

Executive Foreword

East Herts Council values its parks and open spaces. They provide a wonderful blend of our rural and urban environment. Parks provide the space to relax and to exercise. They help us to understand nature, allow us to play and provide an escape from the confines of our busy lives, yet they are right on our doorsteps.

We must not take them for granted or allow them to be neglected. Some of the countries most loved parks are now mature and recognised landscapes but it is important to remember that they all started from nothing. Some of them have been looked after to high standards for centuries, replanted many times and adapted to meet the changing needs of new customers. We have the fortune in East Herts of having over 120 open spaces from pocket sized to countryside parks and must ensure they are nurtured and passed on in the best possible condition to future generations.

This East Herts Council Parks and Open Space Strategy is designed to improve the quality, management, accessibility and usage of our green spaces. Parks are always under various pressures. This plan explores the need to

- protect their natural beauty
- conserve their importance for wildlife and the environment
- provide outlets for leisure and play
- control anti social behaviour and
- rise to the challenge of the current economic climate

The Council has consulted with a wide range of partners and sought advice from the public as we have reviewed and created this strategy.

This revision covers the next five years. We will still ensure our parks meet the needs of the people who use them and that they provide crucial habitats for the wildlife they host. We are committed to community safety and to reflecting the standards set by our planning policies. We have however changed our direction slightly.

The first five years of our plan for open spaces was focused on scrutiny of the major parks and actively expanding their facilities, putting plans into place for their development. Building upon the successful improvement of our larger parks, we are now committed to linking provision across the district with an accessible network of smaller complimentary open spaces. We are mindful of economic pressures and aim to look after what we have instead of investing too heavily in further capital improvements which may not at this time be sustainable.

We will continue creating individual management plans for our larger parks and plans of action for groups of smaller spaces where they are geographically linked. These plans follow the Green Flag methodology;

designed to define what is important about each space and to ensure they meet our needs effectively.

We will be reviewing our play areas for a second time and looking at ways to create more opportunities for visitors of all ages to get fit and healthy in our parks. Whilst we still believe that our open spaces are crucial to providing social and play opportunities for young people, we are now expanding this ethos for our older residents.

Our work with the local community whilst consulting on our plans and facilitating Friends of Groups has been fundamental to the success of our most popular parks and is something we are keen to continue.

The national and local Council objectives which have influenced the new direction of this strategy are:

- Localism and the Big Society
- Everyone Matters – A Sustainable Community Strategy for East Herts 2009 to 2024
- Green Infrastructure Plan
- Public Health Strategy and Action Plan
- Ageing Well Agenda and Ambitions

It has been approved by the Environmental Scrutiny Committee and endorsed by the Executive. This second phase was approved by Council and published in October 2013.

The value of our parks cannot be underestimated. We will continue to ensure they are accessible, they provide for leisure, health and well being and that they remain sustainable.

Linda Haysey
Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support