

Essential Reference Paper 'B'

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

2013 - 2018

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1 Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2013 - 2018

- 1.1 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has been developed to set out the policy framework for the parks and open spaces owned and managed by East Herts Council for the next five years. This follows a review of the previous five year strategy which has assessed the current validity of the objectives and how effective we have been in delivering them.
- 1.2 East Hertfordshire is rich in green spaces and attractive, rolling countryside. The small towns and villages stand in an area of natural beauty with winding country lanes, nestling in shallow valleys of many rivers and streams that criss-cross the district. These natural green spaces, alongside parks and play areas, enrich peoples' lives and provide enjoyable and purposeful facilities for residents and visitors to the area.
- 1.3 Parks and green spaces represent one of the things that are best about East Herts. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that parks and open spaces, as a valuable natural resource, are managed and developed in a responsible and effective way and that they provide good health and leisure outlets for our customers.
- 1.4 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy document will cover the following:
 - The wider context
 - The vision for parks and open spaces provision
 - An overview of existing provision in East Herts
 - The role of Parks and Green Spaces
 - The role of the Council
- 1.5 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy forms the policy framework under which Parks Management Plans for individual sites are developed and consulted upon.
- 1.6 This strategy focuses primarily on how the Council will manage the public open spaces it owns. The Council's current policy on open space provision on privately owned land is contained within the East Herts Local Plan 2nd Review (April 2007) LRC3 "Recreational Requirements in New Residential Developments".

2 The Wider Context

- 2.1 This strategy fits within a series of other policy documents. The intention is to expand on key issues and actions of relevance to parks and open spaces but not duplicate this other work.
- 2.2 The East Herts Corporate Strategic Plan takes into account the Council's vision and corporate priorities to set out the overall vision and direction for the Council over the next four years. It highlights the high level priorities for the Council and identifies the key outcomes that will be achieved. The Corporate Strategic Plan forms the basis for the council's performance management activities and drives the distribution of resources.
- 2.3 The Council has recently adopted a new framework of overarching priorities to ensure that it continues to provide high quality services and remains committed to the community. As part of this, the corporate priorities have been reduced from six to three. These are:

<p>People</p> <p>This priority focuses on enhancing the quality of life, health and wellbeing, particularly for those who are vulnerable, and delivering strong services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce health inequalities, for example, by addressing obesity, smoking and physical inactivity • Reduce fuel poverty • Increase community engagement • Deliver strong and relevant services • Improve outcomes for vulnerable families and individuals
<p>Place</p> <p>This priority focuses on sustainability, the built environment and ensuring our towns and villages are safe and clean.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce residual waste and increase our recycling rate • Reduce the carbon dioxide emissions from our own operations by 25% by 2020 and work with partners to reduce the emissions of households and businesses • Maintain our clean streets and reduce litter • Maintain our parks, play areas and open spaces • Reduce anti social behaviour and the fear of crime • Ensure future development meets the need of the district and its residents

Prosperity

This priority focuses on safeguarding and enhancing our unique mix of rural and urban communities, promoting sustainable, economic opportunities and delivering cost effective services.

- Deliver value for money
- Enhance the economic well being of East Herts
- Deliver sustainable rural business growth
- Protect the environment

2.4 East Herts Council describes the strategic objectives and direction of its leisure, sport, art and cultural aims in Everyone Matters – A Sustainable Community Strategy for East Herts 2009 – 2024 which replaces the previous Cultural Strategy and includes reference to young people in place of the Children and Young People’s Strategy 2007 – 2012. “Everyone Matters” describes, in more detail, the objectives for parks and open spaces within this framework. It also supports the objectives of the current East Herts Public Health Strategy and the new Public Health Strategy which is being developed and expected to come in to effect in 2014.

2.5 The Ageing Well agenda, recently adopted by the Council, sets out to recognise the needs of older people as the Council and its partners develop services and policies. It has been developed within the context of the Council’s corporate priority to enhance the quality of life, health and well being of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable. The Ageing Well agenda sits within the context of the Council’s Sustainable Community Strategy and the Health and Well Being themes of the Public Health Strategy. The Ageing Well Agenda does not currently prescribe any immediate actions that relate directly to the provision of parks and open spaces. However, the aspirations in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy to ensure our parks remain accessible and provide leisure and health opportunities for all residents fits well with the agenda’s ethos.

2.6 Planning guidance is now in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in March 2012. A key message from this document, which relates to the aims of this strategy, states that:

“Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or

qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required". (Para 73, NPPF 2012)

- 2.7 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy reflect existing Planning documents and the emerging District Plan currently being produced as part of the changes to the planning system under the NPPF. (Appendix 1 and 2 contains information on relevant national and local policies).

3 The vision for parks and open spaces provision

- 3.1 Together with our partners we want to protect and preserve our parks and green spaces while at the same time develop them in a sustainable way that meets the needs of the 21st century – balancing out environmental, health, social and economic considerations. The process we have adopted to deliver this focuses on three questions;
- what are our priorities,
 - what are our subsequent objectives, and
 - what actions do we need to take to deliver these?

4 An overview of existing provision in East Herts

- 2.8 The Metropolitan Green Belt, which contains 4 of the 5 towns, covers around one-third of the district. Much of the district is also currently covered by Policy GBC14 “Landscape Character” of the Local Plan Second Review (April 2007).
- 2.9 East Hertfordshire is a beautiful, rural district with large amounts of green, wild and cultivated space. At the commencement of the previous strategy, an audit and assessment of public open space provision by all providers identified 566 open spaces and outdoor sports facilities that are either owned by the Council, parish or town council, private landowner, housing association or community group. Of these, 312 are considered parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural green space, amenity green space and provision for children and young people. Details of the level of provision can be found in the PPG17 Audit and Assessment Report (July 2005).
- 2.10 We have committed to and delivered comprehensive internal audits of our parks and play facilities, and continue to ensure that our management plans carefully assess needs on our open spaces.
- 2.11 East Herts Council owns and manages around 120 open spaces. These include “village greens”, formal gardens, woodland, naturalised areas and 45 main parks. There are currently 56 equipped play sites owned and maintained by the Council within the District.
- 2.12 The Council’s five ‘main’ parks in terms of size and usage are:
- Southern Country Park – Bishop Stortford
 - Hartham Common and the Meads – Hertford and Ware
 - Castle Gardens – Hertford
 - The Castle Grounds – Bishop’s Stortford

- Grange Paddocks and Red White and Blue – Bishop’s Stortford

2.13 In addition, the Council owns:

- Layston Court Gardens – Buntingford, maintained on behalf of East Herts Council by Buntingford Town Council.
- Pishiobury Park – Sawbridgeworth, maintained by East Herts Council as a ‘Country Park’ and historic landscape.

2.14 The Council provides a number of sites for formal sport and informal recreation. Examples of the larger ones include:

- Thorley Open Space – Bishop’s Stortford
- Northern Parkland (Thorley Common) – Bishop’s Stortford
- Sacombe Road Recreation Ground - Hertford
- Presdales Recreation Ground – Ware
- King George Recreation Ground – Ware

2.15 The physical development of parks and open spaces has been largely determined by the level of external funding. The Council’s capital budget set aside each year for parks and open spaces including play areas has provided valuable match funding for a wide range of improvements. It is worth noting that the funding achieved from external sources from 2007 to 2011 brought in an additional sum of nearly £1m to the Council.

2.16 Since the original audit and creation of the Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme in 2007 a total of sixteen projects attracted additional external funding totalling £627,000. This enabled the development of projects, such as the creation of new play areas which would not have been possible with the Council’s resources alone. Appendix 3 contains a table showing the projects and income achieved.

2.17 However, in the current economic climate Government grants and other sources of external funding have reduced considerably. The Council is still able to progress with some developmental work but on a much diminished scale. We must continue to carefully prioritise and plan to ensure we achieve best value and meet the most important needs of our customers with the limited resources available.

5 What is our Strategy aiming to achieve?

We have identified why our parks and open spaces are important to our customers and how we believe they should be looked after and improved. We have thought about how they improve people's lives and what other benefits they provide. We have then decided which areas are most important and have grouped these together to help us prioritise our actions. Within certain priority areas we have set ourselves achievable objectives taking into consideration the things we have learnt from the last 5 years and the advice we have received from our partners and stakeholders. We aim to continue looking after our parks and open spaces responsibly and to make wise and lasting improvements where we are able to.

5.1 The role of parks and open spaces

- 5.1.1 Well managed and appropriately placed parks and open spaces serve as an excellent delivery mechanism for two of the three corporate objectives; People and Place. Most obviously, parks and open spaces contribute to improving people's quality of life, health and wellbeing as individuals, families and communities. But parks and open spaces can also influence perceptions of community safety, deprivation and poverty levels and the local economy.
- 5.1.2 Parks and Open Spaces include: town squares, village greens, sports fields, allotments, playgrounds, graveyards, formal gardens, country parks, wild life reserves, and natural wastelands. As there are many differing ways of describing these features, East Herts Council has chosen to refer to the typologies listed in the PPG 17 Audit and Assessment Report (July 2005). These typologies are a nationally recognised standard, fit with our objectives and will allow for benchmarking in future projects. Whilst PPG17 has been replaced by the NPPF 2012, these typologies remain relevant and will continue to be used until superseded by new guidance. See Appendix 4 for these typologies in detail.
- 5.1.3 All these places give residents a place to relax and enjoy what is best in East Hertfordshire. It is acknowledged that parks and open spaces are valuable places for all people to play, exercise, meet one another, and hold public events. As a focal point of a community; parks and open spaces can contribute to building community spirit and community cohesion.
- 5.1.4 However, this must be carefully balanced with the role of parks and open spaces as a home to wildlife. This is stated as objective 5 in Chapter 10 (Leisure, Recreation and Community Facilities) of the Local Plan Second Review (April 2007) - *"to take into account*

the value of open space, not only as an amenity, but as a contribution to the conservation of the natural and built environment of the district.”

- 5.1.5 Green Infrastructure is described in the NPPF 2012 as “*a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.*”
- 5.1.6 This definition is reinforced in Natural England's Green Infrastructure Guidance and expanded in Green Infrastructure in Hertfordshire: A Framework. We aim to work alongside this emerging planning tool to ensure that our own open spaces support and contribute to this network.
- 5.1.7 The East Herts Green Infrastructure Plan 2011 (GIP) is a high level plan which identifies further technical and project work which will be needed in the future to deliver green infrastructure. Among other things the GIP considers opportunities for enhancement and creation of green infrastructure. The work we are undertaking to develop a management plan for the ‘green finger’ reaching out through parks from the town centre at Bishop’s Stortford is a prime example of where the careful development of our open spaces can support this. We will keep close links with the creation of specific projects in the GIP through our work with the Countryside Management Service, the Town Council and the other partners as it evolves.

5.2 Priority areas

- 5.2.1 The Council recognises that parks and open spaces serve different needs and groups. The Council aims to deliver quality, accessible services in the areas of:
- Parks for people
 - Parks for recreation / enjoyment
 - Parks for wildlife / conservation / heritage
- 5.2.2 It is important that these three priority areas compliment each other and do not compete. The Council is conscious of the tensions that sometimes arise between the role of parks and open spaces as a place for sport and informal recreation and at the same time a place for wildlife and a valuable habitat. All these roles will be taken into account and an appropriate balance attained.

5.2.3 The Council wishes to achieve greater use of parks by those people who find it difficult to take part by providing appropriate information on facilities and improving access. In particular, the vulnerable, people with disabilities and young children. According to the 2011 Census, 20.6% in total of East Herts households have at least one person in the household with a long term health problem or disability, (with or without dependent children). East Herts also has an ageing population as discussed later.

5.2.4 The following pages outline the actions that will be taken in the above priority areas and include a summary of the achievements from the previous five year period with some examples of how we are able to build upon these successes for the future.

5.3 Parks for People

5.3.1 This is about taking a customer focused approach to the maintenance and development of our green space. The Council will work with the community, where appropriate, taking notice of people's opinions, ideas and concerns and providing an opportunity to influence actions that affect them. The Council will:

1. Develop facilities and infrastructure on site to meet a wide range of user's needs, including those who normally find access difficult.
2. Utilise its open spaces for exercise and health benefits.
3. Develop a 'Friends Of' group for a third major park (identifying user groups and other stakeholders).
4. Increase participation through more "fit for purpose" design – the right type in the right place and of the right size. Consulting to identify the type of open space required.
5. Develop safe yet exciting spaces where children are free to be children.
6. Work with partners to provide diversionary facilities and activities to help reduce anti-social behaviour and maintain low crime levels.
7. Design spaces in ways that reduce the fear of crime.
8. Ensure that provision for children and young people is of a high quality and strategically located by expanding upon the improvement already achieved through the Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme.
9. Invest in good, safe spaces for teenagers to meet their friends and for older people to meet and exercise.

10. Continue to maintain the high standards that lead to the successful achievement of two Green Flag Awards.
11. Improve access in terms of information both on site and remotely.
12. Retain current maintenance standards and ensure value for money.

5.3.2 Two “Friends of” groups are now well established at Southern Country Park and Pishiobury Park. Information about each of these groups is available on our web site. The groups have successfully attracted local people to become actively involved in the development of their parks. They provide a voice for local residents to work in partnership with us as we develop our management plans and install new facilities, and in relation to our maintenance regimes. They create a popular opportunity to take part in conservation tasks on site and in regular events that provide the wider public with leisure activities and information. The Southern Country Park group for instance currently has a membership of 38 and contributed a colossal 766 volunteer man hours working in the park during 2012. They worked on an annual butterfly survey, helped us with our ‘Get Park Active’ event and made 34 single improvements to the park including woodland management, planting whips, building a bird screen, fencing repairs, rebuilding steps, laying woodchip and creating an additional woodland path. A third “Friends of Group will help the Council to work closely with residents at another key location. This, along with other projects such as the Pines Playing Field improvements mentioned later, builds upon our wider objectives and meets those of the recent Localism agenda to engage with the community, listening to their views and providing them with a valuable way of getting directly involved in the services we provide. Appendix 1 contains a summary of the Localism Act 2011 actions and underlying concepts.

5.3.3 The Ridgeway Local Park in Hertford has achieved considerable accolade in “fit for purpose” design with its popular natural play area created in a “lost” overgrown section of the park. It was the result of a thorough programme of consultation and the bringing together of skills from outside the authority such as Hertfordshire Groundwork with our own expertise in providing play facilities that children really want. The park has been awarded a Green Flag and attracts attention from even further than those children on the estate for which it was originally intended. The continuing development of skills and contacts obtained through delivering this type of project sets us up to successfully continue meeting our objectives of providing the right type of high quality parks for our customers.

- 5.3.4 Diversionary facilities and activities to help reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) have been developed at a number of sites such as The Ridgeway and Vantorts in Sawbridgeworth. Feedback from our Community Safety Partnership informs us that our activity in this area to date has helped support their work. We have worked closely with them to manage the expectations of our customers and to find effective ways of working in partnership with the police. A prime example where this has been achieved to good effect is King George Recreation Ground in Ware and will be replicated in future projects.
- 5.3.5 Customers sometimes believe that there are only limited solutions to dealing with ASB. For instance, to install “No Ball Game” signs on spaces where young people are creating noise or by simply trying to chase children away to a different location. We have found however that such action is rarely effective. Signs that cannot be enforced will ultimately send the wrong message to young people. We have been able to divert nuisance behaviour away from resident’s houses by for instance planting shrubs against fences that have been used to kick balls against and by installing properly designed areas nearby that can provide a much more attractive area to play football. The installation of CCTV cameras has sometimes been called for but this is governed strictly by legislation that quite rightly insists on a balanced approach to consider people’s right to privacy. Cameras can only be used where there is sufficient evidence of serious crime such as consistent theft or damage of a substantial value.
- 5.3.6 Our diversionary tactics working closely with partners from the East Herts Community Safety Partnership such as the police, at Vantorts Close for example and previously at The Ridgeway and King George Recreation Ground allow us to open dialogue with the young people creating a nuisance and to use our limited resources to fund far more sustainable solutions such as play spaces that young people are excited about and that will ultimately draw them away from “problem” areas. It is important that whilst our work in this area should focus on those residents who are suffering the consequences of poor behaviour, we do not lose sight of the valuable resource that our open spaces provide to young people. They can provide “somewhere to go” and “something to do” in a social climate that in many ways is now less tolerant of young people and their needs. We will continue to work with our Community Safety Team and the police to ensure that residents’ perception of crime is realistic and that we adopt a methodical approach to problem solving in each separate case. We cannot rely on actions that simply move a problem “out of our area of responsibility”. Successfully restricting access to one of our parks for instance will no doubt result in moving an ASB problem to “the area in front of the shops” or the “garage block

behind the houses". The problem still remains and often with worse consequences.

- 5.3.7 Following on from these types of activities we have found ways to work in partnership with local groups and the police to reduce the fear of crime. The Quaker Burial Ground in Ware for example underwent a major overhaul to improve and design out the previous problems at this site and the work at Vantorts Open Space in Sawbridgeworth has transformed an old traditional play site which had over the years suffered from problems with drug use, into a vibrant and popular open space. Local residents had considerable concerns about the site but with the help of the police and the Town Council, a project was developed to successfully tackle the specific issues raised.
- 5.3.8 The Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme devised a framework for the development of management plans for the major parks and open spaces and a programme of specific improvement works. The individual needs of each site have been explored through consultation culminating in the creation of a working management plan to guide improvements and attract external funding where required.
- 5.3.9 The youth shelter in Thorley Wedge, The Ridgeway natural play space and the wheeled sports facility at Vantorts have provided good, safe spaces for teenagers to meet their friends. These compliment existing very well used areas such as the skate park in Hartham Common and the teenage play area in Southern Country Park. We have also developed a network of specially designed kick about areas and Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) across the district that provide areas which not only allow young people to kick a ball about without conflict with local residents but also somewhere they can call their own. We currently have 3 MUGAs, 4 sports walls and 7 kick about areas, and have been trialling a new all weather surface at the kick about area in Southern Country Park.

Green Flag Awards:

- 5.3.10 The Green Flag Award scheme is the benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces in the UK. It was first launched in 1996 to recognise and reward the best green spaces in the country.
- 5.3.11 The Scheme is licensed to Keep Britain Tidy by Communities and Local Government (CLG) who own the Green Flag Award Scheme. Awards are given on an annual basis and winners must apply each year to renew their Green Flag status. As all green spaces are different, each site is judged on its own merits and suitability to the community it serves.

5.3.12 East Herts has achieved 2 Green Flag Awards:

- Southern Country Park achieved the coveted Award in 2008 and has successfully retained this every year since.
- The Ridgeway Local Park gained our second Green Flag Award in 2009 and again has successfully retained it every year.

5.3.13 Applications are judged against eight key criteria (See Appendix 5 for the Green Flag Criteria).

5.3.14 The Council is proud of its two awards and we will continue to work hard to retain them. The level of resources and capital investment to bring a park up to the required standard is considerable and given the current aims of the Council to ensure limited funds are used to their best advantage, we are not aiming at present to increase the Council's number of Green Flag parks. We are however ensuring that management plans consider the criteria as a fundamental part of the process to develop our parks. With this approach, we will gradually ensure that all our parks are looked after in a way that aspires to the Green Flag principals. In the future we will then be in a strong position to make the final investments required to achieve new flags should resources permit.

Grounds Maintenance:

5.3.15 Value for money remains a key aim. We have worked closely with the contractor to deliver innovative continuous improvement initiatives such as;

- Joint auditing of health and safety and management procedures.
- A partnership approach to In Bloom and Green Flag success.
- The installation of tracking devices on vehicles.
- The installation of inclinometers on grassing cutting machinery to minimise risks on slopes.
- Sourcing plants from peat free suppliers.
- Training staff to NVQ standards and introducing an apprenticeship scheme.
- Play area inspections recorded on a tailor made database and input from hand held devices on site.

- Customer calling card to leave in the event of any problem on site.
- The creation and annual review of a shrub manual that informs how and when each species is pruned. This is also helps the contractor to deal proactively with missing or unhealthy shrubs.

5.3.16 New initiatives will include a more advanced system of providing up to the minute information on works progress, direct access for the Council to the contractor vehicle tracking system, improvements to the transportation of green waste and two additional apprenticeship positions on the contract.

Public Health:

5.3.17 The Public Health Outcomes Framework is the new set of national performance indicators which aims to help reduce health gaps or inequalities and support healthy lifestyle improvement. These indicators will seek to reflect the local Health and Wellbeing Board's Strategy objectives and the contribution parks and open spaces make in achieving them, for example:

- Utilising green space for exercise/health reasons.
- Proportion of physically active and inactive adults.
- Excess weight in adults.
- Excess weight in 4-5 year olds and 10-11 year olds.
- Falls and injuries in the over 65's (parks and open spaces can be a positive catalyst in terms of prevention of these aspects of older age by enabling exercise and recreation).

5.3.18 The Five Ways to Wellbeing is a set of evidence-based public mental health objectives aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of the whole population. They were developed by nef (the new economics foundation) as the result of a commission by Foresight, the UK government's futures think-tank, as part of the Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing.

The Five themes are; Connect, Take notice, Keep learning, Be Active and Give.

These connect with activities that can and do happen in green spaces. Connecting with people by going on a walk in a park, giving through volunteering in a Friends group, keeping active in the outdoors, taking notice of the pleasant environment of a park and learning a new skill all fulfil these needs. Whether it be doing

orienteering for the first time or learning to build some steps to help others access the park, these are all essential ingredients to promoting and enabling wellbeing.

Reference: Five Ways to Wellbeing - New applications, New ways of thinking. NHS confederation and New Economics Federation (NEF); 2010.

5.3.19 Encouraging exercise and general fitness reduces a range of health risks and therefore the number of people requiring treatment in the future. This is particularly important for East Herts where there is a rapidly ageing population. Our parks are being continually developed to ensure that there are good opportunities for exercise and outdoor activity for all age groups and abilities. Some of the above objectives are supported directly by specific activities such as the Get Park Active events and orienteering, Geocaching, health walks and the Friends Groups at Southern Country Park and Pishiobury Park.

Ageing Well:

5.3.20 East Herts has an ageing population. The 2011 Census identified that 15.3% of East Herts total population is over 65. In response to the changing demographic, the Council has agreed “Ageing Well Ambitions” as part of the ongoing development of the Ageing Well agenda to make the District a good place to grow old in.

5.3.21 The Council is committed to ensuring its policies and services are accessible to an ageing population. One of the ambitions of this Ageing Well agenda under the ‘Prosperity and well being’ section is to *‘encourage appropriate healthy activities’* and this will be taken on board as we continue to develop our parks and open spaces. (The Ageing Well Ambitions are shown in Appendix 2).

5.3.22 We are committed to making all our parks and open spaces accessible to all as places to visit, walk and play in. The aims of this strategy provide a strong mechanism to create spaces for healthy outdoor activities regardless of age or ability.

5.4 Parks for Recreation

5.4.1 This is about providing facilities for individuals and groups to enjoy, balancing the various uses and demands upon them. The Council will:

1. Develop parks so that there are a range of fun and enjoyable things to do for the different age groups, focusing particularly on those groups identified within the Council’s Corporate Priorities.

2. Work with partners to promote the use of parks and open spaces for community events / festivals and active recreation such as walking clubs.
3. Ensure that spaces are 'multi-purpose' and meet the needs of a wide range of users where possible.
4. Work toward creating a network of accessible high quality spaces connecting paths and footpath networks aspiring to ensure our parks and green spaces are fully accessible by all forms of transport.
5. Ensure that leisure needs are met locally but not overloading the green spaces that provide these opportunities.
6. Target capital investment on those areas that have been identified as deficient through internal audits and management plans.
7. Ensure that new housing developments incorporate safe, healthy environments which encourage walking, cycling and informal play.
8. Provide leisure and community facilities within open spaces that are properly co-ordinated with all forms of development and land use policies.
9. Consider the community need for recreational space and ensure that we make best use of existing watercourses in our parks.

5.4.2 Promotional activities over the last five years have been developed to include a wide range of media. Information on our website has been increased and reviewed to ensure that all our major open spaces are covered with relevant, useful and interesting information. Our individual management plans and specific projects are featured. There is also information on play areas, allotments, countryside access, byelaws and grounds maintenance. We are always looking to add to and update this information to make it more accessible and useful. We provide regular updates on services in Link, in the local press where appropriate and on new social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The use of internet enabled QR codes on posters is being used to develop and promote events and improvement works in our parks and open spaces. These are two dimensional barcodes that can be "read" by some mobile phones and provide a link to a specific web page. Our fun community events on site attract much praise from residents and have become regular and popular features at, for example, Southern Country Park and Pishiobury Park. Each time we plan any significant improvements, we consult with the public using on site events where possible and inviting comment through questionnaires.

This enables us to continually learn about our customers and equally to let them know what opportunities our open spaces offer.

- 5.4.3 The aforementioned planned approach to open space development has ensured that we firstly assess what we already provide, we find out what is needed and then we design our improvements to ensure that money is spent wisely. This can often be improving what we have by, for example adding play activities that are missing. Our initial internal audit in 2007 identified what makes a good play area; swinging, rotating, climbing etc and we have been able to add equipment that plugs the gaps. It has also meant that where more than one or two items of equipment have been found to be nearing the end of their useful life, we have been able to completely revamp certain sites. Two popular examples have been Vantorts Close Local Park and Bentley Road Inclusive Play Area. This methodical and informed approach has meant that we have also been able to look at the wider picture across each town to ensure that play experiences are not duplicated. As the programme to create management plans has developed, we have progressed toward linking plans to ensure diversity but also through creating maps within these plans which show safe pedestrian routes between parks.
- 5.4.4 We will continue to facilitate healthy walking activities in partnership with the Countryside Management Service and our own Leisure Services team. We are also looking closely at the services offered by external providers for fitness and health who currently use our open spaces such as personal trainers and boot camps. We will be charging a fee to any profit making company to contribute towards the upkeep of our parks and will be providing information on our website to better inform our customers of the diverse range of activities offered.
- 5.4.5 As we continue to develop our open spaces, we have found other benefits by exploring their wider access issues. For example at The Pines woodland in Hertford, we worked with the County Council and Groundwork to develop a new attractive and safe walking route across the town. This provides a better walking route for residents to visit the Pines playing field and the linear park on Foxholes Estate. This has led to further improvement of the play area for which we hope to attract external funding, working directly with a local community group. We are also looking at how five open spaces which spread around Southern Country Park can be easily accessed on foot. This has led to a jointly funded project with the County Council to improve some of the footpath links ensuring that there is a safe circular route taking in all of the open spaces in the area. Ongoing work with Riversmead Housing Association in Hornsmill, Hertford has led to a project that aims to improve the landscape around the

community centre and to engage residents in a programme of improvements.

- 5.4.6 We have worked closely with Development Control by providing advice relating to planning applications. We have been successful in securing additional funds from Section 106 Agreements to improve existing open space facilities. We encourage developers to install good quality open spaces and play areas as a priority for the new communities they have created. Sacombe Road Open Space in Hertford for instance has recently benefited from a completely redesigned play area on our open space built and funded by the developers of an adjacent housing scheme. Completely new open spaces and play areas have been built and adopted by the Council in Hertford, Bishop's Stortford and Ware during the last five years.
- 5.4.7 We have actively sought and benefited from considerable investment, not only through section 106 agreements but also through Landfill Tax Grants, Big Lottery and other external funding. Some prime examples of this have been the wetland restoration works at Southern Country Park and Hartham Common, the natural play spaces at The Ridgeway and King George Road and the access improvements at Pishiobury Park.
- 5.4.8 We have worked to assess needs across the district in terms of sporting provision by developing the Play Pitch Strategy July 2010. This document was commissioned through a specialist consultant to guide planners with regard to new developments. It audited provision across the district and set out some observations and priorities. East Herts Council encourage the use of the Play Pitch Strategy to guide financial contributions and new facilities where these are possible through the Planning process. The Parks & Open Spaces Strategy however is designed to ensure that the Council makes the best use of its existing provisions, not to make provision for new facilities without such external support. We have for example adapted our football pitch layouts to provide for the increased demand in junior football by fitting in additional junior pitches in place of less used senior pitches and by over marking senior pitches with the blue lined 9x9 pitches as promoted by the Football Association. We have upgraded our existing changing facilities and actively work with external partners to consider externally funded additional facilities where possible.
- 5.4.9 We will continue to work with Planning and Leisure Services on the forthcoming update to the Parks and Open Spaces Audit and Assessment.

5.5 Parks for Wildlife, Conservation and Heritage

5.5.1 In managing open spaces, the Council will pay particular attention to biodiversity, natural features, wildlife and flora, buildings and structural features. Structures will be designed to perform their function without undue pressure on the surrounding environment or the identified purpose of the space. The Council will seek to identify and protect the historic features, structures, landscapes and characteristics of specific sites, recognising that there may be a variety of historical contexts. The Council also recognises the need for differing emphasis to be placed on access to the various open spaces throughout the district, to take into account the use and biodiversity of each site whilst considering public access and enjoyment of the natural environment.

5.5.2 The Council will:

1. Ensure that identified wildlife habitats, such as those that carry the status of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or county Wildlife Site (WS), are preserved through management strategies and appropriate maintenance.
2. Develop our management systems and operational practices to enhance biodiversity in our parks and open spaces in a way that compliments and enhances the recreational experience.
3. Apply sustainable management practices in the provision and maintenance of open spaces.
4. Seek opportunities for river restoration and enhancement in our parks and open spaces by working with partners and interested bodies, subject to availability of resources.

5.5.3 The Council provides advice to residents in its capacity as the Local Authority administering Tree Preservation Orders. We advise customers who have trees in their gardens that these trees are crucial not only to the landscape but in many other ways. Amongst other things they reduce carbon dioxide levels, filter and absorb pollution, absorb noise, produce oxygen, reduce the stress of modern lifestyles, provide habitats for wildlife and offer shade and shelter. We advise that most trees have the potential to outlive both ourselves and the homes we live in and that they deserve our care and respect. To that extent we also ensure that we manage our own tree stock with considerable diligence. We operate a comprehensive tree risk inspection programme which enables us to keep our trees safe and healthy and have developed a systematic tree replacement programme. Where possible, we involve local people in replanting trees on our open spaces through our Friends Groups and we ensure that tree

planting benefits our customers in immediate ways such as creating shade in our play areas. We have developed a woodland management programme that defines a long term approach to maintaining and looking after our woodlands. A systematic maintenance regime is already in place to execute the basic works and individual management plans are being developed for all our key woodlands with the assistance of the Countryside Management Service. Where possible we aim to secure external funding to deliver some of the more ambitious projects that emerge.

- 5.5.4 The Council has a long term commitment to a 25% reduction in carbon emissions from its operations by 2020. The parks service contributes through its planting initiatives and in the way contracts are managed. For example, as part of the contract extension agreement the grounds maintenance contractor has agreed to transport materials for composting in bulk. This will reduce fossil fuel use and carbon emissions over the contract period.
- 5.5.5 Likewise, we have delivered a number of improvements such as new bridges and water features at Pishiobury Park making best use of some of the funds available to look after the district's water courses. We are also working closely with partners to ensure we properly maintain sustainable drainage features within our responsibilities where possible and encourage others to do the same. We have features such as the 'balancing pond' at Southern Country Park which, in addition to providing an important land drainage feature for the St Michaels Mead estate, has recently benefited from an externally funded wetland restoration project to improve the appearance and biodiversity of the natural planted habitat around the lake. We have a number of water courses running through our parks and have created a new wetland habitat at Hartham Common in partnership with the Environment Agency, the Countryside Management Service and the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to further improve biodiversity in the park and improve access for the public.
- 5.5.6 We will continue to work with partners to explore how housing developers can find appropriate solutions for sustainable drainage infrastructure in accordance with Sustainable Urban Drainage Legislation which aims to manage water runoff to prevent flooding. We are looking at ways to reduce the amount of water we use for our annual bedding schemes and have been using plants grown in peat free compost for some years. The Green Flag criteria help us to ensure that sustainability is always considered as we manage and develop our parks.
- 5.5.7 Through our work with the Countryside Management Service to develop responsible management plans for our open spaces, we

ensure that we contribute directly to the delivery of the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

6 Our commitment

6.1 The Council has a duty to manage its open spaces sensitively, protecting these natural assets for the future but recognising that there are competing priorities for land use. We undertake to:

- Maintain open spaces to a good and safe standard.
- Listen to park users.
- Develop parks to meet changing needs.
- Work in partnership in developing and providing services and facilities.
- Regularly review and update our approach and this strategy.

7 Summary

- 7.1 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has proved to be a valuable document steering us to secure external funding, achieve Green Flag Awards and high levels of public satisfaction in our open spaces.
- 7.2 We now aim to build upon our successes and have set some new objectives. Over the next five years, in addition to the continued delivery of existing objectives we will also focus specifically on the following broad aims;
 - 7.2.1 To encourage even more people of all ages to visit and use our parks. We believe that more diversion of different age groups can reduce the tension that is sometimes perceived. We will design spaces to provide facilities for older people “playing” and exercising alongside children. Our open spaces will not become “no go” areas or spaces that encourage poor behaviour by being cut off from the community.
 - 7.2.2 To make our parks even better for play, better for older people and better for those who would like to stay fit and healthy. This means working within the Councils wider objectives, linking with other initiatives to make connections between open space provision and the wider health and ageing well agendas. We will increase the opportunity for our parks to introduce people to healthy activities. Not many open spaces can provide everything but most of them are an ideal place for people to experience exercise at its easiest and most basic level, walking, kicking a ball about, jogging and light exercise on trim trails for example.
 - 7.2.3 To keep our specialist sports areas to a good standard in order to supplement the more dedicated facilities available across the district at the multitude of sports clubs. Encouraging residents to use our open spaces to pursue healthy activities on a casual basis could also lead on to them taking up sports on a more routine basis by joining local clubs or attending gyms and boot camps.
 - 7.2.4 To link up our open spaces across the main town areas, treating them holistically in terms of access and provision. We will not duplicate facilities in close proximity and will install better signage to navigate between our parks with clearer information to know what is offered just around the corner.
 - 7.2.5 To build on our good relationship with volunteers; helping to shape our parks for the future.
 - 7.2.6 To take our play areas to the next level of provision. We will increase play value over and above the high level now achieved by identifying any remaining gaps in access, age provision, healthy activity and landscape design.

- 7.2.7 To ensure that new projects will always embrace good open space design. The experience gained through developing our major parks will be utilised as we broaden our improvement programme across the network of smaller spaces.
- 7.2.8 To focus our wider conservation activities on water and woodlands. We will seek opportunities for water course restoration and enhancement in our parks and open spaces and will hone our woodland management techniques. We will work closely with partners who have shared interests.
- 7.2.9 To follow the Green Flag ethic of maintaining parks and open spaces to a good standard in the areas that make the most difference to customers and the environment. Having achieved these standards across all our open spaces we will ensure they remain so. We will prioritise our budgets and resources wisely to achieve this.
- 7.3 The process of reviewing our work over the last five years has highlighted the considerable progress, the way that we have been able to work together with our partners and the way we have been able to build upon our experiences for instance in creating useful and meaningful green space action plans. We recognise however that during this period of austerity, our progress in delivering large scale improvements may slow down. Our work over the next five years will ensure there is no deterioration in standards. Signs of neglect can attract anti-social behaviour and undermine the considerable achievements made to date. We will continue to react quickly to small issues as they arise and to use our resources wisely. We intend to continue working closely with the community to maintain the “value” that our customers attribute to our open spaces, encouraging involvement to keep them vibrant and meeting needs.

Appendix 1: Strategic Context (National and regional policy)

Localism and the Big Society

The current Coalition Government is committed to decentralisation; shifting responsibility and power to local communities. As part of The Localism Act 2011, six actions of decentralisation have been identified:

1. Lift the burden of bureaucracy
2. Empower communities to do things their way
3. Increase local control of public finance
4. Diversify the supply of public services
5. Open up Government to public scrutiny
6. Strengthen accountability to local people

Underlying concepts include:

- i) Where services are enjoyed collectively, they should be delivered by accountable community groups.
- ii) Where the scale is too large or those using a service are too dispersed, they should be delivered by local institutions, subject to democratic checks and balances, enabled by full transparency.

National Planning Policy Framework 2012

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the national planning guidance which sets out the approach to development across the country and takes precedence where local or district plans are silent or indeterminate on particular issues.

Further information can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

Appendix 2: Local Policies

Corporate Strategic Plan 2013/14 – 2016/17

The Corporate Strategic Plan sets out the overall vision and direction for the Council over the next four years. It highlights the high level priorities for the council and identifies the key outcomes that will be achieved. The plan forms the basis for the Council's performance management activities and will drive the distribution of resources and is supported by the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. These have been taken into account and integrated into the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

Further information can be found at:

www.eastherts.gov.uk/media/pdf/9/m/Corporate_Strategic_Plan_2013-14_-_2016-17.pdf

Everyone Matters – A Sustainable Community Strategy for East Herts 2009 to 2024 (replacing the Community Strategy – East Herts Together 2003 - 2015)

The vision for the Community Strategy is to create inclusive, prosperous communities within a sustainable environment, to conserve the rich and diverse natural environment and to improve the quality of life of every resident. The priorities that are relevant to this strategy are:

- To protect the high quality environment
- To safeguard neighbourhoods (community cohesion, building a vibrant voluntary and community sector helping community spirit)
- To support vulnerable children and young people
- To provide opportunities for older people
- To promote healthy lifestyles

Further information can be found at:

www.eastherts.gov.uk/media/pdf/9/m/Corporate_Strategic_Plan_2013-14_-_2016-17.pdf

Local Plan Second Review (April 2007)

Current planning policies are set out in the Local Plan Second Review (April 2007). A key objective is that all residents of East Herts have access to appropriate amounts of open space, sport and recreational facilities to meet present and future needs.

Chapter 10 (Leisure, Recreation and Community Facilities) lists several objectives that are relevant to this strategy:

1. To maintain and encourage the provision of an effective level of appropriately located leisure and recreational facilities and, wherever possible, make such facilities available to everyone, including older people and those with disabilities.
2. To take full account of the community need for recreation space and ensure that adequate land and water resources are identified for both organised sport and informal recreation.
5. To take account of the value of open space, not only as an amenity, but as a contribution to the conservation of the natural and built environment of the District.
8. To ensure that provision of leisure and community facilities are properly coordinated with all forms of development and land use policies.

The Local Plan is to be replaced by the District Plan – see below. Further information can be found at: www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=27172

The District Plan for East Herts to 2031 (will be replacing the Local Plan)

The District Plan is the emerging planning document that will shape the future of East Herts to 2031. It will replace the Local Plan Second Review (April 2007)

The District Plan will set out the approach to development across the District and is concerned with creating sustainable communities, planning not only for the provision of new homes, but also new employment opportunities, schools, retail opportunities, nature conservation and green infrastructure as well as supporting community infrastructure such as parks and open spaces. The District plan is distinct from Neighbourhood Planning which enables local communities to prepare plans which set out their own approach to delivering the requirements of the District Plan.

Further information on the emerging District Plan is available on the Council's website at: www.eastherts.gov.uk/districtplan

East Herts Green Infrastructure Plan - March 2011

Land Use Consultants were commissioned to develop Strategic Green Infrastructure Plans for the county and the wider GreenArc area in 2011. 'Local level' Green Infrastructure Plans (GIPs) were also been developed

for seven districts (Dacorum, East Herts, Hertsmere, St. Albans, Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield).

Further information on the East Herts Green Infrastructure Plan can be found at: www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=24807

Community Safety Plan

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 made it a statutory duty for local authorities to work with the police and other partners to reduce and address crime and disorder in their areas. Amendments to this Act by the Police Reform Act 2002 and the Police and Justice Act 2006 placed a responsibility on Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to produce a plan detailing how they intend to tackle crime and disorder and community safety challenges within their area.

East Herts Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is responsible for addressing crime and disorder in East Herts. The current legislation enables the CSP to improve the ways in which community safety is addressed.

The CSP identifies community safety priorities by:

- Producing an annual Strategic Assessment to identify priorities
- Creating and implementing annual action plans to address emerging priorities
- Conducting regular and frequent community consultation and engagement across the District

Community Safety Action Plan

Every year the Community Safety Partnership compiles a strategic assessment using the Community Safety Plan. A strategic assessment presents and interprets the summary findings of this analysis to provide a clear direction for addressing community safety issues within East Herts.

This means every year the CSP identifies up to date community safety issues. New priorities and changes emerging from the strategic assessment process are detailed in partnership action plans. Action plans will run for 12 months every April, updated quarterly.

Public Health Strategy and Action Plan

The East Herts Council Public Health Strategy gives a focus to the public health and health promotion work that different services within the Council are involved in on a day to day basis. The strategy comprises six themed areas which look to cover the main areas of public health that East Herts Council

would like to focus on and contribute to. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy takes onboard these aims and the work / events undertaken by the Council in the parks and open spaces supports the actions developed as part of the Public Health Strategy Action Plan.

The Public Health Strategy is currently being reviewed and further information is available on the Council's website.

Ageing Well Agenda and Ambitions

Source: Report to Executive 6 November 2012 – 'East Herts Ageing Well – Review of Progress'

Members agreed East Herts "Ageing Well Ambitions" as making the District a good place to grow old in. Members' suggested approach for the Council is to:

Strategy and Partnerships:

- Be prepared to make East Herts towns and parishes a good place to grow old in
- Use existing contacts and structures to connect and collaborate
- Gather intelligence/case studies to discover what works well and replicate
- Find the gaps or obstacles that can realistically be addressed to improve the experiences of an aging population
- Encourage councillors to keep up to date with matters/issues that concern older people
- Create an attitude among councillors that in all they do they are minded to consider the impacts or benefits to older people. To always consider 'what can we do to make things better'
- Establish a means of communication among various bodies

People and places:

- Use the overlapping connections to enable change e.g. District Councillors who are also Parish and County Councillors
- Understand what organisations are doing at ground level e.g. Parish and Town Councils
Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP)
Relevant national and local charities
Housing associations Churches, religious bodies
Clubs/associations with interest in ageing people or with a membership of ageing people
residents association
interest groups
schools that have connections with older people medical centres, doctors' surgeries'
- Create informal communication/dialogue with these bodies
- Establish a process of 'alerts' for situations that need addressing

- Be aware of situations where people can suddenly become vulnerable e.g. bereavement
- Set up informal groups of local volunteers who can assist as required, e.g. urgent need of transportation, or helping with digibox tuning
- Broadcast/publicise successful activities around the district or beyond

Achieving cost effective services

- Learn from best practices for minimising costs of delivering added value service through collaboration of three tiers of local government and/or private sponsorship. e.g. community transport, residents or community infrastructure projects, good use of New Homes Bonus for community benefit, purposeful use of Council community grants system

Prosperity and well being

- Ensure East Herts Council's policies reflect the needs of an ageing population
- Ensure District Plan reflects the needs of older people
- Encourage Towns and Parishes to include policies for older people in Local Plans
- Encourage businesses that are older people 'friendly' to use or to work in
- Encourage older people to be engaged in appropriate economic activity/employment
- Encourage able older people to volunteer or use their life skills to help others
- Encourage appropriate healthy activities
- Encourage older people to participate in relevant education

Possible Next Steps

- Create a database of organisations to establish 'touching points' for example existing councillor involvement
- Gather case studies on council website
- List useful website links for reference
- Set up local meetings with residents to discover local gaps/needs using existing funding (e.g. Councillor Community Engagement Grant)
- establish priorities as a group
- Follow up with a wider meeting of interested parties to move concept forward.
- Roll out concepts to Parish and Town Councils including Rural Parish Conference

Appendix 3: Externally Funded Projects

Source: ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY – 13 SEPTEMBER 2011 - PARKS AND OPEN SPACES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – PROGRESS REPORT

7.4

The following table provides a list of projects which have attracted external funding from 2007 to 2011:

Year of Work:	Site:	Works:	Amount of External Capital Funding:	Source of funding:
2007	The Ridgeway Local Park, Hertford	New Multi User games Area	£48,000	Section 106 funding
2008	Southern Country Park Play Area, Bishop's Stortford	New older children's play area	£75,000	Section 106 funding
2008	Turners Crescent Play Area, Bishop's Stortford	New younger children's play area	£45,000	Section 106 funding
2008	King George V Recreation Area, Ware	New Multi User games Area	£25,000	Riversmead Housing Association
2009	Bentley Road Play Area, Hertford	Redesign of original play area to provide an inclusive play area accessible to children of all abilities	£37,000	Big Lottery Funding
2009	King George V Recreation Area, Ware	New Adventure Play Area	£85,000	Big Lottery Funding
2009	The Dell Play Area at The Ridgeway, Hertford	New older children's play area	£53,000	Play Builder Funding
2009	The Ridgeway, Hertford	New access route into the Dell	£55,000	Lafarge Landfill Community Fund
2010	Southern Country Park, Bishop's Stortford	Wetland Restoration Project – further detailed information is in the Appendix	£46,000	Biffaward Landfill Community Fund
2010	Southern Country Park, Bishop's Stortford	Fishing Platforms around the balancing pond	£9,000	Environment Agency Funding
2010	Southern Country Park, Bishop's Stortford	New park signage and wildlife information boards	£10,000	Countryside Management Service
2010	Hartham Common, Hertford	Meadow Restoration Project – further detailed information is available in the Appendix	(£90,000 anticipated funding)	Environment Agency Funded Project
2011	Vantorts Open Space, Sawbridgeworth	Contribution to the 'Vantorts Open Space Revamp Project' – redesign of original play area with a new	Up to £40,000 Subject to STC decision pending final tender details	Sawbridgeworth Town Council

		wheeled sports and ball court area on the decommissioned tennis court		
2011	Vantorts Open Space, Sawbridgeworth	Additional contribution to the 'Vantorts Open Space Revamp Project'	£7,500	East Herts Community Safety Partnership
2010	Buryfields, Ware	Interpretation Plinth in the open space	£1,000	Ware In Bloom /GSK
2011	Kibes Lane, Ware	Contribution to the redesign and landscaping of the Quaker Burial Ground	£500	Ware Society
		TOTAL:	£627,000	

Section 106 Projects - In addition the Council has adopted 4 new play areas and adjacent open spaces under Section 106 Planning Obligation agreements funded by developers since 2007. These represent an external funding contribution of approximately £250,000 Capital (had the Council created the play areas) and £72,700 in Revenue to fund the maintenance of these adopted areas over 10 years.

The table below provides information on location, age range and adoption date for each of these new play areas and open spaces:

SECTION 106 Play Areas - designed and built by developers, then formally adopted by East Herts Council				
Adopted by EHC:	Site:	Works:	Revenue received as part of Section 106 Agreements	Source of funding:
Adopted 2007	Lilbourne Drive Play Area, Hertford	New younger children's play area	£10,000	Section 106 funded
Adopted 2008	Millmead Road Hertford	Two new younger children's play areas and surrounding wooded open space	£30,000	Section 106 funded
Adopted 2009	Yearlings Close, Gt Amwell	New younger children's play area and surrounding open space	£32,700	Section 106 funded
TOTAL approximate revenue income contributions to Section 106 Funded Play Areas:				£72,700

Appendix 4: Open Space Typologies

Source: PPG17 Audit and Assessment Report (July 2005).

TYPE	DEFINITION	PRIMARY PURPOSE / EXAMPLES
Parks and Gardens	Includes urban parks, formal gardens and country parks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal recreation • Community events
Natural and Semi-natural Greenspace	Includes publicly accessible woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (e.g. downlands, commons, meadows), wetlands, open and running water and wastelands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildlife conservation • Biodiversity • Environmental education and awareness
Amenity Greenspace	Most commonly but not exclusively found in housing areas. Includes informal recreation green spaces and village greens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal activities close to home or work • Enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas
Provision for Children and Young People	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipped play areas • Ball courts • Outdoor basketball hoop areas • Skateboard areas • Teenage shelters and 'hangouts'
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Natural or artificial surfaces either publicly or privately owned used for sport and recreation. Includes school playing fields.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor sports pitches • Tennis and bowls • Golf courses • Athletics • Playing fields (including school playing fields) • Water sports
Allotments	Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion. May also include urban farms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing vegetables and other root crops <p>N.B. does not include private gardens</p>
Cemeteries & Churchyards	Cemeteries and churchyards including disused churchyards and other burial grounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet contemplation • Burial of the dead • Wildlife conservation • Promotion of biodiversity
Green Corridors	Includes towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking, cycling or horse riding • Leisure purposes or travel • Opportunities for wildlife migration

Appendix 5 –Green Flag Award Assessment Criteria

Green Flag Award applications are judged against eight key criteria. Where certain criteria are not met, applicants can provide justifications that may be taken into account. What's more, if management practice changes are in progress but not yet fully implemented, transitional phases will be acknowledged and viewed positively.

The judging criteria also considers the fact that each park/green space will offer different kinds of facilities, and will be managed and developed to varying opportunities and constraints. Innovation and the way facilities offered are tailored to the needs of the community will also be taken into account.

Eight key criteria

1. A welcoming place

When approaching or entering the park/green space, the overall impression for any member of the community - regardless of the purpose of their visit - should be positive and inviting. There should be

- Good and safe access
- Good signage to and in the park/green space
- Equal access for all members of the community

2. Healthy, safe and secure

The park/green space must be a healthy, safe and secure place for all members of the community to use. Any issues that have come to light must be addressed in the management plan and implemented on the ground. New issues that arise must be addressed promptly and appropriately.

- Equipment and facilities must be safe to use
- It must be a secure place for all members of the community to use or traverse
- Dog fouling must be adequately addressed
- Health and safety policies should be in place, in practice and regularly reviewed
- Toilets, drinking water, first aid, public telephones and emergency equipment where relevant (e.g. life belts by water) should be available in or near the park/green space, and be clearly signposted.

3. Clean and well maintained

For aesthetic as well as health and safety reasons, issues of cleanliness and maintenance must be adequately addressed, in particular:

- Litter and other waste management
- The maintenance of grounds, buildings, equipment and other features
- A policy on litter, vandalism and maintenance should be in place, in practice and regularly reviewed.

4. Sustainability

Methods used in maintaining the park/green space and its facilities should be environmentally sound, relying on best practices available according to

current knowledge. Management should be aware of the range of techniques available to them, and demonstrate that informed choices have been made and are regularly reviewed. Parks/green spaces should:

- Have an environmental policy or charter and management strategy in place, which is in practice and regularly reviewed
- Minimise and justify pesticide use
- Eliminate horticultural peat use
- Recycle waste plant material
- Demonstrate high horticultural and arboricultural standards
- Have energy conservation, pollution reduction, waste recycling, and resource conservation measures

5. Conservation and heritage

Particular attention should be paid to the conservation and appropriate management of:

- Natural features, wildlife and fauna
- Landscapes
- Buildings and structural features
- These should serve their function well without placing undue pressure on the surrounding environment

6. Community involvement

The park/green space management should actively pursue the involvement of members of the community who represent as many park/green space user groups as possible. The following should be demonstrated:

- Knowledge of user community and levels and patterns of use
- Evidence of community involvement in management and/or developments and results achieved
- Appropriate levels of provision of recreational facilities for all sectors of the community

7. Marketing

- A marketing strategy should be in place, which is in practice and regularly reviewed
- There should be good provision of information to users, e.g. about management strategies, activities, features, ways to get involved
- The park/green space should be promoted as a community resource

8. Management

- A management plan or strategy should be in place
- This should clearly and adequately address all of the above criteria and any other relevant aspects of the park/green space's management
- The plan must be actively implemented and regularly reviewed
- Financially sound management of the park/green space must also be demonstrated

If you would like a translation of this document in another language, large print, Braille, audio or an electronic format, please contact Communications at East Herts Council on 01279 655 261 or email communications@eastherts.gov.uk

Jeżeli chciałbyś, aby ta informacja została przetłumaczona na język polski skontaktuj się z Działem Łączności przy Radzie Wschodniego Hertfordshire tel. 01279 655 261 lub wyślij e-mail communications@eastherts.gov.uk

Se desejar esta informação traduzida em português, por favor contacte o departamento de comunicações do East Herts Council no telefone número 01279 655 261 ou via email communications@eastherts.gov.uk

If you need any further information please contact us:

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Visit: www.eastherts.gov.uk

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