



# **Open Spaces Strategy 2016 to 2021**



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# 1 Introduction to the Open Spaces Strategy

Good quality open spaces, country side and street scene make for a better quality of life for residents.

Networks of well cared for and well designed open spaces, linked as far as possible by off-road footpaths, add to the character of places where we want to live, work, play and visit. Green spaces also provide the green infrastructure that enables communities to deal with floods or combat climate change whilst providing wildlife habitats, open spaces for amenity, recreational, sporting facilities and beautiful parks.

The Open Spaces Strategy is currently in draft format. We are seeking comments through this consultation to inform the final version of the Strategy. Comments can be made where the pencil icon is shown throughout this document.

## 1.1 What is the Open Spaces Strategy?

This strategy has been written to inform all those people who live, work and visit Harborough District about how we want to improve and develop open spaces.

The Strategy takes account of all green spaces of public value, whether owned by Harborough District Council or in private ownership; however it must be acknowledged that its greatest influence can be over those open spaces owned by Harborough District Council or managed by partner organisations.

This is a strategic level document and does not consider the maintenance and management of individual open spaces.

## 1.2 What the Open Spaces Strategy will do.

It will influence how the Council manages and secures the future of open spaces in its ownership, and how we will work in partnership with others to create new open space in the future. We will through this strategy:

### **Enhance Open Space:**

To ensure that the best use is made of existing open space and that new open space is well designed and appropriate to provide opportunities for recreation for all.

### **Protect Open Space:**

To prevent the loss of open space sites and prevent the loss of access to open space for recreation

### **Enable Open Space:**

To ensure that new, good quality open spaces are planned for, delivered in a timely way and meet the current and future health and recreational needs of the community they serve and managed by the most appropriate organisation.

#### **1.2.1 Enhance Open Space:**

The Strategy will seek to work with partners to enhance existing open space throughout the District. It will do this by giving a policy framework that will ensure officers work with developers and others to improve existing open space, and also ensure that new open space is appropriate, landscaped to a high standard and is what the community requires.

The Open Spaces Strategy will also give the opportunity to seek developer contributions for off site enhancements of open space where appropriate, and give a local policy for partners to seek external funding.

The Strategy also considers linking up green spaces and settlements by the use of a new network of 'Greenways'; these are proposed to be for cycling and walking using disused railway lines and other appropriate routes.

The Open Spaces Strategy will give a clear direction of travel for open space in the District, and allow more detailed management plans to be written that will deliver enhancements on the ground.

#### **1.2.2 Protect Open Space:**

It will protect open spaces for communities and wildlife; enable creation of open spaces that are valued and provide suitable habitat; provide a way for communities to take a greater role in management of their local open spaces.

The Open Spaces Strategy seeks to protect existing sites for open space sports and recreation whether privately or Council owned, by applying legislation in the National Planning Policy Framework and the District Local Plan.

### 1.2.3 Enable Open Space

The strategy provides a policy that will allow officers to work with developers, landscapers and others to provide high quality, new open space. This will primarily be on new developments; however there may be opportunities to work with other partners to provide public access to open space that is not associated with development.

The Open Spaces Strategy will seek to ensure that new open space is appropriate, integrated with existing open space, and is accessible to communities. It will also use the planning system to encourage developers to create off road routes within new developments linking to the wider network of rights of way and providing links to existing green spaces and the wider countryside. It will also ensure that open space is managed by the most appropriate and locally accountable organisation. We will seek, through the Open Spaces Strategy, to work proactively with Parish Councils and partner organisations to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and capacity to take responsibility for management of open space.

Needs assessments of existing open space have been undertaken and this data will be used to secure new open space sport and recreation facilities where appropriate. The 2004 needs assessment for open space can be found here [Open Space Assessment 2004](#) , and will form Appendix A of the Open Spaces Strategy.

## 2 Policy Context

There have been some important National Policy changes that should now be reflected in the new Open Spaces Strategy. These include:

The Localism Act Communities able to nominate open space as Assets of Community Value

### 2.1 National Planning Policy Framework

Open Space Sport and Recreation sites to be protected against development unless alternative provision made

Local Green Space can be designated (A list of Local Green Space can be found at Appendix B)

The Open Spaces Strategy should also compliment and support work that other organisations undertake in Harborough District, these include amongst others:

- Woodland Trust (Space For People 2015)
- Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust (Space For Wildlife 2010 – 2015)
- Welland Valley Partnership and Welland Rivers Trust (Enhancing the River Welland 2013)
- Canal and Rivers Trust (CRT 10 year strategy 2015)
- Environment Agency
- Stepping Stones (Creating a Green and Properous Future)

Local Policy changes must also be taken account of and these include:

- Commencing development of a new Local Plan for Harborough District
- Asset Management Plan
- Requirement for a Playing Pitch Strategy

Sport England have commented that a Playing pitch Strategy is required for the District to ensure that the provision of outdoor sports meets local demand and quality requirements.

Other Local Policy changes include the need to update the Provision for Open Space, Sport and Recreation: Developer Guidance document 2009. This document is separate from the Open Spaces Strategy although closely compliments this document

The National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (NPPF) extended previous planning guidance relating to open space, sport and recreation sites by stating that 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 NPPF 2012 also states that Local planning authorities should:

*set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure;*

and

*Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.*

The National Planning Practice Guidance (issued in 2014) gives further clarification by stating:

*Open space, which includes all open space of public value, can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. It can provide health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby; have an ecological value and contribute to green infrastructure, as well as being an important part of the landscape and setting of built development, and an important component in the achievement of sustainable development.*

A summary of the National Planning Policy Framework and how it relates to Harborough's vision for Open Space can be found at Appendix C

The context for the Open Spaces Strategy 2016 to 2021 and the Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015 and their relationship to other strategies can be found at Appendix D.

## 3 Strategy vision

The Open Spaces Strategy should support the Corporate Vision for Harborough District

The vision for Harborough District is:

‘Working with communities in a vibrant, safe and prosperous district.’

Corporate Priorities are:

- Working with Communities to develop places in which to live and be happy.
- Provide public services which are effective and deliver value for money.
- Encourage a vibrant and sustainable business community intent on prosperity, employment and learning opportunities.
- Support the vulnerable in the communities where they live.

### 3.1 The Open Spaces Strategy Vision is:

‘To work in partnership to protect, enhance and enable quality open space that is safe, supports wildlife, is valued and enjoyed by people and contributes to their health and well being’

From this we have been able to develop a series of Aims for Open Spaces in Harborough District. These Aims support the Objectives of Harborough District Council and the National Planning Policy Framework, and use a series of icons to represent each Aim,

Look for the icons through out the document to indicate where an objective or statement supports the aims. (note - these will be inserted in the final draft)

**Table 3.1 Open Space Benefits**

| <b>Aim Icon</b> | <b>Aim</b>   | <b>HDC Priority Supported</b>  | <b>Relevant NPPF Paragraph</b> | <b>What this means</b>   |
|-----------------|--|--|--------------------------------|--|
| Quality         | Aim 1.<br>The provision and maintenance of appropriate and good quality open space | Working with Communities to develop places in which to live and be happy.<br>Support the vulnerable in | Para 70, 73, 74, 81, 171       | We will make sure that open space is the sort of open space that people want, is well maintained, and protected for everyone in the future |

| <b>Aim Icon</b> | <b>Aim</b>   | <b>HDC Priority Supported</b>   | <b>Relevant NPPF Paragraph</b> | <b>What this means</b>   |
|-----------------|--|---|--------------------------------|--|
|                 | that is open to all and protected for future generations   | the communities where they live   |                                |  |
| Conservation    | Aim 2. Conservation and habitat is enhanced and protected  | Working with Communities to develop places in which to live and be happy.   | Para 17                        | We will make sure that animals and plants are given areas where they can live, grow and thrive. Open Spaces should also contribute towards reducing flood risk and the effects of climate change.                                    |
| Value Safety    | Aim 3. To ensure open spaces are safe and litter free, and contribute towards a safe environment | Working with Communities to develop places in which to live and be happy. Support the vulnerable in the communities where they live | Para 70, 156                   | We will make sure that people feel safe at all times of day when they use open spaces, and that open spaces are clean and don't have litter all over the place.  |
| Volunteers      | Aim 4. Voluntary groups are supported to use and manage open spaces                              | Working with Communities to develop places in which to live and be happy. Support the vulnerable in the communities where they live | Para 70, 73                    | We will support groups that want to use open spaces for activities. These might be support groups for vulnerable people or sports clubs. We will also try and encourage groups to look after open spaces that are important to them. |
| Value           | Aim 5. Deliver value for money services when managing open space                                 | Provide public services which are effective and deliver value for money.  | Para 28, 73, 158               | We will ensure that the things that we do on open space, and improvements that we make are good value for money, and money is not wasted.  |
| Income          | Aim 6. Open Space supports   | Encourage a vibrant and sustainable   | Para 28, 156, 158              | We will try and find ways to help business by providing good quality   |

| <b>Aim Icon</b> | <b>Aim</b>  | <b>HDC Priority Supported</b>   | <b>Relevant NPPF Paragraph</b> | <b>What this means</b>   |
|-----------------|---|---|--------------------------------|--|
|                 | business and income is maximised  | business community intent on prosperity, employment and learning opportunities.   |                                | open spaces, and try and find new ways to get an income from open spaces where it is appropriate.  |
| Health          | Aim 7. Ensure that open spaces support health and wellbeing of local people | Working with Communities to develop places in which to live and be happy. Support the vulnerable in the communities where they live | Para 70, 171,                  | We will ensure that open spaces can be used for sport and recreation, which will help keep people fit, healthy and happy. We will also ensure that open spaces can be used by all sorts of people for all sorts of different reasons even if they just want to sit, chat and meet friends. |

## 3.2 The Benefits of Open Space

Parks and open spaces are important to the community they serve and benefit local people in many ways; their health and wellbeing, the local economy, community safety and whether they impact in a positive way to a general sense of satisfaction with where people live.

There is considerable evidence that parks and open spaces, when designed and managed correctly, have the ability to impact positively on all of our lives, in ways that may not be immediately apparent.

Local government must set the right example and ensure, where possible that these valuable assets are available and accessible to all sections of the community so that all might benefit from its use.

Open space provides wider benefits; wildlife habitat, protection of rare and important species, influence over climate change, maintaining fragile ecosystems and mitigating against flood risk.

### 3.3 Health Benefits

Open Spaces provide opportunities for outdoor activity including free and inclusive sports facilities which in turn help increase levels of health and reduce obesity. Open spaces also help to maintain good mental health. They reduce stress by encouraging relaxation through interaction with the natural environment, physical activity and social interaction.

### 3.4 Play

Parks and open spaces offer a space for play, whether formal or informal. They provide a great setting for developing social, physical and cognitive skills. They also offer a location for older children to socialise and relax.

Open space also provides us with learning opportunities for range of subjects, and does so throughout our lives.

### 3.5 Community Safety

Well designed spaces can reduce the fear of crime, increasing usage and enabling everyone to enjoy them. Through increased natural surveillance this can have wider benefits that create safer neighbourhoods.

### 3.6 Our Communities 'Green Heart'

Parks and open spaces are freely available to all, providing opportunities for social interaction, community activity and cultural events. Open spaces can improve local identity and develop a sense of place. Where communities get involved in the management and maintenance of open space the relationships can be more beneficial and give ownership of the environment.

### 3.7 Sustainable Transport and Climate Change

Open spaces provide the opportunity for walking and cycling, lessening reliance on cars and reducing traffic. They provide the 'green lungs' of our towns and cities, absorb pollutants and process carbon dioxide. Some typologies of open space actively encourage sustainable practices such as composting and locally-grown produce. They can also provide natural drainage systems to reduce flooding.

## 3.8

### Our connection with nature

Parks and open spaces provide valuable natural habitats for all forms of wildlife, offer green links, protect biodiversity and give the chance for people to experience and appreciate nature.

This Open Spaces Strategy will develop a strategic context for the planning, protection and development of open spaces and green infrastructure in Harborough District. The delivery of this strategy will enable the Council to coordinate resources to increase the quality and use of green space, to help plan for the future and to ensure that the District's open spaces meet the needs of the local community.

The Open Spaces Strategy 2016 to 2021 is a policy document to be used in association with Harborough District Council Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study 2015. This updated study has determined standards for the provision and quality of new green spaces.

## 4 Harborough District: Spatial Portrait and Open Space

### 4.1 Location

Harborough District covers an area of 238 square miles of south and east Leicestershire. It has a population of approximately 86000 which is split between the two market towns of Market Harborough and Lutterworth, large villages of Broughton Astley, Great Glen, Kibworth and Fleckney and Bushby, Thurnby and Scraftoft . The remaining population live in the smaller rural settlements, 71 of which have a population of less than 500.

Market Harborough (20,000 population) is the largest settlement in the District. Lutterworth and Broughton Astley, both settlements with a population in the region of 9,000, are located in the west of the District.

We will seek to enable the provision of Open Space where it will have the maximum benefit for most people, however some typologies of open space are best provided in areas that are more sparsely populated ( e.g. Natural and semi natural greenspace). We will seek to enable this type of open space where it can have the best outcomes for our environment and either support existing projects or programmes, or discharge the District Councils requirement to reduce the affects of climate change or to meet the requirements of legislation such as the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act and Water Framework Directive amongst others.

### 4.2 The People

Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Broughton Astley have seen the biggest rises in population.

Harborough District varies from national population trends in a number of ways. Most noticeable is the relatively low proportion of people within the 16 – 29 age bands when compared to the national average. This trend is particularly pronounced in rural villages as a large proportion of young people are concentrated in the two market towns. In contrast there is a higher proportion of people aged 45-64 living in the District than nationally and countywide.

Recognising that our District population departs from the national trends is important for us to target open space, and the facilities provided by them,

towards the age structure of the population. It is important that a larger population of children and young people is catered for, but also a higher than average older population.

The District's quality of life and rural character mean that it is seen as an attractive place to live. This pressure and its proximity to Leicester and other centres of employment, has created a buoyant housing market and has resulted in very high average prices.

Where household incomes and average house prices are high, there is often a high expectation within the community for good quality open space provision. The quality of new open space and maintenance of existing open space should be very good, and present good value for money. This is not an easy balance to strike when District Council budgets are being reduced.

## 4.3 Transport

Public transport provision within the District is patchy. There is a frequent and reliable bus service between the two market towns as well as regular links to Leicester, Hinckley and Northampton. The more remote smaller rural settlements of the District are served by limited community transport services to larger settlements. This lack of comprehensive public transport services means that there is often no viable alternative to the use of the private car.

Where possible open spaces should be linked to public transport networks and safe walking and cycling networks. This is especially important when an open space is a destination site, offering more facilities than would normally be used by local people. This approach will give safe and easy access for all and provide access in a sustainable way.

## 4.4 Health

People in Harborough are generally healthier than Leicestershire averages and significantly better than national averages. The importance of health is recognised in surveys which suggest health services are the second most important factor in making somewhere a good place to live.

Open spaces can make an important contribution towards health and well being. This can be from organised sport, but also quiet contemplation and informal exercise. It is also important that wider links are made with the countryside to encourage people to walk or cycle longer distances.

## 4.5 The Environment:

Harborough is predominately a rural area and will remain so. Whilst there are no national landscape designations, the district of is made up of five broad landscape character areas (as determined by the Harborough District Historic Landscape Character Assessment).

The visual appeal and perception of our towns and built up areas in Harborough District can be greatly enhanced by our parks and open spaces. The natural landscape can contribute as much to the quality of the urban environment as design of buildings

The visual amenity of the natural landscape, trees, grass and water are high. Parks and open spaces reconnect us to nature, and give colour, shape, form, texture, movement and smell to our environment. When people are choosing where to live or locate businesses, this can make the difference; businesses place a high value on image and wish to be associated not only with successful locations but ones that attract repeat spend. Healthy environments are more likely to support healthy workforces, improving productivity and reducing absenteeism.

Pleasant and attractively landscaped routes play an important part in travel choices and are far more likely to attract people to make a meaningful and sustainable change in travel choices than hard infrastructure alone.

## 4.6 Water and Flood Management

The Rivers Welland and Avon form much of the district's southern boundary and other main rivers are the Swift, Sence and Eyebrook. The Leicester Line of the Grand Union Canal is a particularly important landscape and cultural heritage asset for the district and incorporates the Grade II\* listed Foxton Locks.

The Open Spaces Strategy will allow the District Council to improve the natural environment when and where possible, and assist other organisations to help discharge the Council obligations under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, Water Framework Directive, The Environment Protection Act, and The Wildlife and Countryside Act amongst others. ( See Appendix E for a more detailed legal framework under which this Strategy should operate.)

A number of watercourses in the District are prone to flooding during extreme weather conditions. The River Welland, which flows through the

centre of Market Harborough, is particularly vulnerable although recent remedial work by Anglia Water has reduced flood risk in the Town. A list of the water bodies in Harborough District, their ecological status and details of at risk of flooding can be found at Appendix F.

The majority of the flood zones are in rural areas and therefore in general the flood risk within the District is not considered to be a significant risk. However, localised run off from agricultural land has proved to be a risk to households and has caused flooding events in the past. The effects of climate change may exacerbate the flooding problems.

The Open Spaces Strategy can help to mitigate against flood risk by creating areas for detention of run off from new development and at the same time creating spaces that can be enjoyed by people and create habitat for wildlife.

The soil and vegetation of parks and open spaces is permeable and capable of absorbing even substantial rainfall. By recharging groundwater in this way it reduces the volume and rate of run-off and contributes to a more sustainable drainage solution. The rate of run-off for surfaces with trees and grass is estimated to be 10-20%, compared to 60-70% for hard landscaped urban areas.

Where urban development has included natural flood plains or other flood mitigation solutions, there is less pressure on piped drainage systems during periods of heavy rain fall and flooding.

## 4.7 Biodiversity

Like much of the East Midlands and Leicestershire, Harborough is relatively poor in biodiversity and geodiversity terms. 1.21% of the District's area is covered by Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), whilst a further 0.42% is covered by Local Wildlife Site designations. There are 2 Local Nature Reserves at Scraftoft and North Kilworth. The Leighfield Forest, where several SSSIs protect what remains of the ancient woodland, is designated as a Biodiversity Conservation Area and recognised in the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust Biodiversity Action Plan. Whilst there are no Regionally Important Geological Sites in the district, there is one Geological SSSI, Tilton Railway Cutting SSSI, which is a 750m section of disused railway cutting. (A list of SSSIs can be found at Appendix G)

A defining characteristic of both the landscape and townscape of Harborough District is the quantity and quality of its historic assets.

Integrating new development with minimum impact into this historic environment by careful planning of open space assets is an important element of the strategy.

With regard to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, road transport is by far the biggest contributor in Harborough, contributing to almost half- or 45% of the district's total emissions.

Trees planted on open space can have a not insignificant affect on the reduction of carbon emissions. Trees and plant life have an important role in improving the air quality in our environment and reducing pollutants. A tree's ability to offset carbon emissions is determined by size, canopy cover, health, and age, but large trees can help lower carbon emissions in the atmosphere by 2-3%.

The canopies of trees act as a physical filter for pollution. The fine particles known as PM<sub>10</sub>s are trapped on the surface of the leaves. When carried into the lungs, PM<sub>10</sub>s make chronic diseases such as asthma and bronchitis worse. Trees have been shown to remove substantial quantities of PM<sub>10</sub>s and are very effective at trapping toxic particles such as lead. Gases such as carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) are known to cause respiratory problems and can also increase sensitivity to allergens. It has been estimated that woodland can reduce concentrations of SO<sub>2</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub> in the air by 4-5%.

## 5 Current provision of Open Space in Harborough District

Harborough District Council owns and manages over 300 ha of open spaces throughout the District of Harborough.

The total amount of open or green spaces in both public and private ownership amounts to over 1,500 ha in Harborough District.

A full list of open space or green space assets in the district can be found at Appendix H

The typologies of Open Space that are considered in this Strategy, with meanings and primary uses can be found in the table below.

**Table 5.1 Open Space Typologies**

| <b>Name of Open Space</b>  | <b>What the name means</b>  | <b>Main Uses of the open space</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| Parks and gardens  | This includes parks in towns, formal parks and country parks  | These do not cost money to use, are close to a bus route, and are well looked after. They are for people to enjoy and for community events such as fetes and shows |
| Natural and semi-natural Greenspaces, including urban and rural Woodland and Country Parks | These are publicly accessible woodlands, woodlands in towns, scrub, grasslands (e.g. downlands, commons, meadows), wetlands, ponds, lakes and running water and wastelands. | They are mainly for wildlife and are places where animals and plants live and can grow without being damaged   |
| Amenity Greenspace   | Most often found near houses. They include informal green spaces and village greens.  | These are areas where people can play games with friends, close to their homes or work. These spaces also help to make housing and other areas look attractive     |
| Outdoor sports facilities  | Grass pitches or artificial pitches either publicly or privately owned used for sport and play. Includes school playing fields.   | Used for playing outdoor sports such as football, rugby, cricket, tennis, bowls, athletics or countryside and water sports   |

| <b>Name of Open Space</b>                                | <b>What the name means</b>   | <b>Main Uses of the open space</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| Provision for children and Young people                  | This is an area for children and young people to play and meet up with friends   | These areas would usually include play areas which have play equipment, like slides and swings. They would also include ball courts for 5 a side football , skateboard areas and teenage shelters for meeting up with friends                     |
| Allotments, community gardens                            | Areas for people who wish to grow their own fruit and vegetables<br>This sort of open space may also include farms in towns.   | Opportunities for people who want to grow their own fruit and vegetables, and allow them to grow in a healthy and sustainable way   |
| Cemeteries, disused Churchyards and other burial Grounds | Cemeteries and other places where people have been buried.   | Places where people can go to think about people who have died. They are often a place where wildlife, animals and plants can live and grow without getting damaged..   |
| Civic Spaces   | This means places like the Market Squares in Market Harborough and Lutterworth. It could also include other areas with hard surfaces for people to walk on like St Marys Place in Market Harborough. | These spaces are mainly used for outdoor markets, fun events for the community like Harborough By The Sea. They also allow people to shop easily in the towns   |
| Green Corridors or Greenways                             | These include towpaths and walkways alongside canals and riverbanks, cycleways, public footpaths and railway lines that are not used anymore.  | These sorts of open spaces are mostly used for walking, cycling or horse riding. They could be used for fun, or for getting to work or to the shops.<br>Because these greenways are left with trees and bushes they can also be used by wildlife. |

Each Open Space has been assigned to a typology depending on its primary use. A full list of District wide open space irrespective of ownership can be found at Appendix H. This list will be updated throughout the life of the open spaces strategy to ensure the data retained by the District Council is current and up to date.

Provision of new open space will be made primarily where housing development takes place.

The mix of typologies, and the amount of open space provided will be determined using the Councils document 'Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015'

The provision of new open space by developers will be proportionate to the size of the development, only be required where there is a shortfall within the accessibility thresholds for each typology and will generally be sought on site.

Where of site provision is sought because of a constrained site, the amount of provision for a typology does not make a practically sized open space or the typology would be better suited to off site provision, then a commuted sum will be sought for off a site provision.

Details of the method of calculation can be found in Appendix I 'Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015'

## 6 Current Management Arrangements and Partnerships

Harborough District Council has sought to provide open spaces that meet the needs of the community, and are maintained through a high specification grounds maintenance contract.

The Council has also sought to work with partner organisations to deliver provision of open spaces of all typologies for the benefit of the community. The Council will continue to seek opportunities to work in partnership with Parish Councils and others to ensure that open space, both new and existing, is managed by the most appropriate locally accountable organisation.

### 6.1 Lease arrangements with other organisations

The Council encourages local communities to take responsibility for their open spaces and ancillary facilities whenever appropriate. ( Open Spaces Strategy 2009) This means that the Council has a mix of different service delivery methods including directly managed sites, volunteer managed areas and sites which are leased to community organisations. Details of the Council's lease arrangement with other organisations are included in Appendix N

### 6.2 Arrangements for maintaining Open Space not in HDC control

Responsibility for these Open Spaces across the District lies with a number of organisations. Parish Councils and Housing Associations maintain green spaces in their local areas. There are a few green spaces maintained by management companies, and there are private land owners and sports clubs that manage and maintain large facilities throughout the District

The management and maintenance of roadside verges is generally undertaken by Leicestershire County Council.

In addition to the above there are many other sites that are maintained or managed in partnership with landowners by trust, charities and other organisations. These organisations include:

- Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust
- Stepping Stones
- Canal and Rivers Trust
- Welland Rivers trust and Welland Valley Partnership
- Woodland Trust
- Leicestershire and Leicester Access Forum

A list of these sites can be found at Appendix P

Private companies, clubs and other landowners are responsible for many open space, sport and recreation sites across the District

## 6.3 Harborough District Councils Open Spaces

Harborough District Council maintains some 300 ha of open space throughout the District. This portfolio is managed by HDC Asset Management Team, and maintained by HDC Contracted Services.

The Open Space sites within Harborough District Council ownership are managed through the Integrated Contract (2009) by an external contractor (FCC). The Integrated Contract is due for renewal in 2016, and the contract is currently being reviewed with consideration being made concerning the best method of delivering the Grounds Maintenance service.

Alternative options and groups that offer management or maintenance of open space are volunteering, Harborough in Bloom, Friends of Welland park, River Cleans, Environment Group, Sustainable Harborough amongst others.

A full list of Businesses or Community Groups that have an interest in, generate employment or income from, or attract income to open spaces can be found at Appendix R

## 7

# Future Management Proposals for Open Space in Harborough District

Harborough District Council will continue to take opportunities to work in partnership with others to ensure that high quality open spaces are provided for the community in the most cost effective for the benefit of the community.

Harborough District Council will work proactively to ensure that all Parish Councils and other partner organisation are enabled to have the knowledge and skills to manage open space with confidence. This may be achieved through training or knowledge sharing, or through Parish Councils grouping together to benefit from mutual support. Harborough District Council will help to facilitate this approach towards open spaces management.

### 7.1

## New Open Space

The Council will encourage the local management of green spaces wherever possible. Parish Councils are generally best placed to adopt land which primarily serves the local community; the opportunity to adopt such land, should the developer not opt to manage the open space through a management company, will be given to the Parish Council in the first instance.

Harborough District Council will continue to adopt new public green spaces which have a strategic value i.e. will attract visitors from across the District and beyond, unless it specifically recommends that another body is better placed to manage the site. The District Council will consider adopting open spaces which do not fall into the category of Strategic Open Space but will not be compelled to do so.

The decision to adopt Open Space will be made in accordance with relevant Harborough District Council Policy. The protocol for adoption of open space by HDC will be developed and approved as an appendix to the Strategy when adopted.

The adoption of Open Space will be accompanied by the appropriate commuted sum for a 30 year maintenance period, details of which can be found in the document Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation (Appendix I).

If the District or Parish Council's decline to adopt new green spaces, Management Companies will be permitted to be formed where developments provide open spaces (i.e. only of value to local residents). The basis for setting up such companies will be determined by the Council's Planning and Legal department and robust controls will be put in place as part of the S106 agreement and /or planning conditions

## 7.2 Existing Open Space

Harborough District Council will take advantage of opportunities that become available to allow local management of open space through licence or lease arrangements or by Parish Councils and others working in partnership.

Licence agreements of up to 5 years will be determined on application of appropriate groups.

Lease agreements are considered a disposal of land and will follow legislation set out in Local Government Act 1972.

The protocol for issuing licence and lease agreements of open space by HDC will be developed and approved as an appendix to the Strategy when adopted.

## 7.3 HDC support for other organisations

Harborough District Council will continue to support Parish Councils, charitable organisations, Trusts and others that seek to manage or improve open space in Harborough District.

Harborough District Council will investigate the opportunities to provide additional resources to Parish Councils. It is envisaged this will be a time limited resource that can help build capacity and a knowledge base within Parish Councils to locally manage open space.

Other support will be in the form of advice, feedback, facilitation and attendance at meetings, where possible

Financial support to organisations by the Council will be subject to the HDC Funding Allocation process.

HDC will seek to support organisations through acquiring S106 contributions from developers where appropriate projects have been identified by partner organisation or communities.

Where contributions have been secured through S106 or other contributions for a specific project, an application will need to be made by the partner organisation through the HDC Funding Allocation process for audit purposes.

## 7.4 The value of Open Space to Business and the Local Community

Open Spaces in Harborough District support business both directly and indirectly. This section seeks to highlight the businesses that have a vested interest in high quality and valued open spaces

How Open Spaces are valued by the community

- Market Harborough voted as one of the best places to live (Times 2015)

From 2013 Residents survey

- Clean Streets and Parks and Open Spaces voted 3 and 4 in the top 5 important factors where they live with 50.3% satisfied with the service they receive.
- Clean streets and facilities for teenagers voted 3 and 4 in the top 5 areas of concern for respondents.
- Clean Streets and Parks and Open Spaces score 8.5 and 6.5 out of 10 respectively as important to provide a good place to live and work.
- Access to Parks and Open Spaces voted third in top five services provided by the Council.

A full list of Businesses or Community Groups that have an interest in, generate employment or income from, or attract income to open spaces can be found at Appendix R

## 8 Minimum Provision, Accessibility and Quality Thresholds

During Consultation communities were asked to comment on the proposed quantity, accessibility and quality provision standards for open spaces.

In 2004 local standards were developed to ensure that open space was provided in sufficient quantity, accessibility and quality based on national guidance. These standards ensure that appropriate amounts of open space are available for communities. This approach has been used since 2009 to successfully provide open space on new development. During consultation in 2015 communities have fed back that they consider that standards are appropriate. The full 2004 needs assessment for open space can be found at Appendix A.

By continuing to use this approach the Council is fulfilling its enabling role for provision of new open space.

A summary of the 2015 consultation responses can be found at Appendix J

### 8.1 Quantity Provision Standard

Through consultation we have been able to determine appropriate and up to date quantity provision standards. These are shown in the table below.

The Quantity Provision Standard will be used when assessing the requirement for new open spaces to be provided as part of housing or other development.

A tailored assessment of each planning application of more than 10 dwellings is undertaken, and a shortfall or oversupply for each typology is determined.

Where there is a shortfall within the typologies accessibility threshold (see Accessibility Provision Standard) a contribution of open space, on site, is required. Where there is an oversupply no provision of open space is required.

The data used to assess the current provision is updated continually, ensuring that robust and appropriate information can be given to developers and others when assessing the current provision of open space.

Further detailed information and use of the Quantity Provision Standard can be found in the document 'Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation' contained at Appendix I.

It should be noted that Sport England have advised that a Playing Pitch Strategy should be provided to ensure that sport and recreation provision is appropriate and directed towards the areas of greatest need.

Harborough District Council will work towards providing a Playing Pitch Strategy which will be used in conjunction with other policy document to ensure all open space provision is considered and appropriately provided.

**Table 8.1 Quantity Provision Standard**

| <b>Name of Open Space</b>               | <b>Quantity Provision Standard</b>   |
|---|--|
| Parks and Gardens                       | 0.4 Hectare per 1000 people in the population  |
| Natural and Semi-natural areas          | 8.5 hectare per 1,000 people (in a country area)<br>1.5 ha per 1,000 people population ( in a city or town area)   |
| Green Corridors                         | 1.3ha per 1000 population which is approximately a 3.3km route 3 m wide per 1000 population, but will be sought when opportunity arises  |
| Amenity Greenspace                      | 0.9 hectare per 1000 people in the population  |
| Provision for Children and Young People | 0.3 hectare per 1000 people in the population  |
| Outdoor Sports Facilities               | HDC has previously used 1.6 ha per 1000 population as a minimum provision and local consultation has determined that respondents still consider this appropriate. HDC will work towards adopting a Playing Pitch Strategy and the provision standard for outdoor sport determined through this further work will be used as part of the Open Spaces Strategy in the future |
| Allotments and Community Gardens        | 0.35 hectare per 1000 people in the population   |
| Cemeteries and Burial Grounds           | 0.35hectare per 1000 people in the population  |
| Civic Spaces                            | There is not a normal amount for this sort of open space. The Council would look to provide new pedestrian spaces when a new   |

| Name of Open Space | Quantity Provision Standard   |
|--------------------|---|
|                    | shopping centre is built or enhance existing civic spaces through contributions |

## 8.2 Accessibility Provision Standard

Through consultation we have been able to determine the accessibility standard that is appropriate to communities in the District. The Accessibility Provision Standards are shown in the table opposite.

When asked whether a differential approach for accessibility should be taken for urban and rural areas or an approach based on the settlement hierarchy, none of the respondents believed that this was necessary.

The accessibility provision standard provides the accessibility thresholds for each typology. When assessing whether there is an over supply or shortfall of open space, each typology is assessed separately to determine the current provision with in the appropriate radius of the site.

Accessibility has been shown to be important through the responses to consultation. Not only for open space to be sufficiently close to where people live, but also be accessible to transport links.

**Table 8.2 Accessibility Provision Standard**

| Open Space Type                         | Accessibility Provision Standard |             |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------|
|   | Time                             | Distance    |
| Parks and Gardens                       | 10 mins (drive or bus)           | 4km         |
| Natural and Semi-natural areas          | 20 mins (walk)                   | 1.6km**     |
| Green Corridors                         | 20 mins (walk)                   | 1.6km*      |
| Amenity Greenspace                      | 10 mins (walk)                   | 800m        |
| Provision for Children and Young People | 5-10 mins (walk)                 | 400m – 800m |
| Outdoor Sports Facilities               | 10 mins (drive or bus)           | 4km         |
| Allotments and Community                | 10 mins (drive or bus)           | 4km         |

| Open Space Type               | Accessibility Provision Standard   |     |
|-------------------------------|--|-----|
| Gardens                       |  |     |
| Cemeteries and Burial Grounds | 5 mins drive or bus  | 2km |
| Civic Spaces                  | This typology is limited to a very small number of sites in urban areas. An accessibility threshold would not therefore be appropriate |     |

\*this should be the furthest a person should have to walk or cycle before being able to join a network of greenways.

\*\* Consultation suggested that the Woodland Trust accessibility thresholds should be used for access to woodland assets.

## 8.3 Access to Woodland

The Woodland Trust has undertaken work to determine the distance people need to travel to access woodland in England. They aspire to a minimum accessibility standard of:

- a wood of at least 2 ha within 500m of their home; and
- a wood of at least 20 ha within 4km of their home

Harborough District Council will use these standards with the District and seek to work with The Woodland trust and other partner organisations to provide new access to woodland, and promote access that has been forgotten or neglected.

We will work with The Woodland Trust to ensure that all accessible woodland is identified and mapped within the District.

There are 50 woods within a 20 mile radius of Market Harborough; however as the table below shows, the local access to woodland in Harborough District is very poor compared with the national average. A list of accessible woodland known to the Woodland trust is shown at Appendix K

In addition to the support the Woodland Trust work in the district, the work of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust(LRWT) will also be promoted and supported where possible. The Leighfield Forest is an important habitat at District level and Harborough District Council will use

the relevant actions within the Biodiversity Action Plan of the LRWT to help ensure the Leighfield Forest and other important woodland is enhanced and protected

**Table 8.3 Accessibility to Woodland**

| Woodland in Harborough District | Accessible Woodland                                    |  | Inaccessible Woodland  |  | Woodland Creation  |  |   |   |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|
|                                 | % of population with access to a 2ha+ wood within 500m | % of population with access to a 20ha+ wood within 4km | % extra population with access to a 2ha+ wood within 500m if existing woods opened | % extra population with access to a 20ha+ wood within 4km if existing woods opened | % population requiring new woodland to be able to access a 2ha+ wood within 500m | % population requiring new woodland to be able to access a 20ha+ wood within 4km | Total area of new 2ha+ woods needed to meet 500m access standard (hectares) | Total area of new 20ha+ woods needed to meet 4km access standard (hectares) |
| District/nationally             |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |   |
| Harborough                      | 1.0  | 5.4  | 29.0   | 15.7   | 70.0   | 78.8   | 148   | 180   |
| England                         | 16.8   | 65.8   | 34.3   | 22.4   | 48.8   | 11.9   | 41523   | 15265   |

## 8.4

### Quality Provision Standard

The quality of open space throughout the District is generally good. There is however a theme that runs through the user group and workshop sessions that are asking for site specific improvements to open spaces. This should be addressed through site management plans and renovation schemes.

The overall quality vision for open space should be

‘A Clean, litter free and dog fouling free area that has appropriate facilities, amenities, habitat and biodiversity that are maintained appropriately, accessible and in a usable condition’

The measure of whether the quality of an open space achieves the quality vision should be made using the LEQSE (Local Environmental Quality Survey of England) monitoring tool and Contracted Services Grounds Monitoring tool. This allows utilisation of an existing monitoring system and applies not further burden to Contracted Services staff.

Contracted Services should be contacted for further information concerning these quality monitoring tools. Further details of these monitoring tools can be found at Appendix L and Appendix M.

## 9 Aims of the Open Spaces Strategy

In chapters 15 to 21 we intend to outline the Aims of the Open Spaces Strategy and the actions required to deliver them. Where Open Space is not owned by HDC we will indicate how we will support others.

A full Aims and Action plan can be found at Appendix O

### 9.1 Aim 1. The provision and maintenance of appropriate and good quality open space that is open to all and protected for future generations

Open Spaces play a vital role in shaping our environment. Well designed and accessible open spaces can help preserve the cultural heritage of an area. They also create a sense of place that the local population can feel proud of and identify with, giving a sense of community and quality of life.

Green infrastructure can also serve as a green lung, a wildlife corridor to allow access to nature. It can provide a safe route to work and landscape buffers create attractive, vibrant and liveable communities.

Good design of public space means creating spaces which people want to use, can easily access, spend time in and enjoy. Good design takes advantage of the opportunity to create environments that are truly inspirational for existing and future generations of all abilities.

A clean, safe, attractive and well maintained environment attracts visitors to our District, which in turn boosts our economy. Well designed urban and rural landscapes, including tree, shrub and ornamental planting within the street environment can have a significant effect by 'softening' the built environment and creating places that are desirable to live work and visit.

Well connected open spaces have been shown to attract a skilled and mobile workforce which will benefit the local economy. A substantial provision of green infrastructure will also support jobs in tourism, the green economy (e.g. land management) and agriculture.

Access to quality open spaces can help people of all ages stay both physically and mentally healthy. With a higher aging population in Harborough District it is important to ensure the needs of older people are also considered.

Children and young people need space where they can socialise and spend time with their peers away from their homes. The time spent in open space playing and interacting can teach children and young people many important life skills. Parks, recreation grounds, amenity green space provide a place for children and young people to independently explore their environment.

Open Spaces also fulfil the ongoing need for the provision of land for future burial requirements in Harborough District. This provision of burial space is made through Parish Councils, PCCs, Harborough District Council and some private provision.

Green space standards are measured in a number of different ways including qualitative, quantitative and accessibility. A matrix for measuring the quality of open space will be developed.

### 9.1.1

#### Aim 1 Objectives

- Green Flag Award for Welland Park in 2009/10/11/12
- Green Pendant Award for Community Garden at Little Bowden 2009
- East Midlands In Bloom Winners for Market Harborough 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015
- Britain in Bloom Heritage Award winner 2004 and finalist 2013
- River Welland Renovation for People and Wildlife 2014/15

#### Related Policy

- NPPF Chapter 8 paras 73 to 76
- CS 8: Protecting and Enhancing Green Infrastructure

**Objective 1: To ensure creatively designed and appropriate open spaces are provided on new developments that are accessible and support community requirements. Ensure that schemes are well designed, multifunctional, well connected and cost effective to maintain.**

#### Actions to achieve this objective

- Continue to work with developers, landscapers and other partners to deliver open space on new development
- Seek to address shortfalls in open space and playing pitch provision, and any restrictions to its accessibility

- Continue to review the need for open space; formulate and apply locally based standards appropriate to Harborough District using the policies in Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015
- Seek to provide an area of safe, attractive and useable open space, accessible to all sectors of the community within reasonable distance of dwellings according to its typology.
- Ensure that open space provision is considered early in the development process and in development briefs
- Seek work with partners and landowners to provide links between open spaces that form a network of 'Greenways' for walking and cycling either for leisure or commuting
- Ensure landscape management plans are provided by developers to give certainty that open space will be appropriately managed in the future
- To provide a Developer Guidance note regarding the planting and landscaping of SUDS for promotion of biodiversity
- Comments to be provided at an early stage for landscaping and SUDS schemes on new development

**Objective 2: To carefully manage the acquisition and disposal of open space by the District Council to ensure that the open space portfolio remains appropriate and is maintained by the most appropriate organisation and provides services the community wants**

**Actions to  
achieve this  
objective**

- HDC will follow the policies of the Corporate Property Strategy in acquiring or disposing of open spaces,
- HDC will pay due regard to the social, community and environmental benefits or drawbacks when assessing the future management of open space
- HDC will work with community groups, Parish Councils and Partners to deliver open space provision by the most suitable organisation
- HDC will seek opportunities to work in partnership with and build capacity in Parish Councils and others to achieve local management of open space.
- Dispose of open space only in exceptional circumstances in the context of comprehensive regeneration and to significantly improve the quality of open space provision.
- Continue to maintain the Asset Database and Open Space mapping to provide information on all public and publicly accessible open space
- Use the District Council website as a means to share information and promote services and events

**Objective 3: To develop a prioritised and strategic approach to open space improvements and that this remains an inclusive process.**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- Rank project as a list of priorities to take account of those that are required because of legislation to those that would be good to do but are not a legislative requirement
- Consult the local community, Ward members, open space users and other stakeholders using all appropriate methods when delivering improvement projects
- Work in association with other Council departments and external agencies and partners to be fully inclusive in future consultations

**Objective 4: To ensure that open space retains a detailed and well documented specification and schedule of maintenance which is appropriate to the open space level of use and location and is providing services the community wants**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- Ensure that all parks and open spaces meet Harborough District Council's maintenance standards
- Work closely with community groups, partners and private landowners to ensure existing areas of open space are available for public use and are maintained in an appropriate condition.

**Objective 5: To ensure that open space is providing services the community wants, open to all and is protected for future generations.**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- To implement the policies relating to open space sport and recreation sites in the national Planning Policy Framework 2012 and the Core Strategy 2009 or subsequent adopted policies.
- Use the annual resident satisfaction survey, and other feedback to sample public opinion concerning open space use and use this information to prioritise improvements
- Review the provision of accessible woodlands and seek to address any shortfalls
- Ensure that open spaces are considered in other relevant social, economic and environmental strategies
- Local Green Space will be identified, designated and protected in the New Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plans ( A list of Local Green Space can be found at Appendix B)

## 9.2

### Aim 2. The natural environment, conservation and habitat is enhanced and protected

Harborough District's open spaces contain significant amounts of wildlife habitat which support a rich biodiversity. It is important that these habitats are managed sensitively to protect and enhance this biodiversity for current and future generations to enjoy. Priorities should include the conservation of natural habitats wherever possible, to increase wildlife value and improve biodiversity on all green spaces.

The Districts watercourses and reservoirs, woodlands and green wedges are important green infrastructure that is valued by communities and should be protected for community use and enjoyment and also for the habitat and conservation value it affords to wildlife.

There are a number of sites within the District that are designated.

Local Nature Reserves at Scraftoft and North Kilworth.

Leighfield Forest which straddles the border between Harborough and Rutland is a well-wooded area of high nature conservation, landscape and historical importance. Several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) protect what remains of the ancient woodland.

One Geological SSSI,

Tilton Railway Cutting SSSI, which is a 750m section of disused railway cutting providing exposures of sediments which were deposited during the Lower Jurassic Period.

Leicestershire has a Local Nature Partnership in place which provides a forum for partner organisations to help their local area to manage the natural environment as a system and to embed its value in local decisions for the benefit of nature, people and the economy.

Harborough District sits within the catchment of the Welland, Avon and other main rivers are the Swift, Sence and Eyebrook. The Welland River Partnership, Welland Rivers Trust, and the Soar valley Partnership work within the District to deliver water quality and habitat improvements.

Open Spaces contribute towards the mitigation against flood risk. They provide an opportunity to incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems

(SUDS) which can provide habitat for wildlife and a visual amenity. The District Councils recommended approach towards incorporating SUDs in open space will be developed as part of the Strategy actions.

### 9.2.1

### Aim 2 Objectives

**What has been achieved:**

- Local Nature Reserves
- Battlefield Local Nature Reserve
- North Kilworth Bogs
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Tilton Railway Cutting
- Stanford Hall
- Leighfield Forest
- Allexton Wood
- Chater Valley
- Great Bowden Borrowpit
- Misterton Marshes
- Grand Union Canal
- Local Wildlife Sites and SSSIs

See Appendix G

Related Policy

- NPPF Section 11 para 109 and 114
- Core Strategy Policy CS8

**Objective 6: To promote better habitat and conservation and work with partners to manage key sites in line with best practice and site management plans where appropriate.**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- Maintain an appropriate balance between amenity areas and areas for wildlife protection/enhancement.
- Liaise with partners to ensure area for habitat and biodiversity are appropriately managed and where possible enhanced.
- Periodically review site management plans and grounds maintenance practices to ensure that natural habitats are being managed in the most appropriate way.
- Promote the planting of woodland within the District to better achieve The Woodland Trust access standard and the relevant actions of the LRWT Biodiversity Action Plan.
- To provide a Developer Guidance note regarding the planting and

landscaping of SUDS for promotion of biodiversity.

- Comments to be provided at an early stage for landscaping and SUDS schemes on new development

**Objective 7: Manage green spaces wherever possible in order to protect biodiversity and create multifunctional greenspaces for current and future generations to enjoy and learn.**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- Continue to work in partnership with Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and others to ensure habitat and biodiversity is protected, enhanced and accessible.
- Establish and manage, where appropriate, meadow land, wetland and woodland on open space, taking account of management cost increases or decreases.

**Objective 8: Ensure open space is retained for increased indirect environmental benefits such as surface water attenuation and mitigation against climate change.**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- Promote the good design, landscaping, planting and construction of Sustainable Drainage systems and techniques that establish areas for habitat and biodiversity.
- Harborough District Council will adopt new water attenuation structures and balancing lagoons (only where other suitable partner management cannot be found) with an appropriate commuted sum in line with the Provision for Open space Sport and Recreation policy.
- Harborough District Council will monitor flood alleviation structure not only for flood mitigation but for habitat management and improvement.

## 9.3 Aim 3. To ensure open spaces are safe and litter free, and contribute towards a safe environment

The District Council has, under Common and Statutory Law, a responsibility to manage and maintain its open spaces in a manner that protects users from harm. The Council has a greater duty of care when children or young people may be at risk.

Children should have access to challenging and innovative play environments where they can take acceptable levels of risk, but not

exposed to risk that may result in serious injury or death. Risk taking is an essential part of play and allows children to learn and develop their capabilities.

The District Council should also manage and maintain its open space to reduce the risk of claims against it for accidents. This can be through good design, consultation with users, appropriate maintenance, renovation and inspection.

Cemeteries and burial grounds have many large gravestones and monuments which require specialist repair and monitoring; the District Council will ensure that the sites within its control are adequately monitored, and advice is rolled out to Parish Council and others concerning making these area as safe as possible.

Safe and efficient operations are required to ensure the risk to public and contractors is minimised. The Health and Safety at Work Act, Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations amongst others help to reduce risk to public and contractors. For a more comprehensive list of legislation that open spaces will operate under see Appendix E.

Open Spaces should be welcoming places, and places that people want to visit and feel safe. Well maintained and high quality sites can reduce the fear of crime and reduce anti social behaviour. Local involvement by community groups can have a marked reduction in antisocial behaviour.

Litter collection and dog fouling have both proved to be issues that communities ask to be addressed. Regular monitoring of cleanliness through LEQSE (Local Environmental Quality Survey of England), and a robust grounds maintenance and street cleansing contract have allowed open spaces to be maintained to a high standard and achieve a good quality.

Additionally dog fouling is monitored by enforcement officers and fixed penalty notices issued where appropriate. Raising the profile of the issues created by fouling dogs has also ensured communities are aware of the problems and can deal with them.

### 9.3.1

### Aim 3 Objectives

**What has been achieved since 2009:**

- Play Areas
- Dedicated team for play area inspections
- Annual RoSPA inspections for play area
- RoSPA inspections rolled out to Parish Councils
- Programme of play area renovations

- LEQSE
- % of sites maintained to standard
- Contract Management
- Regular site inspections
- Programmed Tree Surveys
- Tree work programme
- Street light maintenance
- Community Safety
- Anti Dog Fouling and reporting
- Graffiti reporting
- Anti Social behaviour reporting
- Supporting Neighbourhood Watch
- Provision of information regarding drug and alcohol abuse support and reporting

#### Other

- Smartwater areas for HDC assets

#### Related Policy

- NPPF 2012
- Health and Safety At Work
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations
- EN1176 and EN177
- LEQSE
- Environmental Protection Act 1990

### **Objective 9: Ensure open space sites are maintained in a clean condition**

#### **Actions to achieve this objective**

- Ensure the frequency of litter picks is appropriate to maintain the site to at least Grade A in zone 1 areas and Grade B elsewhere according to LEQSE
- Remove graffiti within timescale dictated by policy
- Address and action reports of dog fouling and broken glass within policy timescale
- Undertake a programme of park furniture and play area cleansing on an annual basis
- Liaise and work with partners to ensure open spaces across the District are maintained safely and litter free

### **Objective 10: Reduce the fear of crime and antisocial behaviour on open spaces.**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- The community safety team will continue to work in open spaces to reduce anti social behaviour, dog fouling and graffiti and issue penalties to offenders.
- The community safety team will continue to encourage people to report incidences of crime or anti social behaviour
- Ensure staff, volunteers and contractors that come into contact with children and vulnerable adults meet the requirements of HDC Safeguarding Duties and Policies

### **Objective 11: Balance the conflicting requirements to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour, but still provide interesting landscaped areas which protect the natural environment**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- Work with landscapers and other partners to reduce the fear of crime through good design that is not detrimental to users or biodiversity
- Monitor the contract to ensure planting is appropriately managed to prevent sight lines becoming overgrown.
- Where appropriate use 'soft policing' to monitor areas of open space.

### **Objective 12: Reduce the risk of accidents on all typologies of open space and play areas by regular inspection, repair and replacement where needed**

**Actions to achieve this objective**

- Contracted Services and their appointed contractor will continue to monitor open spaces and play areas as per the grounds maintenance contract;
- Defects reported in a timely way and ensuring that repair or replacement of the defective item is undertaken as soon as possible.
- Ensure that RoSPA inspections on play areas are undertaken annually and all defects are repaired or items replaced.
- Ensure a rolling programme of tree inspections is undertaken using an Arboricultural Association approved consultant on a five yearly cycle, or more often if recommended. All works arising from the survey will be carried out according to the recommendations.
- Memorials in Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards will be inspected for safety on a five year cycle by suitably qualified persons. All works arising will be carried out according to the risk assessment at the time of inspection.
- Play equipment will be replaced on an ongoing basis, with adequate funding made available to Contracted Services following the annual RoSPA audit of play provision.

## 9.4

### Aim 4: Voluntary groups are supported to use and manage open spaces

Volunteering in Harborough District Councils open spaces make an invaluable contribution to provision of the service. Volunteers carry out a huge number of activities from ornamental planting and environment initiatives, to play days and sports provision.

As the amount of volunteering increases or changes it may be necessary for the District Council to change the way it supports volunteer groups.

Volunteering groups range from groups that come together infrequently or on a 'needs' basis, to fully constituted groups such as Harborough in Bloom, Friends of Welland Park to sports clubs that provide activities for young people and others and fully autonomous charities such as Canal and Rivers Trust, Welland Rivers Trust and Sustainable Harborough amongst others.

Volunteers and voluntary groups require help and advice during their initial stages, to ensure they become valuable and sustainable contributors to open space provision and the activities that take place there.

Volunteering on open spaces should be welcomed, supported and promoted by the Council. Where needed, assistance should be given in the form of information and advice to help volunteering groups start up.

When inviting volunteering groups onto Council managed open space, the Authority will ensure that open spaces are as safe as is practical, and risks are reduced to a minimum.

#### 9.4.1

#### Aim 4 Objectives

**What has been achieved since 2009:**

##### Sustainable Harborough

- £1m grant and volunteer time since 2014

##### Welland Rivers Trust

- £0.5m grant for River Welland restoration; also Stonton and Langton Brook restoration and improvements. volunteer time since 2012

##### Canal and Rivers Trust

- Lottery grant

### Harborough in Bloom

- Volunteer time

### Friends of Welland Park

- Grant of £60k to resurface tennis courts
- Provision of Sport on Open Spaces
- Clubs and volunteers
- Related Policies
- Corporate Property Strategy

### **Objective 13: District Council teams are set up to providing suitable support and advice to volunteer groups operating on open space.**

#### **Actions to achieve this objective**

- Teams should review structures to ensure that they are sufficiently customer focussed to support volunteering on open spaces.
- Teams should ensure volunteers are given timely and suitable support and advice, especially during the first few months of a project.
- Teams will ensure that volunteer groups are signposted towards organisations that can provide further support, advice or funding

### **Objective 14: District Council officers will seek to encourage and facilitate new volunteering opportunities where resources permit.**

#### **Actions to achieve this objective**

- Teams should ensure that bureaucracy is avoided to allow volunteers to operate successfully on District Council open spaces
- Licences to operate on District Council open spaces for less than 5 years (Corporate Property Strategy, Supplementary Policy & Procedures, Disposal, Acquisition & Community Asset Transfer Policy ) will be made on officer recommendation with Director of Community Services Approval.
- Leases to operate on District Council open space will be made by officer recommendation with Portfolio Holder approval in accordance with the relevant Corporate Property Strategy policy.

**Objective 15: Where funding permits, S106 off site open space contributions will be directed towards volunteer groups that can add value to open space provision or have provided match funding and can demonstrate sustainable projects**

**Actions to  
achieve this  
aim**

- Developer contributions that are collected for off site open space improvements will be directed as a priority to volunteer groups that can demonstrate that they have secured, or will secure, additional funding for their project.
- Distribution of S106 contributions will meet the Allocations (grants) process and be in accordance with the Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation.
- Sustainable and long term projects will be supported as a priority
- Teams should identify key areas where volunteer support will provide a clear benefit to the Council.

## 9.5 Aim 5: Deliver value for money services when managing open space

Open Space costs money to maintain. To meet the minimum obligations as an open space owner, the District Council will always need to spend money on its maintenance obligations. To fulfil the communities aspiration to provide good quality open space that is available for everyone additional money will need to be spent on behalf of communities.

This is not to suggest that money should be wasted, and teams must ensure that open space and its associated maintenance delivers good value for money.

The value of open space cannot, however, be measured in purely financial terms. There is much social capital that is associated with open space provision and this must be recognised when assessing whether open space delivers value for money.

A competitively tendered grounds maintenance contract is vital when delivering a value for money service. The current Integrated Contract is being retendered in 2016, with the current Grounds Maintenance contract offering exceptional value for money given the current specifications.

It will be important for the District Council to consider the level of quality that is required from a new Grounds Maintenance contract and write

specifications accordingly. The specification may not be the same across all open spaces, but a targeted approach may need to be used with some open space receiving less maintenance than high priority areas.

### 9.5.1

### Aim 5 Objectives

**What has been achieved since 2009:**

- 2009 Grounds Maintenance Contract delivering very good value for money
- 2016 Grounds Maintenance Contract being prepared and tendered.
- Cost reductions within Grounds Maintenance contract in 2012,13,14

**Actions to achieve this objective**

**Objective 16: To deliver an appropriate level of Grounds Maintenance service, recognising the usage and profile of an open space.**

- Retender the Grounds Maintenance contact with appropriate specifications and Bill of Quantities
- Ensure that an appropriate Grounds Maintenance specification is written to allow a differentiation of service level between different typologies or locations of open space.
- Prioritise resources to those open spaces that are most used or have the highest profile.

**Actions to achieve this objective**

**Objective 17: Periodically review provision of landscape features and amenities available on open spaces**

- Periodically undertake a cost of maintenance and benefit of provision analysis of landscape features and other amenities provided on open space to assess whether they are still appropriate and offer value for money
- Use the results of the cost and benefit analysis to determine whether existing landscape features and amenities should be removed, repaired, remodelled or be subject to alternative management when assessing available budgets.

## 9.6

## Aim 6. Open Space supports business and income is maximised

By providing a range of environmental, health and social benefits green spaces contribute to reducing the costs incurred by employers and business in addressing health challenges in the work place. Green spaces are thus able to provide a number of indirect economic benefits to society.

Urban residents are willing to pay a premium on house or rent levels in order to live in areas close to green spaces. This results in local increases of property and land value, linked directly to their proximity to green spaces.

Green spaces are not only attractive to a local population, but also to tourists. Welland Park has become a destination park and attracts visitors from beyond the district boundaries. Based on their capacity to make urban areas more attractive, green spaces play a beneficial role in our towns approaches to marketing themselves.

In addition to attracting leisure visitors to a town, green spaces may play a role in businesses' decisions to locate in a certain area. Some research (Understanding the Contribution Parks and Green Spaces can make to Improving People's Lives.) proposed business decisions to locate to an area may be driven to an extent by green spaces' attractiveness for workers as well as their ability to increase customer footfall (due to the areas' general attractiveness for residents and visitors). The findings are, however, inconclusive and it is more likely that green spaces are more attractive in close proximity to peoples homes than peoples places of work

Harborough District Council open spaces are generally free to access, but some charges are made for use of individual items. These being:

- Burials in cemeteries
- Sports pitch use
- Tennis court use
- Bowling Green use
- Hiring and lease/licencing of some pavilions

Sponsorship by business could generate income to subsidise the maintenance of open space. A similar approach has been used by the County Council for sponsorship of roundabouts.

Supporting community groups to achieve funding bids could be the most effective way of increasing capital funding of open spaces. It is however, unlikely that officers have sufficient time and resources to support a rolling programme of funding bids with detailed input

Officers should always endeavour to help community groups find where they can source advice and help for grant applications. This means working closely with the voluntary sector support network and keeping apprised of which organisation will be best placed to help community groups.

While capital funding can be a great boost to provision of facilities and amenities on open space, funding is generally not available for revenue and maintenance of projects. Care should be taken to ensure that the overall burden for maintenance is not increase without increasing a revenue stream or off setting the additional costs by reducing costs elsewhere.

Income generated from Open Space Activities in

- Cemetery and Burial Grounds
- Civic Spaces
- Pitch Hire
- Bowls Hire
- Tennis Hire
- Building leases.
- Related Policies
- Corporate Property Strategy
- Corporate Charging Policy

### 9.6.1

### Aim 6 Objectives

#### Actions to achieve this objective

#### **Objective 18: Review pricing policy for open spaces**

- Review the sites which are used by external organisations, compile a list of lettings, licences and leases and consider whether a pricing review can be undertaken.
- Review the pricing policies and scale of fees and charges for all typologies open space to assess whether the charge meets the real cost of provision
- Review the exclusive right of burial policy to determine whether the time period for exclusive right of burial should be altered and whether an renewal of the exclusive right of burial should be introduced.

#### Actions to achieve this objective

#### **Objective 19: Investigate the benefit of sponsorship of open space**

- Review where open space could benefit form sponsorship and consider whether it is possible to issue tender notices for specific locations

#### Actions to achieve this objective

#### **Objective 20: Continue to support community groups in seeking external funding for open space projects that make open spaces attractive for all residents and visitors**

- Continue, with partners, to promote grants through the Grants Surgery.
- Officers to identify and be aware of the support available for community

groups to apply for external funding

- To encourage community groups and Parish Councils to have 'shovel ready' schemes to take advantage of funding when available
- Continue to work with Parish Councils and other community groups to ensure that open space projects are identified, costed and included in Section 106 agreements where appropriate.

### **Objective 21: Support Local Business first**

**Actions to  
achieve this  
objective**

- Give opportunity for local business to quote or tender for works in open spaces
- Consider the benefits provided by local employment when issuing service contracts one off works to companies.
- Where tenders are submitted of equal value priority should be given, where possible, to a local business or employer.

## **9.7 Aim 7. Ensure that open spaces support health and wellbeing of local people**

Open Space provide places for people to enjoy recreational activities and exercise that contribute towards their health and wellbeing.

Activities can range from freely determined play to organised sport. They can also involve more passive recreation, and perhaps just a place to sit and contemplate.

They also provide a place that allows people of all ages to meet. This contributes to community cohesion and social integration, and supports an increased sense of belonging to an area as well as closer neighbourhood ties.

Poor air quality, urban heat and an increasingly sedentary lifestyle among today's population are frequently linked to problems of ill health. In particular, they have been found to contribute to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and increasing levels of obesity in adults and children. By providing spaces for physical exercise and contributing to better air quality, green spaces help to counteract such health problems.

The aesthetic benefit of having green space around you can have a positive effect by reducing stress, lowering blood pressure, and alleviating cognitive disorders and attention deficit disorder. Being able to not only to relax, but also to exercise outdoors in green areas, contributes to better mental health and well-being.

### 9.7.1

### Aim 7 Objectives

**What has  
been  
achieved  
since 2009:**

- Harborough Walking Group
- Welland Park Gym
- Table Tennis
- Tennis Court renovation 2012
- Support for sport clubs (HTFC, MHRFC)

**Actions to  
achieve this  
objective**

**Objective 22: Promote activities for open spaces use that are linked to health benefits**

- Continue to provide open spaces suitable for organised sport
- Leisure team continue to monitor the number of persons taking regular exercise
- Continue to provide areas for children's play
- Work with Partners and landowners to create a network of greenways that allow walking and cycling , either for leisure or commuting
- Continue to provide advice and support for community groups and individuals who want to promote health and wellbeing activities and facilitate use of open spaces for these activities where possible

**Actions to  
achieve this  
objective**

**Objective 23: Increase provision of 'green gyms' for all ages**

- Provide additional space for outdoor gyms and activities that support older people to exercise
- Work with partners and community groups to provide green gyms where appropriate

## 10

# Open Space Strategy Action Plan

The delivery of the Open Spaces Strategy depends on Harborough District Council Team Plans and partner organisation support.

The Objectives for the Open Spaces Strategy have been transferred to an Action Plan which can be found at Appendix O.

The action plan gives details of the expected outputs and the actions that are required to deliver the objectives of the Open Spaces Strategy.

Because many teams within the District Council are involved in delivering the objectives of the Open Spaces Strategy the Delivery Plan will be made up of individual team actions. These will need to be incorporated into the business planning process, and it will be important for teams to ensure that the actions are incorporated into Team Plans.

The success of the Open Spaces Strategy is not only dependant on Harborough District Council teams, but also partner organisations and community groups.

The objectives and outcomes included in the Open Spaces Strategy have been designed to fit well with existing objectives of many external organisations. This will ensure that extra burdens that the District Council is unable to influence are not placed on those organisations or officers.

Community groups will be able to use the Open Spaces Strategy as a framework for achieving many of the outcomes relating to the environment that are important to them. When adopted the Open Spaces Strategy will form a policy framework that will allow community groups to seek additional funding and support to deliver individual projects.

# 11

## Consultation

The Open Spaces Strategy was published for consultation on the following dates:

- First Issues Consultation 24th February to 13th April 2015
- Draft Open Spaces Strategy Consultation 10<sup>th</sup> August to 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2015

The Consultations were hosted on the Strategic Planning Consultation Portal with pdf copies made available where required.

Easy to read versions of both consultation were made available on line and to all Parish Councils.

A targeted approach to consultation with young people and other priority groups was undertaken by the District Council Equality and Diversity Officer.

## 12 Strategy Review

The Open Spaces Strategy will be reviewed in three years time, but is anticipated to last for a period of five years, at which time there will be a full review of the Strategy.

Contact details for the Strategic Planning and Housing team can be found below.

List of Appendices for Open Spaces Strategy

Appendix A – Open Space Assessment 2004

Appendix B – Local Green Space

Appendix C – NPPF summary for Open Space

Appendix D – Policy Context for the Open Spaces Strategy

Appendix E – Legal Framework for Open Spaces Strategy

Appendix F - Waterbodies in Harborough District

Appendix G – List of SSSIs in Harborough District

Appendix H – Open Spaces assets in Harborough District

Appendix I – Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation 2015

Appendix J – Summary of 2015 Consultation responses

Appendix K – Woodland within 20 mile radius of Market Harborough

Appendix L – Local Environmental Quality Survey of England

Appendix M – Grounds Monitoring Tool

Appendix N – HDC lease arrangements with organisations

Appendix O – Aims and Action Plan

Appendix P – Sites managed by other organisations

Appendix R – Business and Community Groups with interest in open spaces



Appendix S – Draft Open Spaces Strategy Consultation responses Oct 2015 (link to be inserted when available)