

Parks, Play Areas and Open Spaces Five Year Plan Strategy

Introduction

This draft of this strategy is an initial starting point for a long term strategy for the council with regard to existing and potential sites in order to develop a plan which can be placed before the public for consultation and provide the basis to enable the council to move forward in managing land in its ownership for the benefit of the local community. It will also be used to inform budgeting decisions and to take into account climate and health concerns following the council's commitment to the climate and health emergencies.

The body of this document is divided into three sections:

- General policies which are mainly covered by the existing Open Spaces Strategy
- Individual Location Plans
- Future considerations.

The aim of this draft is to detail the discussed plans and then use to discuss priorities and timescales in order to develop a SMART scheme to be able to present to the public. It will not be written in stone but form a guide for councillors to follow or amend as necessary either due to circumstances or public demand.

The initial work will be to prioritise work for each site. This will all then be compiled into a central table which will detail the work across all sites for each year. This turn will allow for each to be costed and also decide if it is capital or revenue work. Major capital work may require grant/loan applications, partnership, sponsorship, and/or matched funding. Revenue work and capital work may have an effect on the budget. It may also be that there may be too many projects across all sites to achieve in a given year and priorities allotted to items within that year's projects or even some projects postponed. If the later happens, consideration should be given to ensure that projects in all wards across the town have an equity of treatment regardless of size or location.

With regard to play areas, a database of equipment should be developed to show when purchased along with cost, maintenance and repair history and costs. It should also include the annual check and any comments along with expected lifespan. Additional details such as manufacturer, if it is still in production and whether replacement parts are available would all be beneficial information. A record of an injuries would be highly beneficial. It would also be very positive to work with local schools to run a survey showing different pieces of play equipment and getting them to rate them from 1-5. This could be used as a guide but more consideration should be given to the number of different activities which can be facilitated by play equipment in line with the ROSPA guidelines used by Sentinel in our 2017 guide. (Although out of date this does provide a very good indication of the types of activities and equipment.)

General Policies

As mentioned above most of these are already outlined within the Open Spaces Strategy which was agreed within the first two years of the formation of this council but also ties in newer policies such as the Wild Flower Policy and the Mulching Policy as well as the declarations of both the Climate and Health Emergencies. It is planned that this five-year strategy and any decisions taken should be included within the Open Spaces Strategy and will form an overall guidance which can be consulted upon with the public. It is important to note that the size of the content of all of these items together would be overwhelming and therefore consultation may be better on a site by site basis with reference to the larger overall plan for those who are interested.

New areas which need to be added to the Open Spaces Strategy which are currently being considered by council will include the Signage paper currently progressing through council as well as the proposal

that the council will have bins at the entrances to every open space as well as benches and bicycle racks as appropriate.

Common Considerations

Many of the parks have common considerations for which it would be worth getting professional advice for all the parks concerned at the same time. This includes such issues as lighting (and solar power), rainwater storage, pond management, skateboard/bike track development etc. This would be worth building into the early stages of the five-year plans even if the projects may be further down the line.

Other considerations will include whether to install bike racks or lockable bike storage. This might come down to considerations of potential usage and space. Also, the style of benches, bins and bike racks. We currently have a standard style that we have inherited and it would seem unwise to change this where there are significant numbers of these benches in a park, especially if it is more traditional park. However, this style may be too formal for some of our areas. Whilst it would be sensible to have a range of standard park furniture it may also be beneficial to recognise that there may be the option to vary it for a different location of a specific area and that all areas in parks are not the same even in the same park. Some parks may benefit from variations on a theme, i.e. Belle Vue where the Peace benches could be echoed with similar benches but with different themes. Where items are clustered together it can be more harmonious if they are the same rather than a whole lot of different styles which can be the case with bins in our parks. It may be that rather than buy a new bin we may just need to exchange some.

CCTV will be a common consideration across our parks however we have to consider this along with whether it is monitored or unmonitored CCTV as this may affect our decisions and the locations in the CCTV is deployed. If it is unmonitored CCTV, we may only want to cover areas which might be susceptible to damage in order to have evidence for prosecution/insurance purposes as unmonitored CCTV, whilst it might prevent activities, will not actually be able to stop anything which is already happening.