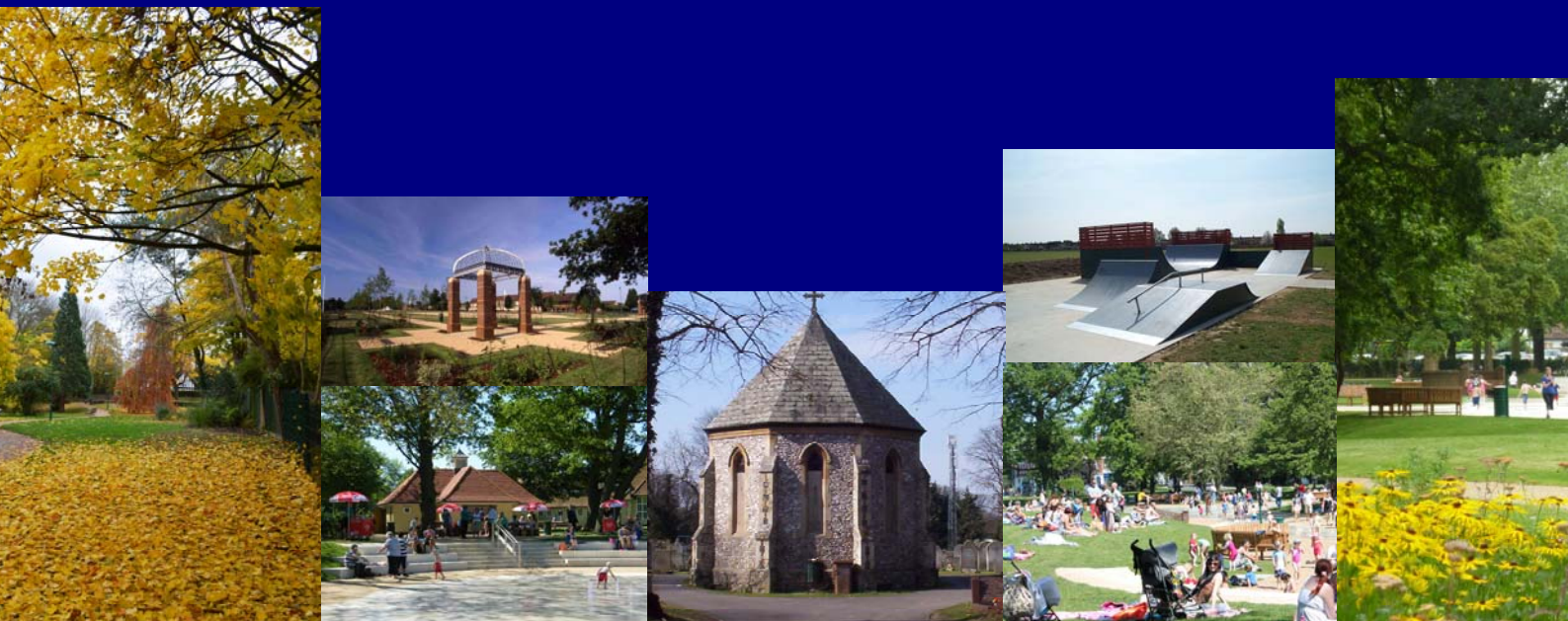


North Hertfordshire District Council



Customer Services Directorate



www.north-herts.gov.uk

A Green Space Management Strategy for North Hertfordshire

*A management approach for the future of Green Space in
North Hertfordshire*

2014 - 2019

LETCHWORTH (17.07.13)

A Green Space Management Strategy Delivering The Vision For North Hertfordshire

To maintain and improve green space for the current and future needs of the local community.

“Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper”

In order to achieve its objective the strategy has the following aims:

- To highlight the value and role of parks and green spaces in meeting corporate and community needs.
- To provide the justification and evidence base to maximise external investment opportunities and secure funding through planning obligations to provide continued investment for green space at reduced cost to the Council.
- To provide a framework to work in partnership with key stakeholders such as Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service along with volunteers to deliver improvements and external funding opportunities to green space.
- To provide clear policies that priorities essential green space investment requirements for the next five years.
- Based on sound policies develop a sustainable five year investment programme for green space that reduces the Council’s revenue and capital spend whilst still providing essential short term enhancements for green space.

Foreword

The importance of green spaces is well recognised. Our health and wellbeing, a sense of pride in the local area, the enjoyment of being outdoors and the environment around us – all these are affected by the quality of our green spaces, from parks to play areas and from woodland to sports pitches.

At a time when local authorities face increasing financial pressures, it is more important than ever for us to set out how we will help ensure that our green spaces are looked after for communities in North Hertfordshire, both now and in the future.

Over the last 10 years, residents' satisfaction of green spaces in North Herts has steadily improved. You will find many of the reasons for that highlighted in this document, with significant improvements taking place throughout the district in recent years. This Strategy sets out how we propose to continue that upward trend.

Each proposed investment in the Strategy is linked directly to the Council's three priorities – working with local communities, protecting our environment for our communities and living within our means to deliver cost-effective services. To meet our objectives, we will maximise on external funding opportunities to fund improvements at minimal cost to the Council.

Many of the people who live or work in North Herts are proud of the green spaces available to them, and I am equally proud to be able to present a Strategy which seeks to maintain and improve those spaces in the years ahead.

Councillor Ian Knighton
Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services

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1.0 Background

Historically North Hertfordshire District Council has provided the maintenance and development of green space within its four urban towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston. More recently it has also taken on responsibility for sections of Great Ashby on the outskirts of Stevenage.

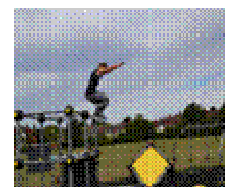
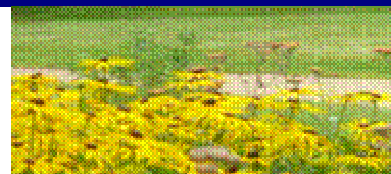
Since 2001 the maintenance and development of green space has been undertaken by two separate sections, one responsible for maintenance and the other for development of green space. This approach has brought clear benefits to our customers by enabling the Council to adopt a proactive rather than reactive approach to the development of green space. By having clear strategies and action plans in place it has enabled the Council to secure significant external funding opportunities for the development of green space. Prior to 2001 day-to-day operational issues often took place over long-term strategic planning.

In 2009 the Council launched its Green Space Management Strategy providing a proactive approach for the development of green space in accordance with the needs of the local community. A primary aim of the strategy was to provide the framework and evidence base to enable the Council to maximise on external funding opportunities to continue to deliver real improvements to green space at reduced cost to the Council. The Strategy contained the following 5 year action plans for the delivery of improvements to green space.

- Green Space Action Plan
- Outdoor Sports Facilities Action Plan
- Outdoor Play Provision Action Plan
- Cemeteries & Church Yards Action Plan
- Allotments Action Plan

It also had strong links with the Council's Biodiversity Reference Document, Climate Change Strategy and Tree Management Strategy.

The action plans expire in March 2014. A review of the strategy has therefore taken place and new action plans produced taking into account the needs of the Council and the local community for the period April 2014 - March 2019.



2.0 The Importance of Green Space

Central Government and national groups have expressed the continued importance of public Green Space in the health and well-being of communities.

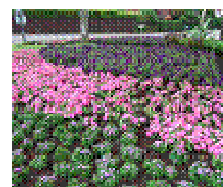
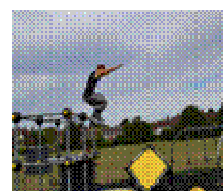
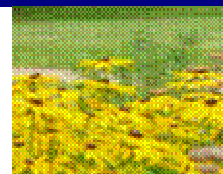
From April 2013 local authorities at county level were required to take on the statutory duty to improve the health of their communities as required by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and with it, to deliver a number of the public health services formerly the responsibility of the NHS. Upper tier local authorities will have specific responsibilities to improve the health of their populations, backed by a ring-fenced grant and a specialist public health team led by the Director of Public Health. Upper tier authorities will be supported in this by using the existing expertise within district councils – including through environmental health, work with groups supporting the elderly and carers, sports and leisure activities etc. for example The use of open spaces, parks, playgrounds and relevant leisure facilities are promoted in terms of reducing the impact of obesity on long term health, the importance in the management of wellbeing and in aiding relaxation, as well as ‘sensory’ enjoyment.

Conclusions from the Community *Green* research project by the Commission for Art and the Built Environment (CABE) are that “people greatly value local green spaces, from parks, pitches and recreation grounds to woodland and playgrounds. They appreciate the benefits in terms of relaxation and stress alleviation and the opportunity green space provides for exercise, social contact with friends and family and playing with children”.

A 2012 MORI survey commissioned by environmental charity Groundwork found that nine out of ten adults identify parks, playgrounds and green spaces as important in making somewhere a good place to live or work. More than three quarters want to see investment in them maintained by their local council.

Green space can also help mitigate against climate change. The Forestry Commission shows that trees in towns can help reduce the ‘urban heat island effect by up to 7°C. As trees and plants grow, they take in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

For new developments, green space can be used to significantly improve quality. Larger developments may be able to incorporate substantial new areas of green space. This document does not set out detailed specification for the level of provision that will be sought from new developments, but will work alongside the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan and emerging Local Plan to ensure that appropriate provision of open space from new development will be secured.

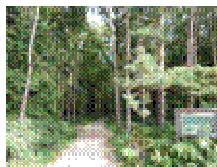
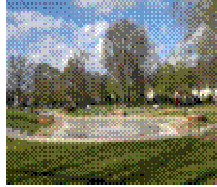
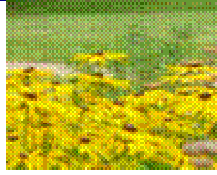


3.0 Financial Pressures

Central Government has announced its provisional Finance Settlement for local councils. This confirmed that NHDC will receive an 8.4% reduction in funding from government for the financial year 2013/14, this amounts to approximately £550,000. The national average reduction is 3.9%.

Provisional figures suggest a further reduction in funding to NHDC for 2014/15 of around 12.5%. This is in addition to unprecedented cuts in our grant of more than 25% following the government's 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. In 2011/12 and 2012/13 NHDC has made efficiencies of around £2.5million, with a further £900,000 planned for 2013/14. In total, the Council has already identified over £9.3million of savings over the last eight years in the drive to become more efficient. Much of this has been achieved without having a serious impact on the services most valued by the local community.

The availability of capital funds is also limited. The Council has spent the useable capital receipts received from the Housing Stock transfer in 2003/04 and has just a limited portfolio of remaining assets to sell. In the current economic climate it has proven difficult to progress asset sales. As a result it has been necessary to use set aside receipts to fund the capital programme in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and it is anticipated that these will be used to fund the future capital programme.



4.0 What the Green Space Strategy Will Achieve

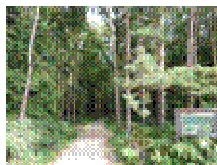
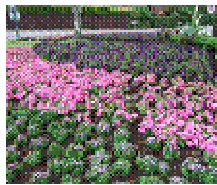
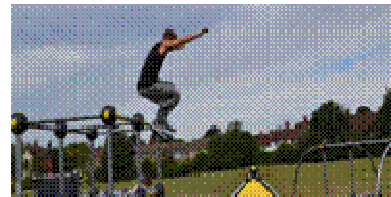
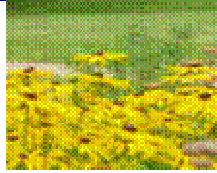
4.1 Objective

To maintain and improve green space for the current and future needs of the local community.

4.2 Aims

In order to achieve its objective the strategy has the following aims:

1. To highlight the value and role of parks and green spaces in meeting corporate and community needs.
2. To provide the justification and evidence base to maximise external investment opportunities and secure funding through planning obligations to provide continued investment for green space at reduced cost to the Council.
3. To provide a framework to work in partnership with key stakeholders such as Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service along with volunteers to deliver improvements and external funding opportunities to green space.
4. To provide clear policies that prioritise essential green space investment requirements for the next five years.
5. Based on sound policies develop a sustainable five year investment programme for green space that reduces the Council's revenue and capital spend whilst still providing essential short term enhancements for green space.



5.0 The Past Five Years Successes

5.1 Customer comments

The results of the Citizen Panel in relation to satisfaction levels of parks and open spaces shows the effectiveness of having separate sections, one responsible for maintenance and the other for development of green space with clearly defined policies and action plans for improvements.

Year	2001	2002	2003	2005	2009	2011
Very / Fairly Satisfied	59%	69%	68%	75%	73%	83%
Very / Fairly Dissatisfied	12%	8%	8%	7%	9%	5%

These results demonstrate a continued improvement in satisfaction over the past five years with an overall 24% increase in satisfaction levels over the past ten years and a 7% drop in dissatisfaction. The survey showed that 93% of residents use parks and open spaces, this is a 19% increase from 2009.

The 2008 Place Survey

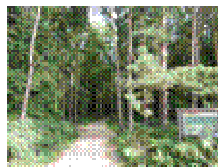
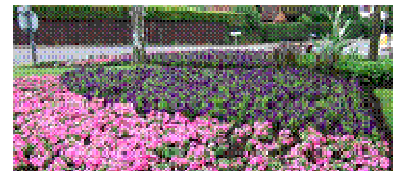
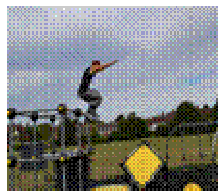
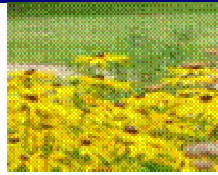
- Showed residents had an overall satisfaction rate of 74.3% for Parks and Open Spaces

The 2011 Citizen Panel

- Demonstrated that residents were positive about the various elements of green space, with at least 71% rated them as good.
- The vast majority of North Hertfordshire residents agreed that where they live there is a park or open spaces within easy walking distance from their home (96%).
- Residents rated the standard of maintenance of grass cutting (84%) and flower beds (82%) as good.

The 2011 Tracker Survey

- Showed that Parks and Open spaces was the most frequently used service used by residents with a 78% usage rate and 90% of residents were satisfied with the provision of this service.



5.2 External investment achieved over the past five years

Year 1		
Project	Awarding Body	Value of grant
Howard Park	National Lottery grant	£128,500
Grange Pavilion	The Football Foundation	£219,500
Grange Community Garden	Waste Recycling Environmental Limited (WREN)	£32,959
Grange Community Garden	Letchworth Garden City Council	£3,910
Jackmans Community Garden	WREN	£7,000
Jackmans Community Garden	Letchworth Garden City Council	£2,500
Jackmans Community Garden	North Hertfordshire Homes	£5,000
Norton Common Games Area	WREN	£25,000
Norton Common Games Area	The Football Foundation	£19,000
King George V Games Area	WREN	£25,000
King George V Games Area	The Football Foundation	£19,000
Ivel springs conservation work	WREN	£17,260
Avenue Park cricket nets	National Lottery grant	£9,500
Knights Templar Training Pitch	The Football Foundation	£400,000
Buzzworks, Old Hale Way	WREN	£25,000
District wide roundabouts	Private Sponsorship	£14,681
Oughtonhead Common	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,326
Ivel Springs	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,304
Weston Hills	Countryside Stewardship grant	£375
Total		£956,815

Year 2		
Project	Awarding Body	Value of grant
Oughtonhead Common conservation work	WREN	£50,000
Ivel Springs conservation work	WREN	£25,000
Norton Common conservation work	WREN	£35,000
District wide roundabouts	Private Sponsorship	£14,681
King George V Flood lights	RFU	£40,000
King George V Irrigation	RFU	£27,000
King George V pitch improvements	RFU	£15,000
Oughtonhead Common	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,326
Ivel Springs	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,304
Weston Hills	Countryside Stewardship grant	£375
Total		£209,686

Year 3		
Project	Awarding Body	Value of grant
Bee project Old Hale Way allotments	Jordans	£10,000
Ransoms pavilion	WREN	£25,000
North Road Allotments	National Lottery grant	£10,000
Ivel Springs wetland	Natural England	£6,400
Hillbrow play area	Play Builder	£55,000
District wide roundabouts	Private Sponsorship	£14,681
Oughtonhead Common	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,326
Ivel Springs	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,304
Weston Hills	Countryside Stewardship grant	£375
Total		£124,086

Year 4		
Project	Awarding Body	Value of grant
Ivel Springs conservation work	BIFFA	£40,000
Weston Hills conservation work	Woodland Grant Scheme	£35,000
Howard Park & Gardens	National Lottery grant	£1,800,000
District wide roundabouts	Private Sponsorship	£14,681
Oughtonhead Common	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,326
Ivel Springs	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,304
Weston Hills	Countryside Stewardship grant	£375
Total		£1,892,686

Year 5		
Project	Awarding Body	Value of grant
Pix Brook conservation work	HCC	£10,000
Pix Brook conservation work	LGCHF	£10,000
Avenue Park play area	Play Builder	£55,000
Avenue Park entrance	National Lottery grant	£53,000
Grange pitch improvements	Britvic	£5,000
Oughtonhead Common	Ernest Cook	£4,500
Howard Gardens	Flexible Support Fund	£10,100
Purwell Meadows	Veolia	£58,425
District wide roundabouts	Private Sponsorship	£14,681
Great Ashby District Park	Woodland Grant	£13,075
Oughtonhead Common	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,326
Ivel Springs	Countryside Stewardship grant	£1,304
Weston Hills	Countryside Stewardship grant	£375
Total		£236,786

**Total External Investment In Green Space Over The Past 5 Years:
£3,420,059**

(Much of this funding was secured by partnership working with third parties such as the Countryside Management Service, Groundwork Hertfordshire and Community groups)

In addition to the **£3,420,059** external funding there has also been an estimated **30,000 hours of voluntary work** for improvements to green space. This equates to an additional 3 full time staff being employed over the five year period.

5.3 What improvements happened in your local area?

LETCHWORTH	
Location	Improvement
Howard Park & Gardens	Parks for People Lottery £2.7 million refurbishment of town centre park & gardens with interactive water play features.
Norton Common	Flood lit Multi Use Games Area, surfacing pathways, works to water courses, new signs and improvements to entrances. Obtained Local Nature Reserve status and Green Flag awards.
Wilbury Recreation Ground	New refurbished play area and ball court
Temple Recreation Ground	New refurbished play area and teenager zone
Hillbrow Recreation Ground	New refurbished play area
Grange Recreation Ground	New sports pavilion, pitch improvements, refurbished play area, adult outdoor gym equipment and new skateboard ramps
Pix Brook Meadows	Improved pathways and opened ancient orchard
Pryor Way allotments	Creation of 15 new plots
Woolgrove allotments	Creation of new allotment site

The above works were achieved in Letchworth with:

External grants:	£2,410,384
NHDC's direct investment:	£925,000
Total investment:	£3,335,384

HITCHIN	
Location	Improvement
Bancroft Gardens	Commencement of Parks for People Lottery application to refurbish gardens
King George V Recreation Ground	Pitch improvements, new flood lit Multi Use Games Area, refurbished play area, adult outdoor gym equipment
Purwell Recreation Ground	Refurbished play area

HITCHIN	
Location	Improvement
Ransoms Recreation Ground	Refurbished sports changing rooms and community hall
Oldhale Way Allotments	Creation of education bee keeping garden with classroom
Burford Way Allotments	Creation of woodland bee keeping garden
Oughton Head Common	Access improvements and additional interpretation of the site

The above works were achieved in Hitchin with:

External grants:	£313,925
NHDC's direct investment:	£300,000
Total Investment:	£613,925

BALDOCK	
Location	Improvement
Avenue Park	Refurbished play area, interactive water splash pool play feature, improvements to main entrance, new cricket nets and compound, shrub and tree planting and boundary security improvements
Ivel Springs	New surfaced pathways, wetland habitat creation, development of neutral grass lands, obtained Local Nature Reserve Status
Weston Hills	Improvements to entrances, surfaced pathways, interpretative signage, expansion of chalk grassland habitat, boundary fencing and obtained Local Nature Reserve status
North Road allotments	Improvements to boundary fencing and creation of 15 new plots.

The above works were achieved in Baldock with:

External grants:	£665,830
NHDC's direct investment:	£255,000
Total Investment:	£920,830

ROYSTON	
Location	Improvement
Priory Memorial Gardens	Additional play equipment, flood lighting for Multi Use Games Area, improvements to entrance gates. Retained green flag status
Burn Road BMX track	Partnership working with Royston Rockets for improvements to track.

The above works were achieved in Royston with:

External grants:	£16,845
NHDC's direct investment:	£45,000
Total Investment:	£61,845

Gt. ASHBY	
Location	Improvement
District Park	New path surfacing, signs, interpretation panels and a leaflet

The above works were achieved in Great Ashby with:

External grants:	£13,075
NHDC's direct investment:	£0
Total Investment:	£13,075

By the completion of the existing strategy in March 2014 we will have also delivered:

Town	Location	Improvement
Letchworth	Howard Park & Gardens	New community cottage garden at entrance to Mrs Howard Hall and woodland garden adjacent the museum
Hitchin	Bancroft Gardens	Development and submission of Parks for People lottery application to renovate the gardens
Hitchin	Walsworth Common	Refurbished play area
Hitchin	Ransoms Recreation Ground	Refurbished play area
Baldock	Avenue Park	Completion of refurbishment works to town centre park
Royston	Priory Memorial Gardens	Reconstruction of pathways

It is estimated that the above improvements will amount to an additional investment in the region of £425,000 funded both from external grants and NHDC's direct investment.

5.4 What improvements did not happen in your local area?

Due to ever increasing financial constraints in 2010 the Green Space Action plans were re-prioritised and the following projects were either undertaken by alternative means, or deferred to be reviewed at a future date. This reduced the Council's own expenditure by £640,000.

Projects removed from the capital programme

Town	Location	Project	Outcome
Baldock	Weston Hills	Obtain Local Nature Reserve Status by improvements to access and enhanced management.	Achieved using external funding and volunteers
Baldock	Ivel Way	Renovate Play Area	Deferred
Hitchin	Windmill Hill	New retaining wall and disabled access.	Deferred
Hitchin	Walsworth Common	Replace Sports Pavilion	Deferred
Hitchin	Walsworth Common	Renovate Football pitches	Deferred
Royston	Priory Memorial Gardens	Renovate Play Area	Achieved using external funds

The above table shows that some of the improvements were still delivered despite no capital funding.

6.0 The Next Five Years

6.1 North Hertfordshire District Council's priorities

It is clear that quality green space will continue to play a vital role in sustaining and improving local communities. It is however widely recognised that for the next five years Local Councils have ever increasing financial constraints in providing services to local communities. In 2013/14 North Hertfordshire District Council has set the following priorities to assist in its future service delivery:

Living within our means to deliver cost effective services

This will include initiatives on new ways of working, delivering value for money, reducing service subsidies and reducing overall spend to match available income without reliance on reserves.

Examples Relevant to Green Space:

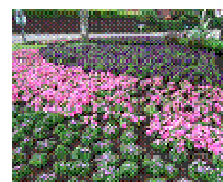
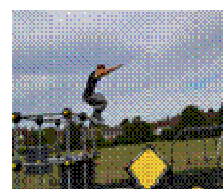
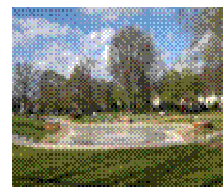
- Through the Heritage Lottery Fund North Hertfordshire District Council will be applying for a grant to refurbish Bancroft Gardens in the Town Centre of Hitchin. The heritage nature of the site will be enhanced along with providing a safer community green space for casual visits and formal events.
- Through grant applications to the Football Foundation it is intended to provide a new football changing pavilion and refurbish the football pitches at Walsworth Common in Hitchin.
- Applications will be made to external bodies for grants to allow improvements to neighbourhood parks and amenity green space.
- Monies secured under Planning obligations will continue to be used to deliver green space improvements.

Working with local communities

To allow the Council to recognise Community Development work in the widest sense and the existing work on our Town Centres and the Localism agenda Which will include increasing yet further community participation.

Examples Relevant to Green Space:

- Increased working with local youth for improvements to wheeled sports facilities.
- Continued partnership working with Hitchin Sunday League for self-management of sports pavilions throughout the district.
- Engaging Groundwork Hertfordshire to work with local communities to refurbish 5 play areas.



- Engaging the Countryside Management Service to further support Friends of Group's and volunteers to enhance the Council's open spaces for all to enjoy.

Protecting our environment for our communities

This priority demonstrates our continuing commitment to care for the environment and do what we can to protect it within limited resources. This includes protection of the green belt, waste reduction, recycling, carbon dioxide reduction, energy efficiency and renovation of our parks & open spaces.

Examples Relevant to Green Space:

- Renovation of Bancroft Gardens in the Town centre of Hitchin.
- A programme to provide enhancements to neighbourhood parks and amenity green space.
- A programme linked to the Council's Biodiversity reference document to provide biodiversity enhancements to urban green space.

6.2 Funding Sources for 2014-2019

Funding for Green Space in North Hertfordshire is in four parts:

Grounds Maintenance Budgets

i. Contractual works

The Grounds Maintenance Contract sets the standards for the maintenance of our green space. It provides the day to day maintenance of Green Space in the urban district areas of North Herts. John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance Limited is the sole grounds maintenance contractor holding an 8 year performance monitored contract. There are financial penalties for non-performance. Daily maintenance regimes include grass cutting, horticultural and groundsmanship activities, litter clearance, dog bin collection, building cleaning as well as many others but chiefly maintaining the status quo.

ii. Non- Contractual works

These provide for maintenance works that are not included in the Grounds Maintenance Contract. These can be repairs to fencing, new signs, cutting vacant allotment plots or removing fly-tipping. Maintenance budgets have fallen in real terms over many years and are viewed as insufficient for long term infrastructure replacement.

A major theme of all the Action Plans is that its objectives should not have an adverse, upward affect on Grounds maintenance expenditure. This can be achieved by rationalisation of provision, standardisation of product range or labour reducing measures.

iii. Capital budgets

Capital programmes provide long term improvements to infrastructure of Green Space. Although brought about by a strategic view to sustain infrastructure, they should be for new developments and improvements only with adequate budgets provided for ongoing repairs and replacement. The work is delivered through the strategy and site specific action plans.

These budgets can include monies received from planning obligations, which are often tied to be spent on particular schemes or localities. There may well be further money secured from planning obligations to be spent on schemes not identified in the action plans contained in this document,

but where investment in green space is required to make those developments acceptable in planning terms. As and when the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is introduced the ways in which money is obtained from development, the amounts which can be gained and the ways in which it can be spent on green space management will need to be reconsidered.

iv. Outsourced grants

In recent years substantial investment has been made possible by monies acquired from Planning Gain and grants from national funding sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Football Foundation and Landfill Tax (WREN, Biffa). Some funding streams such as WREN and Biffa have now expired but the Heritage Lottery have launched a new programme for investment in green space and money is still available from the Football Foundation and a variety of other smaller granting bodies.

We have already entered five of our countryside sites with the Rural Payment Agency under their Higher Level Stewardship Scheme which will generate an additional **£105,750** external investment over the next ten years towards their maintenance.

Living within our means

In light of a sustained period of national austerity, North Hertfordshire District Council has an adopted Value for Money Policy which states; “We aim to reduce our costs and ensure value for money through working with partners and investment in technology”. The Council’s Financial Management Strategy reiterates this; “The Council remains committed to the identification of efficiency measures and the delivery of value for money services.

The Green Space Management Strategy recognises the importance of ‘living within our means’ and will work with external agencies in particular Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service along with the local community to secure external funding opportunities to supplement a limited NHDC capital investment programme providing the best value for money approach.

7.0 What the Next Five Years of the Strategy Will Cover

This Green Space Management Strategy will cover all aspects of green space, sport and recreation provision managed by the District Council in North Hertfordshire. It will need to be flexible to ensure maximum investment in green space is possible whilst accommodating the councils changing financial position and pressures on key partners and external agencies.

It should be recognised that much green space is multi-functional and may have secondary and even further purpose or function e.g. a Town Park or Recreation Ground may include a play area and some semi-natural areas, as well as a sports pitch.

The green space across the district have been classified into the following types:

7.1 Town Parks & Gardens

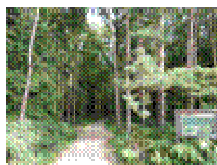
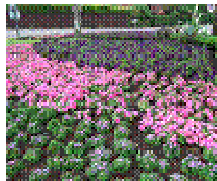
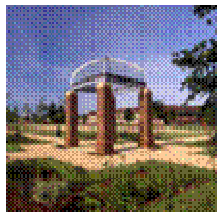
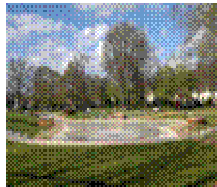
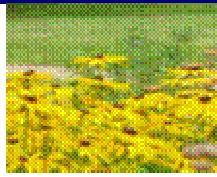
These are areas of land that are normally enclosed, designed, managed and maintained as a public park or garden. Their primary purpose is to provide accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events. They may include equipped play areas, facilities for young people and sport facilities such as tennis courts or bowling greens. Investment in these sites featured heavily in the 2010-14 action plans and with the exception of Bancroft Gardens in Hitchin works are now complete. Therefore the current action plans identify little need for investment over the next 5 years in town parks & gardens. In the case of Bancroft a funding allocation was made available in the 2010-14 action plans and this will be carried forward to provide core funding for a Parks for People Lottery application.

Policy for Town Parks & Gardens:

To maintain the infrastructure of town centre parks & gardens through existing revenue budgets. In the case of Hitchin subject to external investment being secured through a Parks for People Lottery grant to refurbish Bancroft Gardens.

7.2 Neighbourhood Parks

Neighbourhood Parks have been identified as being of primary importance for the next five years. They are the recreational grounds located within or on the edge of towns or villages. They are within walking distance of the main residential areas that they are serving and provide the local green space for many residents. They can have a different range of facilities to Town Parks & Gardens, such as sport pitches, equipped play areas youth facilities including skateparks as well as informal open space. In previous action plans these sites received limited investment and due to their proximity to residential areas are now being prioritised. Further details and the programme for improvement is shown in the Green Space Action Plan.



Policy for Neighbourhood Parks:

To invest in these sites by providing core funding to allow partnership working with key partners such as Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service to work with stakeholders to provide enhancements and community ownership of local green space.

7.3 Amenity Green Space

Amenity green space has been identified as being of primary importance for the next five years. They are landscaped areas that have a visual amenity and/or have separate land uses e.g. separating a major road from housing areas, areas of grass within housing areas and business parks and village greens. Their primary purpose is to provide opportunities for informal recreation often close to housing areas or to enhance the visual appearance of residential and other areas. As for neighbourhood parks previously little investment was made in this area and due to their proximity to residential areas are now being prioritised for investment. Further details and the programme for improvement is shown in the Green Space Action Plan.

Policy for Amenity Green Space:

To invest in these sites by providing core funding to allow partnership working with key partners such as Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service to work with stakeholders to provide enhancements and community ownership of local green space.

7.4 Grass Verges / Green Corridors

These are green routes/linkages including river corridors, major road verges and hedgerows that connect different areas within urban and rural areas and join green spaces together. They are of high biodiversity importance along with providing opportunities for walking, cycling or horse riding routes and for wildlife migration. Further details and actions are contained in the Councils Biodiversity Reference Document - Habitats.

Policy for Verges / Green Corridors:

To support key partnership such as the Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service to work with stakeholders to provide habitat and recreational improvements to green space.

7.5 Countryside Parks

These are areas with residual natural habitats. Their primary purpose is for wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness but may include areas of more formal recreation. These are valuable natural habitats and partnership with the Countryside Management Service has developed conservation management plans which volunteers play a key role in their delivery. The key sites have also obtained Local Nature Reserve status and obtain annual grant funding from the Rural Payment Agency. Further details and actions are contained in the Councils Biodiversity Reference Document 2.31 Urban Habitats and 2.32 Actions for Urban Habitats.

Policy for Countryside Parks:

To support key partners such as Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service to work with volunteers to deliver the actions of agreed management plans.

7.6 Allotments

These are a statutory function and comprise primarily of parcels of land leased to provide opportunities for people to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion but can include conservation areas.

Policy for Allotments:

To work in partnership with key stakeholders such as allotment associations and land owners towards local devolved management of the allotment function.

7.7 Churchyards and Cemeteries

These are statutory functions and include cemeteries and churchyards with legitimate public access. Their primary purpose is for burial of the dead and quiet contemplation, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity. The Council has a continued legal responsibility to take on the management of closed church yards. The historic Council owned cemeteries are nearing capacity and the Council has invested in a new district wide cemetery at Wilbury Hills near Letchworth. In the case of Royston the Town Council are developing their own future cemetery provision. Further details and programme for improvement is shown in the Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards Action Plan.

Policy for Churchyards and Cemeteries:

To promote Wilbury Hills as the District wide cemetery & undertake essential Health & Safety works at other churchyard & cemetery locations .

7.8 Outdoor Children's Play Provision

These areas are designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people. This type of green space includes equipped and adventure play areas, for children and young people. They can be part of larger parks and recreation grounds or be stand alone facilities. Currently we maintain 51 equipped play areas. Over the past five years there has been significant investment in renovating outdoor play facilities. High maintenance items such as wooden fencing and bark pits have been replaced with low maintenance items generating an annual saving £45,000 from the maintenance budget. In view of the historic investment in play areas for the next five years the investment focuses on one main play area in each of the four towns and the main play area in Great Ashby. The existing revenue maintenance budget will be used to provide limited investment in the remaining play areas which have a strategic play value. Small play areas with no strategic play value will not receive any investment. Further details and the programme for improvement is shown in the Outdoor Play Provision Action Plan.

Policy for Outdoor Children's Play Provision:

To renovate one major strategically important play area per year for the next 5 years. To utilise existing revenue budgets to provide limited investment in the remaining play areas with a strategic value. No investment will be made for play areas listed as having limited or no strategic value.

7.9 Outdoor Sports Facilities

These areas' primary purpose is for participation in sport e.g. football or rugby pitches, golf courses, tennis courts, multi use games areas, BMX, skate boarding and bowling greens. The

Council is keen to be involved in improvements to facilities such as sports pavilions and wheeled sports facilities but in the current economic climate does not have resources to directly undertake these works. The action plans identify grant funding that could be made available to community and sporting groups to assist them undertake improvements. Walsworth Common in Hitchin was identified in the previous strategy as a site requiring investment. Currently the poor condition of many of the pitches have resulted in them being taken out of use and the pavilion is in a poor state of repair. Priority should be given to work with the Football Foundation and other sporting bodies for investment in this site.

In the case of Baldock a clear deficiency in the provision of a wheeled sports facility has been identified and this has been listed for investment in the action plans. Further details and programme for improvement is shown in the Outdoor Sports Facilities Action Plan.

In addition the provision of outdoor gym equipment should be considered as part of the refurbishment the major strategically important play areas in each of the towns.

Policy for Outdoor Sports Facilities:

To develop a wheeled sports facility in Baldock. To assist community and sporting groups to undertake improvements to existing facilities in particular at Walsworth Common in Hitchin.

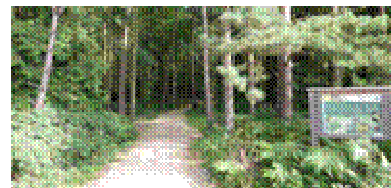
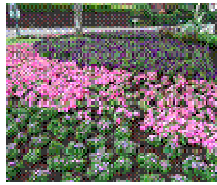
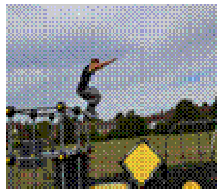
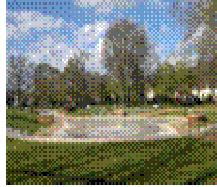
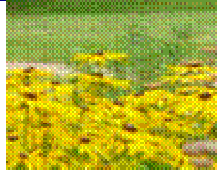
Education Grounds and School Playing Fields

These are areas of open space associated with education establishments. They are areas of grassland with a combination of playing fields, play facilities or other areas of sport such as tennis, cricket or football. Most are inaccessible to the public but some have multi-use purposes and are used by the public after school hours and at weekends. The District Council has no direct responsibility for Education Grounds and School Playing Fields and therefore it is not possible to produce detailed action plan for improvements. It is the objective of the Council to provide support for the development of school sports facilities that demonstrate public use and to encourage use of green space as an outdoor classroom.

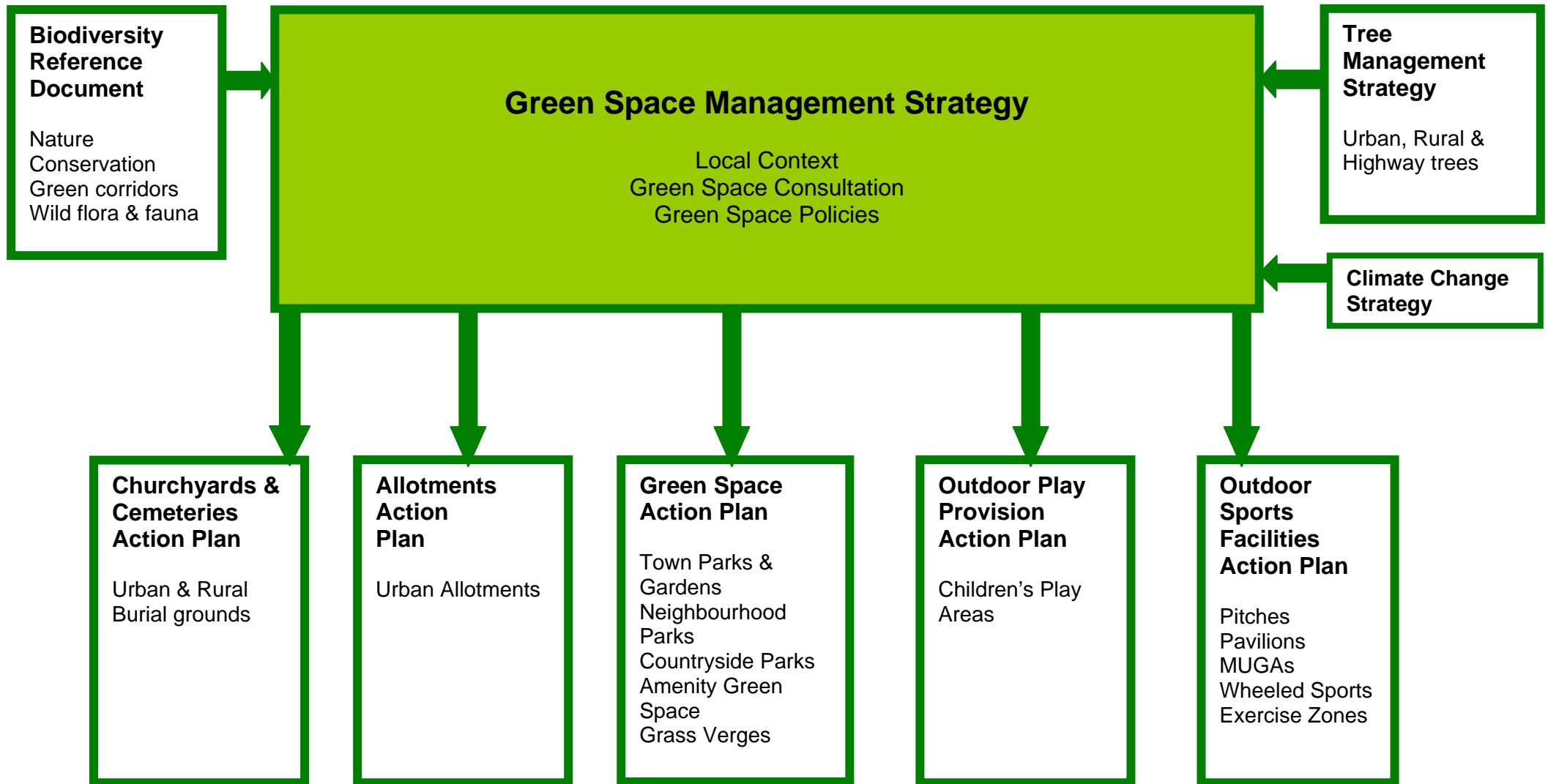
8.0 Green Space Action Plans

The action plans for the next five years list an investment programme of £3,316,030. This investment has focused on health & safety issues at cemeteries renovation of Bancroft Gardens in Hitchin and essential investment required to meet local community needs at a local level in neighbourhood parks and amenity green space. The action plans rely heavily on partnership working with Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service for their delivery. In the previous five years we have secured approximately 70% external funding to offset capital spend. If this trend continues the £3,316,030 investment programme will be funded by £994,809 NHDC capital and £2,321,221 external investment.

The previous five years had an investment programme of £4,945,059 and it must be recognised that whilst reduced investment may be appropriate and financially essential in the short term it will not be sustainable in the longer term and the quality of green space and the benefits it brings would be quickly eroded. The following flow chart identifies how the Green Space Policies flow into the Action Plans:



8.1 Green Space Management Strategy Flow Chart



9.0 Summary Investment Programme

Full details of the Green Space investment programme for 2014-2019 is detailed in the individual Action Plans that accompany this Strategy.

Listed below is a summary of the investment programme contained within the action plans for the next five years.

9.1 Churchyard & Cemetery Action Plan

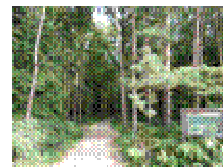
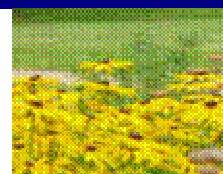
Location	Site	Investment	Year	Value
Hitchin	Hitchin Cemetery	Construction of garden of remembrance	2014/15	£20,000
Baldock	Baldock Cemetery	Reconstruction pathways and roadways	2014/15	£35,000
Letchworth	Wilbury Hills Cemetery	Feasibility study for Crematorium	2014/15	£15,000
Royston	Royston Cemeteries	Reconstruction pathways and roadways	2015/16	£35,000
Letchworth	Icknield Way Cemetery	Reconstruction pathways and roadways	2016/17	£40,000
Hitchin	Hitchin Cemetery	Reconstruction pathways and roadways	2017/18	£40,000
Letchworth	Wilbury Hills Cemetery	Construction of new roadway	2018/19	£35,000
			Total	£220,000

9.2 Allotments Action Plan

Currently, Baldock Allotments & Leisure Gardeners Association have a devolved maintenance grant arrangement for the two Baldock Allotment sites. Negotiations are taking place for the Association to take over the management of the Baldock sites under a full Autonomy arrangement.

Letchworth Heritage Foundation has also shown interest in accommodating the Letchworth sites within their own provision under a full Autonomy arrangement.

Enquiries from other local associations and interested groups in devolved management arrangements are the future goal of the District Council and would be facilitated.



9.3 Green Space Action Plan

Location	Site	Investment	Year	Value
Baldock	Clothall Road	Replace Clothall Rd boundary fence and gate	2016/17	£15,000
Hitchin	Purwell	Improve entrances, enhance biodiversity and interpretation.	2014/15	£25,000
Hitchin	Smithsons	Resurfacing, enhance planting and biodiversity	2015/16	£30,000
Hitchin	Cadwell	Enhance riverside * biodiversity	2015/16	£5,000
Hitchin	Butts Close	New path, replace benches, replace vehicle gate, historical interpretation	2015/16	£30,000
Hitchin	Swinburne	Improve disability access, add pathway to Oughtonhead, enhance biodiversity Replace field gate	2016/17	£30,000
Hitchin	King George V	Repairs to car park, signage, improve main entrance. Restore electricity to garages	2016/17	£60,000
Hitchin	Walsworth Cm	Tarmac car park. Enhance biodiversity	2017/18	£30,000
Hitchin	Ransoms	Renew Nightingale Rd * railings	2017/18	£10,000
Hitchin	Windmill Hill	Replace Hermitage Rd wall	2018/19	£70,000
Letchworth	Baldock Rd	Improve entrances, hedgerow pruning Boundary chainlink fencing	2014/15	£60,000
Letchworth	Grange	Entrance improvements, remove ascot fencing & add bike restrictors, enhance biodiversity	2015/16	£15,000
Letchworth	Jackmans Creamery	Resurface car park	2015/16	£30,000
Letchworth	Wilbury	Enhance biodiversity*	2017/18	£3,000
Letchworth	Temple Gardens	Improve accessibility from hostel entrance *	2017/18	£7,000
Letchworth	Hillbrow	Improve accessibility from garage block entrance, hedgerow pruning & improve boundary fencing	2018/19	£30,000
Royston	Newmarket Rd	Entrance improvements *	2017/18	£5,000
Great Ashby	District Park	Pathways, entrance enhancements, planting	2017/18	£45,000
			Total	£500,000

* Items solely for planning gain

In addition to the proposed new investment continue with the £1,801.030 scheme to refurbishment of Bancroft Gardens, Hitchin utilising £245,000 previously approved capital funding with an aim to secure £1,556,030 from funding bodies.

9.4 Outdoor Play Provision Action Plan

By comparing the strategic value of the play area location, the present provision/condition and expected longevity before any need for major investment, an improvements priority list can be formulated to sustain the District Council's play area provision for the next five years.

Location	Site	Investment	Year	Value
Baldock	Bush Springs	Renovate Play Area	2014/15	£75,000
Hitchin	Bancroft Gardens	Renovate Play Area	2015/16	£75,000
Royston	Serby Ave	Renovate Play Area	2016/17	£75,000
Letchworth	Jackmans Central	Renovate Play Area	2017/18	£75,000
Great Ashby	Serpentine Way	Renovate Play Area	2018/19	£75,000
			Total	£375,000

9.5 Outdoor Sports Facilities Action Plan

It is envisaged that new facilities and enhancements to existing will be driven by user groups encompassing outsourced funding. 'Pump-primer' allowances contributing to the full cost of the works will be available over the course of the 5-year programme.

Location	Site	Investment	Year	Value
Baldock	Bakers Close	Improve changing rooms	2014/15	£50,000
Baldock	Development belt	New wheeled sports facility	2015/16	£100,000
Hitchin	KGV	Enhancements to wheeled sports provision	2014/15	£20,000
Hitchin	Walsworth	New changing rooms	2016/17	£50,000
Hitchin	Walsworth	Pitch improvements	2016/17	£20,000
Hitchin	Walsworth	Enhancements to wheeled sports provision	2016/17	£20,000
Hitchin	KGV	New pavilion complex	2017/18	£50,000
Letchworth	Norton Common	Enhancements to wheeled sports provision	2015/16	£20,000
Letchworth	Baldock Road	Enhancements to wheeled sports provision	2018/19	£20,000
Letchworth	Norton Common	Improve pavilion	2018/19	£50,000
Royston	Newmarket Road	Enhancements to wheeled sports provision	2017/18	£20,000
			Total	£420,000



More information is available from:

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