



Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

2007 - 2012

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Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2007 - 2012

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has been developed to set out the policy framework for the parks and open spaces owned and managed by East Herts Council for the next five years.

East Hertfordshire is rich in green spaces and attractive, rolling countryside. The small towns and villages stand in an area of natural beauty with winding country lanes, nestling in shallow valleys of many rivers and streams that criss-cross the district. These natural green spaces, alongside parks and play areas, enrich peoples' lives and provide enjoyable and purposeful facilities for residents and visitors to the area.

Parks and green spaces represent one of the things that are best about East Herts. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that parks and open spaces, as a valuable natural resource, are managed and developed in a responsible and effective way.

East Herts Council describes the strategic objectives and direction of its leisure, sport, art and cultural aims with its Cultural Strategy. This document describes, in more detail, the objectives for parks and open spaces within the framework of the Cultural Strategy. It is linked to and aligned with the Council's Play Strategy. It reflects the Council's Corporate Objectives, the 'East Herts Together' Community Strategy and the Local Plan Second Review (April 2007) as well as county, regional, and national policy. This document will cover the following:

- The vision for parks and open spaces provision
- An overview of existing provision in East Herts
- The role of Parks and Green Spaces
- The role of the Council

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will form the policy framework under which Parks Management Plans for individual sites will be developed and consulted upon.

This strategy is focused primarily on how the Council will manage the public open spaces under its control. The Council's policy on open space provision on privately owned land is contained within the East Herts Local Plan Second Review (April 2007) LRC3 "Recreational Requirements in New Residential Developments", which can be found at www.eastherts.gov.uk.

The vision for parks and open spaces provision

Together with our partners we want to protect and preserve our parks and green space while at the same time developing them in a sustainable way that meets the needs of the 21st century – balancing out environmental, social and economic considerations.

An overview of existing provision in East Herts

The Metropolitan Green Belt, which contains 4 of the 5 towns, covers around one-third of the District; much of the District is also covered by Policy GBC14 "Landscape Character" of the Local Plan Second Review (April 2007), reflecting its high landscape value.

East Hertfordshire is a beautiful, rural district with large amounts of green wild and cultivated space. A recent audit and assessment of public open space provision by all providers identified 566 open spaces and outdoor sports facilities that are either owned by the Council, parish or town council, private landowner or housing association, community group. Of these, 312 are considered parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural green space, amenity green space and provision for children and young people. Details of the level of provision can be found in the PPG17 Audit and Assessment Report (July 2005).

East Herts Council owns and manages 120 open spaces. These include "village greens", formal gardens, woodland, naturalised areas and 40 main parks. There are currently 46 equipped play sites owned and maintained by the Council within the District.

The Council's five 'main' parks in terms of size and general usage are:

- Northern and Southern Parkland (Southern Country Park) – Bishop Stortford
- Hartham Common and the Meads – Hertford and Ware
- Castle Gardens – Hertford
- The Castle Grounds – Bishop's Stortford
- Grange Paddocks and Red White and Blue – Bishop's Stortford

In addition, the Council owns Layston Court Gardens – Buntingford, which is maintained on behalf of East Herts Council by Buntingford Town Council.

Pishiobury Park – Sawbridgeworth, is maintained as a 'Country Park' and historic landscape.

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

- Thorley Open Space – Bishop's Stortford
- Sacombe Road Recreation Ground - Hertford
- Presdales Recreation Ground – Ware
- King George Recreation Ground – Ware

Expenditure on parks and open spaces in 2006/2007 was approximately £1.5m.

The role of parks and open spaces

Well managed and appropriately placed parks and open spaces serve as a delivery mechanism for five of the six corporate objectives. Most obviously parks and open spaces contribute to improving people's quality of life, health and well-being of individuals, families and communities. But parks and open spaces can also influence perceptions of community safety, deprivation and poverty levels and the local economy.

Parks and Open Spaces include: town squares, village greens, sports fields, allotments, playgrounds, graveyards, formal gardens, country parks, wild life preserves, and natural wastelands. As there are many differing ways of describing these features, East Herts Council has chosen to refer to the typologies listed in PPG 17 Audit and Assessment Report (July 2005). These are a nationally recognised standard, fit with our objectives and will allow for benchmarking in future projects. See Appendix 3 for PPG17 parks and open spaces typologies in detail.

All these places give residents a place to relax and enjoy what is best in East Hertfordshire. It is acknowledged that parks and open spaces are valuable places for all people to play, exercise, meet one another, and hold public events. As a focal point of a community, parks and open spaces can contribute to building community spirit and community cohesion.

This role, however, must be carefully balanced with the role of the parks and open spaces as a home to wildlife. This is stated as objective 5 in Chapter 10 (Leisure, Recreation and Community Facilities) of the Local Plan Second Review (April 2007) - "to take into account the value of open space, not only as an amenity, but as a contribution to the conservation of the natural and built environment of the District."

Priority areas

The Council recognises that parks and open spaces serve different needs and groups. The Council aims to deliver quality, accessible services in the areas of:

- Parks for people
- Parks for recreation / enjoyment
- Parks for wildlife / conservation / heritage

It is important that these three priority areas complement each other and do not compete. The Council is conscious of the tensions that sometimes arise between the role of the parks and open spaces as a place for sport and informal recreation and at the same time a place for wildlife and a valuable habitat. Both these roles will be taken into account and an appropriate balance attained.

The Council wishes to achieve greater use of parks by those people who find it difficult to take part by providing appropriate information on facilities. In particular, older people, the vulnerable, people with disabilities and young

children. It is estimated that 13.5% of people in East Herts have a disability. The following pages outline the actions that will be taken in the priority areas:

Parks for People

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

1. Develop facilities and infrastructure on site to meet a wide range of users needs, including those who normally find access difficult.
2. Develop 'Friends Of' groups for the 5 major parks (identifying user groups and other stakeholders).
3. Increasing participation through more "fit for purpose" design – the right type in the right place and of the right size. Consulting to identify the type of open space required.
4. Develop safe yet exciting spaces where children are free to be children.
5. Work with partners to provide diversionary facilities and activities to help reduce anti-social behaviour.
6. Design spaces in ways that reduce fear of crime.
7. Ensure that provision for children and young people is high quality and strategically located.
8. Invest in good, safe spaces for teenagers to meet their friends.
9. Pursue Green Flag Awards for parks.
10. Improve access in terms of information both on site and remotely.
11. Improve maintenance standards and ensuring value for money.

Parks for Recreation

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

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

1. Work with partners to promote the use of parks and open spaces for community events / festivals and active recreation such as walking clubs.
2. Ensure that spaces are 'multi-purpose' and meet the needs of a wide range of users where possible.
3. Work toward creating a network of accessible high quality spaces connecting paths and footpath networks. Trying to make sure our parks and green spaces are fully accessible by all forms of transport.

4. Ensure that leisure needs are met locally but not overloading the green spaces that provide these opportunities.
5. Target capital investment on those areas that have been identified as deficient in facilities.
6. Ensure that new housing developments incorporate safe, healthy environments which encourage walking, cycling and informal play.
7. Provide leisure and community facilities within open spaces that are properly coordinated with all forms of development and land use policies.
8. Consider the community need for recreation space and ensure that adequate land and water resources are identified for both organised sport and informal recreation.

Parks for Wildlife, Conservation and Heritage

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

1. Ensure that identified wildlife habitats, such as those that carry the status of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or county Wildlife Site (WS), are preserved through management strategies and appropriate maintenance.
2. Develop our management systems and operational practices to ensure biodiversity in our parks and open spaces in a way that complements and enhances the recreational experience.
3. Consider and apply sustainable management practices in the provision and maintenance of open spaces.
4. Use our statutory planning powers and community leadership role to influence what happens on public open space that the Council does not control.

The role of the Council

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

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

Appendix 1: Strategic Context (National and regional policy)

Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

The national government's Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17) states "the government expects all local authorities to carry out assessments and audits of open space and sport and recreational facilities." Local authority planning decisions on open spaces need to be informed by local need assessments and local provision standards on quantity and quality. A greater emphasis is placed on qualitative considerations – allowing authorities to identify potential for increased use through better design, management and or maintenance of open space.

Local Area Agreements

Local Area Agreements are shared outcomes and targets for local areas in this case Hertfordshire. They have been agreed between Central Government and Herts Forward (previously Herts Together) in consultation with the District and Borough Councils. The process started in March 2006 and if 12 "stretch" targets are met there is a potential reward grant of £28 million that will be shared out among the Local Strategic Partnerships. There are four blocks of targets:

- Children and Young People – based on "Every Child Matters"
- Healthier communities and older people
- Economic development and enterprise
- Safer and stronger communities

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will have a particular role to play in the Safer Stronger Communities Block of the LAA, especially in relation to the liveability agenda. This block is about partners from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors working together in addressing priorities around crime, drugs, anti-social behaviour, improving public spaces, making public services more responsive to local needs and empowering local communities to influence local decision making, encouraging greater active citizenship and more formal volunteering in civic life.

Relevant outcomes within the Safer Stronger Block include:

- Being safe, feeling safe – Hertfordshire citizens can live, work, travel and play in confidence that they are safe. Target – improved access to sport and leisure for children and young people.
- Neighbourhoods are cleaner and greener and communities will be encouraged to actively manage their own environment and more widely a sense of belonging – connected to a sense of pride in the area and community cohesion. By working alongside the "professionals" – citizens can contribute to the quality of their locality. Target – satisfaction with neighbourhood cleanliness, "liveability".

Parks and Open Spaces can also address the Children and Young People block around such outcomes as Being Healthy, Staying Safe and Enjoying and Achieving.

“Every Child Matters Framework” – this is a multi-agency approach to taking forward the national children’s agenda. The priorities are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Achieving economic well-being

Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England (RSS14)

One of the key issues for health that is relevant for the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is the following:

New housing developments should incorporate safe, healthy environments which encourage walking, cycling and informal play.

Appendix 2: Local Policies

Corporate Strategic Plan

The Council has recently updated its Corporate Priorities and Key Objectives. Parks and Open Spaces contribute to 5 of the 6 priorities. These have been taken into account and integrated into the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

The priorities that are relevant to this strategy are listed below:

- Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable. Objective 2 states “Ensure access to opportunities to take part in sport, leisure and cultural community activities.”
- Improve standards of neighbourhood management and environmental management in our towns and villages. Specifically, Objective 1 states “Implement a range of initiatives to improve and sustain environmental quality.”
- Care for and improve our natural and built environment. Specifically, Objective 1 states “Protect the natural environment through conserving and protecting the local and wider environment.”
- Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities through effective development control. Specifically Objective 3 states “Plan, manage and monitor the core role of the Council as the co-ordinator of the emerging Local Plans to ensure appropriate infrastructure provision in order to maintain our sustainable communities.”
- Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public. Specifically, Objective 3 states “Encourage more resident participation in the Council and in democracy.”

Community Strategy 2003

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

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

Local Plan Second Review (April 2007)

Implement Village Development Strategy in order to meet rural community needs, strengthen village life and encourage vital and viable communities.

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

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

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

Community Safety Strategy

Parks provide a sense of place for local people; can be a source of community pride, community cohesion, community spirit.

Appendix 3: PPG17 Open Space Typologies

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

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

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