

Green Space Strategy 2020 to 2030

DRAFT

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Introduction

High quality, well-managed green spaces are a vital part of healthy sustainable communities. They are an essential aspect of everyday life that communities feel passionately about. Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) is committed to providing quality green spaces, across a spectrum of open space type, to provide places for fun, recreation, health and high quality space for the Borough's wildlife. By virtue, our space should be benefiting both wildlife and people.

The Green Space Strategy 2020 – 2030 builds on the progress and improvements made through the implementation of the Borough's first Green Space Strategy, which was published in 2007. It looks to identify the current issues facing green spaces, how they are used and managed and how we will work collectively with our local community, and our partners, to address current and future pressures.

An action plan in appendix 1 has been prepared to address how we will begin to deal with the issues facing our green spaces. This is only the start of the story as we will seek to keep this action plan under continuous review. This will enable the Council, community and our partners to be responsive to new opportunities, ideas and any funding opportunities which may arise.

Why have a strategy?

A planned approach to green space management enables sustainable long term investment to maximise the way spaces are used and managed. It enables the Council to work with local communities to plan facilities to meet the need of local people, and helps to ensure ecology and the conservation of the natural environment is at the forefront of our thinking.

What do we mean by Green Space?

The Council owns and manages over 400 hectares of land which is categorised as green space. This land can be broadly divided into the categories below. A definition of each of these spaces can be found in appendix 1.

- Cemeteries
- Formal parks
- Green corridors
- Informal open space
- Nature reserves and countryside sites
- Play areas
- Suitable alternative accessible green space (SANG)
- Trees and woodland

The strategy will focus on land parcels owned or managed by the Council, which measure over 0.2 hectares or 2000m² (for comparison purposes this would be the area of approximately 3 tennis courts). Placing emphasis on larger spaces will help us to reach a greater number of residents and target resources appropriately.

What is not covered and why?

Although essential for the health and wellbeing of our local communities, the improvement and management of sports pitches, and areas for formal recreation, are not included in the scope of this strategy - this is because they are covered in detail in the Playing Pitch Strategy and Sports Facility Strategy, 2020.

While sports pitches and other formal recreation areas are outside the remit of this strategy, we will seek to take account of the identified aims in the way these provisions are managed. This includes considering the way in which sports sites can link with other green spaces to provide ecological networks, and the significant potential for ecological enhancement.

Strategic priorities

The priorities of this strategy are;

1. To respond to the increasing pressure for more (and more diverse) green space to meet current and future demand
2. Provide resilient spaces in the face of a changing climate
3. Connect green spaces to form part of an ecological network
4. Maintain safe and accessible green spaces
5. Encourage community participation in green space management

Relationship with national and local policy

National guidance and policy

25 Year Environment Plan ‘A Green Future’ 2018

The Government’s plan ‘*A Green Future*’: *Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)*, seeks to deal with the past negative impact on the environment and sets out 10 goals to achieve over the life time of the plan. These are:

1. Clean air
2. Clean and plentiful water
3. Thriving plants and wildlife
4. A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as drought and flooding
5. Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
6. Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment
7. Mitigating and adapting to climate change
8. Minimising waste
9. Managing exposure to chemicals
10. Enhancing biosecurity

Four key policies from this plan directly relate to this strategy and actions will be delivered to contribute to:

- Using and managing land sustainably
- Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes
- Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing
- Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste

Environment Bill 2020

This new legislation will deliver the ambitions set out in the 25 year Environment Plan. The Bill makes provision about targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment; including improvement to environmental protection about waste and resource efficiency; air quality; standards; water; nature and biodiversity conservation.

Biodiversity net gain proposals will see a requirement for developers to demonstrate a minimum 10% gain for biodiversity within new schemes. All biodiversity sites linked to development will need to be recorded on a Biodiversity Sites Register and maintained to deliver their biodiversity objectives for 30 years.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government’s planning policies for England. Paragraph 73 stipulates that “access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities”.

Local policy

In order to develop a successful Green Space Strategy, it is important to draw wider local policies together. The following plans, in addition to local research, mapping and surveys have informed the preparation of the Green Space Strategy.

Test Valley Borough Council Corporate Plan

During the summer of 2018, local councillors and officers attended more than 70 events across the Borough and engaged with more than 2000 residents discussing what was important to them and would improve their quality of life. The objective of this research was to strengthen the Council's evidence-led approach for developing new policy and strategy and the approach to understanding the experience people have of the services they receive. Overall the residents of Test Valley expressed their aspirations and determination to support and develop their Borough. Specifically:

- Residents are keen to take part in more leisure activities across the Borough making the most of Test Valley's Green Spaces
- Residents want to be able to easily access the countryside and green spaces within Test Valley
- There is an interest in more accessible and well-linked cycling and walking routes
- Residents support the continued investment in our Green Spaces and nature reserves

The Test Valley Borough Council Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023 *Growing Our Potential* sets 4 key priorities:

Town Centres, to adapt and be attractive, vibrant and prosperous places

Communities, to be empowered, connected and able to build upon their strengths

People, to be able to live well and fulfil their aspirations

The Local Environment, for current and future generations

The provision and management of high quality green space cuts across all of these priorities contributing to; a sense of place in town centres, enabling communities to feel empowered to be involved with decisions about, and actions to: assist their local environment as well as ongoing management, protection and enhancement.

For the Local Environment priority, the Council has pledged it will invest in:

- Providing high-quality green infrastructure such as green spaces and nature reserves for our communities to access and enjoy for generations to come. The protection of biodiversity will be integral to this.
- Enhancing the quality of the public realm to improve the local environment, so that these are attractive spaces and places that people can enjoy and spend time in.

- Expanding the network and usage of family friendly cycling and walking routes to make them accessible and well linked, in order to promote wellbeing and more sustainable travel.
- Making the most of the benefits from inward investment and economic growth. Promoting the Borough as an outstanding place to live and work, whilst safeguarding its heritage and natural assets.

Adopted Local Plan

The Local Plan provides the planning policies that will be used in the determination of planning applications. It includes proposals for new green spaces at a number of sites across the Borough, with Policy LHW1 setting out the requirement for open space as part of new residential development. Additionally, the Local Plan recognises the requirement for additional space to be provided to help address the impact of an increase in visitor pressure arising from proposed development on certain designated wildlife sites, such as the New Forest.

Community Plans

Both Andover Vision and Romsey Future's Vision documents contain a number of ambitions for the enhancement of the towns' green spaces. These plans give the local population the opportunity to inform the decision making which affects their lives and enables the Council to shape the plan around the community need.

The Council is committed to working with Andover Vision and Romsey Future, as well as other place-based community planning activities as they come forward, to develop and deliver green space enhancements that reflect the priorities of local people.

Public Open Space Audit 2018

The purpose of this audit was to identify existing provision, in terms of quantity and quality, of public open space within the Borough relative to the requirements of the Local Plan (Policy LHW1). It is used in assessing the justification for the provision of, or contributions towards, public open space associated with new residential development.

The audit also forms part of the evidence base, helping to inform policies and proposals relating to the provision, enhancement and protection of public open space. The audit does not cover all the types of green space considered in this strategy.

Sustainability Framework

This framework sets out the Council's objectives that will be taken into account, alongside other considerations, in delivering services and running the Council's estate. The objectives include conserving, and where possible enhancing, the local environment including biodiversity.

Climate Emergency Action Plan

This was approved in June 2020 and identifies a series of actions that the Council will take in moving towards achieving carbon neutrality. A series of actions have been identified in relation to the natural environment, some of which will influence the approach to management of our green spaces.

What are the key issues we are considering?

Health and wellbeing

It is our objective to make a positive contribution to enhance the physical, mental and social wellbeing of our residents. Statistics from Public Health England (2020) demonstrate increase demand placed on the health services for mental health issues, and obesity related illnesses.

In order to counter the rising level of obesity, particularly in children, we need to continue to create and maintain safe, enjoyable and challenging environments which encourage participation in physical activity. We also need to consider interventions where we encounter barriers to accessing green space. We need to work to increase use of, or engagement with, the natural environment and work with partners who use targeted health interventions based in green space.

Biodiversity and access to nature

The value of access to nature is well known and spaces dedicated to ecological protection are vitally important for both wildlife and people. The **25 Year Environment Plan 'A Green Future' 2018** sets out a powerful policy context for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, and states the importance of “strengthening the connections between people and nature”, through access to and enjoyment of natural spaces, and through educational opportunities. Additionally, the plan recognises the importance of volunteering as a beneficial way of experiencing the natural world, and highlights “the wealth of evidence on the positive effect that spending time in the natural environment” has on both physical and mental health.

Wildlife in an urban setting is progressively being squeezed into ever smaller areas due to development, pressure from recreation and inappropriate management. We will continue to work to protect these important spaces and look for opportunities to expand the boundaries creating a network of ecological corridors linking spaces. Alongside the approach to managing wildlife sites, we will also continue to explore opportunities to conserve, and where possible enhance, biodiversity in all green spaces.

Climate emergency

Changes in the climate, including a rise in global temperature, and current practices in the management of the natural world across the globe, have reached a critical point where changes are needed now to combat irreversible consequences.

In June 2019, the UK updated its target for reducing carbon emissions to achieve a 100% reduction relative to 1990 levels by 2050. At a local level, the Council has declared a climate emergency and put in place an action plan to continue the journey towards carbon neutrality. The action plan highlights some of the ways we will seek to reduce carbon emissions through the management of our green spaces. We will also need to be thinking about how we need to adapt the approach to the management of our green spaces to account for the

changes in climate, such as changes in the volume and intensity of rainfall and potentially the need to provide additional areas of shade.

Management of trees in the landscape

Trees are great - they make a significant contribution to the landscape, sense of place, provide a wide ecological resource, help regulate temperature and provide invaluable carbon capture. However, trees often require management to ensure longevity, harmony with communities and importantly to ensure ecological balance. The Council has an obligation to look after the Borough's tree resource to ensure sustainable management, which will include planting, appropriate care of veteran and future veteran trees. To manage the expectation, and in line with the emerging Environment Bill, a Tree Strategy will be developed, which will outline the Council's approach to managing trees, tree planting and options for future woodland creation.

Disease and invasive species

We work proactively to control the spread and, where required, manage the removal of invasive species located on Council land. These include Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and *Crassula helmsii*. The spread of new pests and disease, which impact on our native species and landscape, is becoming more frequent with proactive management required to do what is reasonably practicable to keep the public safe.

Ash dieback currently presents a significant landscape scale problem, which will have a massive impact on the Borough's ash trees. Current predictions suggest that up to 95% of all ash will die as a result. In response to this, we have prepared an action plan to manage the risk associated with the disease and how we will look to recover from the loss of tree cover from ash removal.

Meeting the increasing demand for access to green space

Whilst the borough is generally well served with green space, according to the Public Open Space Audit 2018, there is currently a deficit in the quantity of green space in a number of areas within Test Valley based on the requirements of the Local Plan. Whilst this deficit may not be obvious on the ground, certain spaces are under constant pressure.

This is often compounded by competing demands for the same space at the same time for different pursuits, which are not compatible or that the space cannot accommodate. This can have a corresponding impact on site character, maintenance standards, resources needed, or the perception of the safety of the space and can also impact on the site's ecological value. Whilst the concept of multi-functional spaces is generally a sound one, additional space will inevitably be needed, as well as developing new facilities within existing spaces appropriately, where possible, to cater for the increasing demand.

Meeting the needs of the community

Green spaces provide places where people can come together and are often at the heart of communities providing a space in which to spend time, meet, play and interact. These spaces help to define the cultural identity of a neighbourhood. Involving local communities in the planning of improvements, and then the site's ongoing management, helps to foster a sense of ownership in a space. Strong partnerships have been developed with friends groups, local naturalists volunteer groups, and civic societies across Test Valley. This has vastly increased the number of projects delivered jointly and their success as a result.

We will continue to work with the local communities and support voluntary groups, to deliver projects across the borough, with the aspiration to meet local needs and exceed expectations.

New housing development

Housing development provides an opportunity to create exciting well thought out green space, which connects new and existing communities. Conversely, they can also put pressure on existing green spaces when not enough thought is given to layout, design and end use or where recreational space is not provided onsite. The Local Plan policy LHW1 provides a mechanism to secure green space on site on developments. Where new green space is proposed on site, this is normally secured through a Section 106 Agreement.

Where a development is small in size, and it is impractical to achieve meaningful green space onsite, a financial contribution by way of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is required. This levy will be available to fund schemes to increase the capacity of an existing green space, through the improvement of facilities, or strategically to fund the purchase of additional land.

Where new green space is provided as part of new housing developments every effort is made throughout the process (from pre-application discussions to completion of the development) to ensure these spaces are set out and can be managed to the best possible standards.

To help ensure all new spaces meet the needs of new and existing communities, a design guide for the layout of new green space, including equipped children's play, will be developed. Through implementation and ongoing monitoring, we will look to put resources in place to manage the construction of spaces and then the ongoing management and maintenance.

Maintaining safe spaces

Test Valley Green Spaces are generally perceived as safe places to use and enjoy. However, there are occasions when a situation may arise where anti-social behaviour does occur. This can take the form of vandalism, threatening behaviour and trespass, nuisance dogs, fouling and litter. We will continue to work with our communities and partners to maintain safe spaces through targeted intelligence led campaigns and where required enforcement of Public Space Protection Orders.

Maintenance standards

Well set out and cared for green spaces provide a wealth of benefits to a local community. It is well documented that where standards do fall a corresponding decline in use, and the behaviour of those who continue to use the space, can follow. Ensuring the right resource and expertise is deployed is essential in maintaining the high standards expected by our community.

High standards does not necessarily translate to neat and tidy. As we move forward with the delivery of this strategy more emphasis will be placed on a gentler way of management where traditional grounds maintenance is balanced with appropriate timing, management and frequencies of operation (of grass cutting for instance) to achieve biodiversity gain.

To measure the standards of our current green spaces, and to plan where standards may need to be raised, we will undertake a comprehensive re-assessment of all spaces above 2000m². This assessment will be based on the criteria set out in the Green Flag Award as summarised in appendix 4. Each space will be evaluated, this will help to inform and prioritise the improvements that should be made. This will be periodically reviewed throughout the life of this strategy.

Resources

The adoption of the Green Space Strategy in 2007 paved the way for a more strategic way to prioritise improvements to the Borough's green spaces. Tangible improvements have been made and investment has been constant during this however, we are in uncertain times where pressure on local authority resources is an ever present challenge.

The Council, where the opportunity arises, will use external funding including developer contributions to bring about project delivery. It will also be important that, if we are to realise the ambition to continue to make long term sustainable improvements to our green spaces, we will need to look at alternative ways of working, innovative partnerships and further external funding opportunities.

Next steps

Involving local communities

Involving local communities in planning future improvements to their green space, and making use of local knowledge, will be one of the ways to ensure the success of a project. Where specific needs have been identified, or where major improvements are planned, we will work with local communities to ensure wherever possible that any improvement work meets the needs of the majority of local residents. This will include working with Romsey Future, Andover Vision and other community initiatives and community planning exercises to decide priorities for the action plan.

Monitoring and evaluation

The action plan in appendix 1 details how we will work to achieve the strategic priorities set out on page 4. It will be important that this strategy is treated as a live document. This will help us to react to new opportunities as they emerge and support projects that have been identified through community consultation. The action plan will be monitored through the Council's performance management framework.

Appendix 1 – Action Plan 2020 - 2030

Appendix 2 – Green Space Typologies

Nature Reserves and countryside sites – These sites are primarily managed to protect and enhance habitats and species, and provide wonderful opportunities for residents to learn about wildlife whilst enjoying all the benefits of being outdoors. Urban nature reserves have become increasingly important wildlife refuges with the potential to support increasingly more diverse ranges of species when managed appropriately.

The management of Borough Council nature reserves is directed by site specific management plans monitored throughout the year by professional staff. We work with a range of partner organisation such as Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, groups and individuals to ensure we maximise the ecological benefit of these sites for both wildlife and people.

Volunteering and community participation is absolutely key to successful management. A wide range of opportunities throughout the year are promoted to encourage community involvement such as; practical work parties, cattle overseeing, forest school, bush craft events, wildlife walks, recording, Bio Blitz events and the Community Woodfair. These events engage wider members of the community with our Green Spaces, encouraging engagement and commitment for the ongoing protection of these sites.

Green corridors - Green corridors can take numerous forms including cycle routes, river corridors, woodland and public rights of way. These can provide opportunities for walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel. These green assets form the basis of the way in which people can move between Green Spaces and through the environment providing often traffic free links. Green corridors can provide important ecological links between habitats by provide stepping stones or routes for movement. Their presence helps to mitigate against habitat fragmentation.

A number of initiatives specifically target these green assets: these include the River Anton Enhancement Scheme and Romsey Waterways project.

Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) - The Council has been proactive in purchasing land and working with landowner/developers to create Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG). This has a purpose to mitigate the potential impact of recreation pressure from new housing in the south of the borough on European protected sites. These spaces are established to offer safe and secure places to walk a dog helping to reduce the need to travel to places like the New Forest Special Areas_of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) and Solent SPA.

We opened the first SANG at Mill Lane, Sherfield English in 2019..

Informal open spaces – Informal Green Spaces are generally located in residential areas and are highly valued spaces, they provide important visual and recreational benefits, they help to shape and define the character of the neighbourhood and make space for informal recreation. These spaces fulfil a varied function with activities such as dog walking, informal ball games etc. and will often include the equipment for play, exercise and wheeled sports. Examples of this type of Green Space are Lavington Gardens in North Baddesley and Casterbridge Lane in Weyhill.

Formal Parks – Parks are highly visible and highly valued spaces, which can set the quality standards for an urban centre. Parks are often formally laid out with lawns, flower beds, paths, shrubs and trees and can be categorised for their historical significance. Parks are generally centrally located and provide key venues for high profile events which draw people from the local community. Landscaping would typically take the form of seasonal bedding schemes, trees and shrubs with facilities for children's play, bowling greens, tennis courts, kiosk/café, bandstands and sculptures and memorials. Examples of this type of Green Space are Vigo Recreation Ground in Andover and Romsey War Memorial Park.

Trees and Woodland - Trees are cared for across all of the Green Spaces and provide a whole host of benefits including; enhancing landscape character, improving air quality, reducing flood risk, enhancing health and wellbeing (including providing shading) and can provide significant biodiversity value. All decisions on management of trees take into account the role in respect of the significant landscape, ecological and emotional value trees play in the environment. The Council holds digital records of the location and condition of over 25,000 individual trees and the number is rising as we continue to survey our tree stock.

Cemeteries - Cemeteries are not only important for the relatives and friends of those whose remains have been committed but are also public open spaces offering place for quiet contemplation. Cemeteries often contain icons of community cultural heritage, such as memorials to events that remain in the community memory. Cemeteries can be bright, welcoming spaces packed with interest. More recently cemeteries have been identified as areas which can be ecologically important, offering a variety of undisturbed habitats for some of Britain's best loved wildlife.

Play Areas - Play takes a whole variety of forms and can combine a host of opportunities be it games in the street, exploring a woodland setting to exciting adventurous dynamic equipped play areas and everything in between.

Play provides a way to interact, exercise, learn and develop with the range of experiences offered which should be aimed at challenge. Play is good for you.

The wider Green Spaces including our woodlands and nature reserves provide well managed and accessible places for exploration and unstructured play. TVBC also manage over 100 equipped play facilities across the Borough, which are aimed at a range of ages from two years old upwards and include play areas, outdoor gyms, fitness trails, multi-use games areas and venues for wheeled sports.

Where new play areas are planned, we work with local residents on the design and equip these areas to create the correct facility for the location. Where new equipped play is planned on new housing sites, we will work with the developer team to ensure the best possible outcome for new and existing residents.

Appendix 3 - Assessment criteria based on the Green Flag Award criteria

Welcoming Place - First impressions are important and Green Spaces should be positive and inviting. Sites, where possible, will be made accessible to the whole community with provision for the elderly and disabled visitors as well as young people. Signs both inside and outside the space will be clear and of consistent design to offer appropriate information.

Healthy, safe and secure - Sites will be safe for all age groups and sectors of the community, including staff. Drinking water, first aid facilities, toilets and emergency equipment will be provided if appropriate to the site. An onsite presence in Green Spaces can make people feel safer and contributes to the general security of individual areas. A long term strategy to look at getting a visible presence in these spaces will be investigated. A Health and Safety policy will be put into practice and hygiene issues such as dog fouling will be addressed.

Clean and Well Maintained - The appearance and overall upkeep of a Green Space is a determining factor in whether local people use and respect the space. For aesthetic, environmental, health and safety reasons, litter, graffiti and waste management will be addressed. Flower beds, lawns, buildings, equipment, benches and water features will be evaluated, locations and conditions logged and facilities repaired or replaced if necessary.

Sustainability - The maintenance of Green Space and its facilities will be environmentally sound. The application of pesticides will be minimised and the use of horticultural peat will be eliminated. Wherever possible, waste vegetation will be recycled or composted and used on site, and priority will be given to low maintenance planting. The implementation of energy conservation measures and pollution reduction, where applicable, are considered as high priority as is the need to offset carbon emissions, including through increased tree planting.

Conservation and Heritage - Every Green Space is unique. Every effort will be made to conserve and manage any natural or built heritage. If appropriate, original land features and historical buildings will be restored and maintained to a high standard. Consideration will be given to increasing biological diversity, and conserving and creating new habitats will be incorporated at every opportunity.

Community Involvement - Public participation is essential to the success of any Green Space. Where we actively involve the local community and visitors, in the development and implementation of projects, improvements are more sustainable and have a higher success rate. Where possible, 'Friends' groups and other community-based strategies will be fostered to support the management and long term development of key sites.

Marketing - The local community will be made more aware of where Green Spaces are, what facilities are available and what events happen there. Methods to market the sites need to be diverse with site information publicised through tools such as leaflets, websites or notice boards.

Management - The development of 5-year management plans for specific sites to deliver sustainable improvements to Green Space will be reviewed, primarily for sites with the greatest visitor numbers. Management plans will illustrate the daily management prescriptions and operational schedules as well as a timescale for surveys. Management plans will be reviewed regularly.