

North Hertfordshire District Council



Customer Services Directorate



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A Green Space Management Strategy for North Hertfordshire

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

2017 - 2021

A Green Space Management Strategy Delivering the Vision for North Hertfordshire

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

The aim of the Strategy is:

To provide a sustainable, strategic approach for the future management of green space.

Foreword

Statement from Councillor Jane Gray

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.

Surveys show that 82% of residents use our parks & open Spaces. You will find many of the reasons for this highlighted in this document, with significant improvements taking place throughout the district in recent years. This Strategy sets out how we propose to continue to maintain the quality of green space within ever decreasing funds.

In view of the Council's financial position and need to make further savings, the Council has superseded the 2014-2019 Green Space Management Strategy with a new strategy for 2017-2021. This ensures future proposed investment in the Strategy provides maximum community benefit and aligns to the principles of the Council's current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Corporate Plan and emerging Local Plan.

The key driver of this strategy is to retain and maintain the green space in our urban environments for current and future generations to enjoy.

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 retain and maintain those spaces for the years ahead.

Councillor Jane Gray
Executive Member 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.

In 2009 the Council launched its first Green Space Management Strategy (GSMS) 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 2009-2014 Strategy managed to secure 70% of its funding for improvements to green space from external sources.

For the period 2014-2016 due to increased competition for external grants and reducing developer contributions we only secured approximately 40% of funding from external sources.

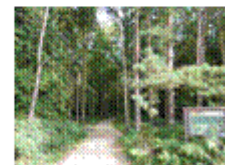
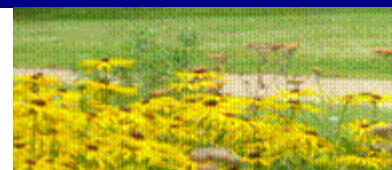
In the medium to long term, with changing legislation, which restricts developer contributions and changes in external grant criteria, reducing opportunities for councils to secure grants, it is anticipated that any investment in green space will become more reliant on NHDC's own resources.

With the evident decline in external funding for green space investment, the options are to either increase the use of NHDC funds to maintain the current level of investment or reduce investment in green space infrastructure.

The Council's MTFs identifies that over the coming years significant savings will have to be achieved. It is therefore not prudent to continue with the current relatively high investment in green space.

In the current economic climate the direction of travel for the GSMS needs to focus on key principles and policies. The main one being that the green space itself and trees offer the greatest value to our residents and the unit cost to maintain this provision is relatively low.

This strategy recognises that retention of the green space itself with associated trees is paramount and looks at where essential savings can be made by reducing investment in the additional infrastructure that have minimal impact on our communities.



2.0 The Importance of Green Space

For centuries public parks and open spaces have played an important part in the social and civic life of communities. From pocket parks in local neighbourhoods, country parks on the periphery of towns, to large civic parks at the heart of city centres, public parks are deeply rooted in the physical fabric, spirit and identity of thousands of places across the UK.

2.1 CENTRAL TO FAMILY LIFE

Some of our earliest childhood memories include visits to local parks. Socially, parks offer opportunities to rest and meet friends, for children and young people to play, to hold events, to pass through on the way to work, to exercise and take time out from the pressures of everyday life. Other reports also acknowledge the importance of parks to children. *Making Britain Great for Children and Families* – a manifesto launched by 4Children, the national charity working towards a more integrated approach to children’s services – includes better provision of parks in its list of ways to create good places for children to grow up in.

2.2 SUPPORTING HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

Parks have a positive effect on people’s wellbeing and the health of their neighbourhoods. Evidence from the University of Exeter’s *European Centre for Environment and Human Health*, published by the Association for Psychological Science⁷, reveals that people who live in greener urban areas report greater wellbeing and lower levels of mental stress than city dwellers without nearby parks and gardens. An increase in visitor numbers, particularly in urban parks, was recorded by Natural England in their annual *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment* (MENE) surveys. In 2012–13 there were fewer visits to the countryside and a significant increase in visits to green spaces in towns and cities. This points to the growing importance of parks as the only place some people encounter nature. The *State of the Nation’s Waistline* report, published by the National Obesity Forum, states that over 25% of adults in England are considered obese. By 2050 the figure is expected to rise to 50%. Parks provide vital health resources that help to support healthy populations. Their value to public health is emphasised in *Public Health and Landscape*, a recent position statement by the Landscape Institute, which demonstrates parks are a key ingredient in creating healthy places.

2.3 IMPROVING SOCIAL COHESION

Recent research highlights that “there is good evidence suggesting that the natural environment contributes to social cohesion. This appears to be particularly the case for well-maintained green spaces”. An example from Chicago suggests that parks can actively promote “inter-community relations in a way which is almost unique in urban life”. A Joseph Rowntree report notes that, as communities across the UK become increasingly mixed and diverse, local social amenities will become more and more important. Public parks offer one of the most important social spaces in a neighbourhood, but, as interviews in the research highlight, their condition is a key issue, as poor-quality parks can have a detrimental effect on cohesion.



2.4 PROMOTING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Public parks have been used throughout history to promote investment and growth. Developers frequently use the proximity of parks to attract investors. A study on improving the competitiveness of England's core cities notes that "soft location factors are an increasingly important part of economic decision-making". Good-quality parks and public spaces contribute to these factors, which help to attract and retain skilled workers and their families. Forward-looking cities with a good environment and easy access to natural amenities are working at preserving and improving them. They know that for skilled employees "the quality of life for themselves and their families is an increasingly important factor" of location. Recent research from Natural England draws together a growing evidence base on ways the natural environment, including parks, can enhance the economic competitiveness of a particular region and increase employee productivity. Good parks also boost the tourist economy.

Visit Britain has found that, of the 31 million tourists visiting Britain, over a third enjoy visiting a park or garden, making it one of the most popular activities (ranking above visiting a museum, castle, historic house or art gallery). Clissold Park, a local neighbourhood park in the London Borough of Hackney, receives the same number of annual visitors as London's National Portrait Gallery, and more than St Paul's Cathedral (2.1 million, 2.1 million and 1.8 million visitors respectively). Investing in parks is a recognised way of helping to regenerate and re-vitalise an area. There are economic indicators to show this works, and strong evidence of the impact of parks in protecting and enhancing land and property values. The presence of a well maintained park has been shown through research by CABI Space to add on average a 5% to 7% premium on house prices. Equally, a declining park has the opposite effect.

At a local level we need only look at the increased visitor numbers to Letchworth Garden City following the refurbishment work to Howard Park & Gardens.

2.5 DELIVERING ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Parks are a key component of the 'green infrastructure' of towns and cities, complementing the heavily engineered and costly 'grey infrastructure' of roads, utilities and sewerage systems. Properly planned, attractive green networks of parks, green spaces and river corridors provide natural systems and ecological services that collect and clean water, improve air quality and reduce peak summer temperatures. There is increasing interest in parks' ability to improve the resilience of neighbourhoods to the impacts of 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. Parks also provide biodiversity hotspots. The qualities of an ecologically rich functional landscape were built into London's Olympic Park at the outset. As the UK's newest large public park, it not only provided an attractive and dramatic setting for the London 2012 Games but also continues to reduce flood risk, store surface water, and accommodate a rich diversity of plant and animal species.

3.0 Financial Pressures

The Council uses two funding streams for green space. **Revenue** which is similar to money held in a current bank account is used for the day to day maintenance of green space. **Capital** which is similar to money held in a savings account is used for improvements to green space.

The current MTFs has been updated to reflect the general economic position. The outlook for District Councils' funding continues to point to a very difficult financial position in future years, with reducing resources and rising demand. The Council remains under pressure to adjust how it delivers services, how it generates income (and at what level) and to review the functions it performs in order to deal with the on-going demands and this will continue for several years.

The Chancellor has reiterated that public spending control is central to the Government's commitment to reduce the deficit. Therefore expenditure reduction plans will continue and austerity measures are likely to remain in place until at least 2018.

Initial Local Government Association modelling suggested reductions from 2016/17 to 2018/19 of 12.1%, 11.6% and 4.7% respectively.

The MTFs recognises that it will not be able to continue to resource current levels of service given the ongoing scale and pace of funding cuts and will ensure that budget savings are identified to minimise the impact on frontline core services.

All investment priority bids for both Revenue and Capital are therefore subject to robust scrutiny from the Council, where they are subject to six basic questions:

- Is the expenditure fundamental to delivery of the Council's objectives?
- Is this a service that the local area needs?
- Can commercial income be generated that can be gained to support the delivery of services?
- Is there an absolute priority to incur the expenditure in the next 12 months?
- What are the risks involved in not spending the money?
- Will the growth result in quantifiable savings in future years?

The MTFs recommends the de-prioritising of those areas which are not specified priorities and there is no statutory responsibility.



4.0 What the Green Space Strategy Will Achieve

4.1 AIM

To provide a Sustainable, Strategic Approach for the Future Management of Green Space.

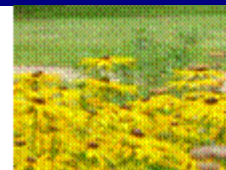
This aim should help ensure that, with more limited resources available, future investment in green space is directed to areas that maximise community benefit.

For example: Directing Capital funds for the refurbishment of large play areas that serve an entire neighbourhood. Capital expenditure could also be used to reduce future revenue expenditure by removing funding from infrastructure which have low community benefit but ongoing associated revenue costs e.g. ageing football changing rooms and small play areas that only serve a small part of a neighbourhood.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

In order to achieve its aim the Strategy has the following objectives:

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 diminishing 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 continue to adopt a partnership working approach with our grounds maintenance contractor 'John O'Conner' to deliver quality maintenance at best value for the Council.
5. To continue to adopt a partnership working approach with the County Highway Authority to maintain the highway green infrastructure in the urban environment.
6. To work closely with planning policy to ensure future provision of green space is sustainable and best meets the needs of the local community.
7. To provide clear policies that prioritises essential green space investment requirements for the next four years.
8. Based on sound policies develop a sustainable four 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.

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

5.0 Citizen Panel

5.1 2016 CITIZEN PANEL EXERCISE

The results of the 2014 Citizen Panel exercise show an 11% decline in use from 2011 but retains an increase of 9% from 2009.

Year	2009	2011	2014
Residents use of Parks & Open Spaces	73%	93%	82%

Residents who never visit the Council's parks and open spaces were asked why this was, 3 in 10 residents said that this was because they don't live or work in close proximity to any of the listed parks/open spaces. More than two fifths of residents also reported that they never visit any of the parks/open spaces due to health issues or a lack of time (22%). Just under a fifth (18%) of residents also stated that they are not interested in visiting parks or open spaces.

A relatively high proportion reported visiting all the parks and open spaces either less than once a month or never. The parks and open spaces that were visited the most (i.e. every day or most days, or once or twice a week) were the larger green space sites such as, Broadway Gardens in Letchworth, Oughtonhead Common in Hitchin, Priory Gardens in Royston and Howard Park and Gardens in Letchworth.

Residents were asked to indicate the main purpose of their visits. Around two fifths or more of residents reported the main purpose of their visits to be: walking/dog walking (45%), as a walk through route (45%), to spend time with family and friends (42%) and to visit the children's play area (38%).

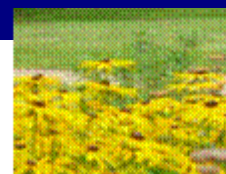
More than a third of residents reported that improved refreshment facilities (35%) would encourage them to visit more often. Around a quarter or more of residents also said: improved children's play facilities (29%), more seating (27%), improved conservation areas/planting (25%) and improved footpaths (23%) would encourage them to visit more often.

16% of residents said that they would be likely to want to join a community volunteer group which would help maintain and enhance open spaces on the Council's behalf; more than two thirds (69%) said that this was unlikely.

5.2 CITIZEN PANEL 2016 FOCUS GROUPS

Background

Opinion Research Services (ORS) was commissioned in 2016 to undertake three focus groups (one in Hitchin, one in Letchworth and one in Royston) with members of NHDC's Citizens' Panel to discuss the Green Space Management Strategy Review. The groups included a total of 29 people: they were recruited from NHDC's Citizen Panel by ORS through its social research call centre, with



quota controls to ensure a relatively proportional representation of different demographic and socio-economic groups.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Play Areas

In general, NHDC's strategic approach proposed for reducing equipped play areas was rejected; many residents were of the opinion that removing play equipment would discourage children from being active and exacerbate childhood obesity. Indeed, it was argued that the policy directly contradicts the government's focus on encouraging healthy lifestyles and that, long-term, the Council would face public health issues as a result of implementing it.

The focus groups commented that while some of the play areas are small and don't serve a big catchment area without them people have to travel further and drive to bigger parks instead of being able to walk to a close by play area.

The focus group acknowledge that the Council had limited funding to retain play areas (currently £85k p.a.) and suggested alternatives such as sponsorship and help from community groups.

Football Pitches

Many argued that there would be little point removing football pitches given they generate income, cost little to maintain and already represent green space when matches are not being played. It was suggested that usage should be encouraged and that even pitches in low demand should be retained insofar as they offer play opportunities at little cost to the Council.

Football Pavilions

The majority of participants across all three focus groups accepted that several of NHDC's football pavilions are in a poor state of repair. Not only are they of little benefit to local residents, who in the main prefer to change at home prior to matches but they also considered them dangerous and unsafe due to their poor condition. As such, there was general support for the proposal to remove most of them.

Some residents at Hitchin argued against the need for a brand new pavilion at Walsworth in the grounds that it would rarely be used and more important green space sites (such as parks and play areas) could be invested in instead.

Overall Conclusions

Participants frequently stressed the importance of retaining a wide of range of accessible, local services - including both equipped play areas and green space sites. Specifically, the proposals for play areas and grass football pitches were generally negatively received, but participants agreed there is little or need for football pavilions, to the extent that there was even some opposition to the proposed potential new site at Walsworth.

Hitchin and Royston participants described the current capital investment for green spaces as being insufficient. There were also misgivings about whether the Council would preserve reverted green spaces in the long-term, as opposed to allowing them to be built upon for housing.

6.0 Recent Improvements to Green Space

6.1 IMPROVEMENTS BETWEEN 2014 & 2016

Between 2014 & 2016 the following improvements have been completed that are identified in the 2014-2019 strategy:

LETCHWORTH		
Location	Improvement	Budget
Baldock Road Recreation Ground	Extended car park, removal of redundant concrete bases and landscaping back to green space	£60,000
Grange Recreation Ground	New fencing and gates at main entrance, bulb planting	£15,000
Jackmans Recreation Ground	Removal of old pavilion base, new pathway and conservation area	£30,000
Norton Common	New skate park	£170,000

The above works were achieved in Letchworth with:

Section 106:	£180,743
NHDC's direct investment:	£94,257
Total investment:	£275,000

HITCHIN		
Location	Improvement	Budget
Hitchin Cemetery	Construction of Garden of Remembrance	£20,000
Purwell Recreation Ground	New entrance gate, signage, seating and planting	£25,000
Butts Close	Wetland conservation improvements	£30,000
Bancroft Recreation Ground	Water splash park	£160,000
Bancroft Recreation Ground	Toilet / baby changing for water splash park	£30,000
Bancroft Recreation Ground	Landscaping of four public tennis courts back to green space	£35,000
Bancroft Recreation Ground	Refurbished play area	£75,000
Bancroft Recreation Ground	Resurface pathways	£50,000
Bancroft Recreation Ground	Riverside improvements	£30,000
Smithsons Recreation Ground	Resurface pathways, seating and planting	£30,000
King George V Recreation Ground	Improvements to skate park	£20,000

The above works were achieved in Hitchin with:

Section 106 :	£203,743
NHDC's direct investment:	£301,257
Total Investment:	£505,000

BALDOCK		
Location	Improvement	Budget
Baldock Cemetery	Resurfacing of roadways and paths	£35,000
Bush Spring Play Area	Refurbished play area	£75,000

The above works were achieved in Baldock with:

Section 106:	£49,770
NHDC's direct investment:	£60,230
Total Investment:	£110,000

ROYSTON		
Location	Improvement	Budget
Royston Cemetery	Resurfacing of roadways and paths	£35,000
York Way	Outdoor fitness trail	£6,000
Priory Gardens	Water Splash Park	£160,000
Serby Ave Play Area	Refurbish play area	£75,000

The above works were achieved in Royston with:

Section 106:	£28,966
NHDC's direct investment:	£247,034
Total Investment:	£276,000

Gt. ASHBY		
Location	Improvement	Budget
District Park	Improve pathways and tree planting	£20,000

The above works were achieved in Great Ashby with:

Section 106:	£20,000
NHDC's direct investment:	£0
Total Investment:	£20,000

£483,000 Section 106 contributions were directed to the above projects to offset 41% of the Green Space invest of £1,186,000. The remaining £703,000 (59%) was funded from NHDC's own contributions.

6.2 EXTERNAL GRANTS APPLIED FOR

During the period 2014-2016 the following external grants were applied for:

Grant Body	Description	Value	Outcome
Parks for People Lottery Fund	Renovation of Bancroft Recreation Ground	£2,117,500	Rejected
Biffa Landfill fund	Riverside improvements Walsworth Common	£50,000	Rejected
Biffa Landfill fund	Improvements to play area Bush Springs Baldock	£50,000	Rejected

7.0 The Next Four Years

7.1 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 four years Local Councils have ever increasing financial constraints in providing services to local communities. In 2016 North Hertfordshire District Council adopted its 2016-2021 Corporate Plan. This is a high level strategic document that sets out the Council's ambitions and aspirations for the district.

The Council has identified the following three objectives for 2016 onwards:

- **To work with our partners to provide an attractive and safe environment for our residents, where diversity is welcomed and the disadvantaged are supported**

Examples Relevant to Green Space:

Working with partners such as the Countryside Management Services and Groundwork Hertfordshire to provide attractive accessible green spaces which are freely available for all to enjoy.

- **To promote sustainable growth within our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities, whilst remaining mindful of our cultural and physical heritage**

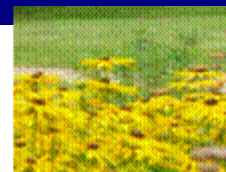
Examples Relevant to Green Space:

Natural England has drawn together a growing evidence base on ways the natural environment, including parks, can enhance the economic competitiveness of a particular region and increase employee productivity. Good parks also boost the tourist economy. Visit Britain has found that, of the 31 million tourists visiting Britain, over a third enjoy visiting a park or garden, making it one of the most popular activities (ranking above visiting a museum, castle, historic house or art gallery).

- **To ensure that the Council delivers cost effective and necessary services to our residents that are responsive to developing need and financial constraints**

Examples Relevant to Green Space:

Adoption of a Green Space Strategy that ensures green space investment is aligned with the principles of the Council's MTFS and maintains the quality and community benefit of our green space for current and future generations.



7.2 FUNDING SOURCES FOR 2017-2021

Funding for green space in North Hertfordshire is in four parts:

Grounds Maintenance Budgets

i. Revenue Expenditure

The Grounds Maintenance Contract sets the standards for the maintenance of our green space. £1.5 million revenue funding per annum 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 a 10 year performance monitored contract. Daily maintenance regimes include grass cutting, burials, horticultural and groundsmanship activities, litter clearance, dog bin collection, building cleaning as well as many others but chiefly maintaining the status quo.

ii. Capital budgets

The Council's decreasing Capital budget can still provide long term improvements to essential element of Green Space infrastructure. Capital budgets cannot be used for the maintenance of existing features but used for total refurbishments. The work is delivered through the strategies four year site specific action plans, totalling £1,205k, of which £396k is dependant on securing outsourced grants / developer contributions.

iii. Outsourced grants

Elements of the site specific action plan are dependant on securing £80k external grants to offset capital expenditure. However it should be noted that funding bodies such as the Football Foundation have cut public funding by £1.6m. The competition for smaller grants from Landfill tax has greatly increased and in the past 3 years the Council has failed to secure any grants from these schemes.

iv. Developer contributions

Elements of the site specific action plans are dependant on securing developers. However it should be noted that changes in planning guidance means this money may not be so readily available for future projects.

Cost Reductions

In light of a sustained period of national austerity, North Hertfordshire District Council has adopted its current Medium Term Financial Strategy which states:

“that it will not be able to continue to resource current levels of service given the ongoing scale and pace of funding cuts and will ensure that budget savings are identified to minimise the impact on frontline core services”.

The 2017-2021 Green Space Management Strategy recognises the importance of cost reductions and will work with external agencies in particular Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service along with the local community to try to secure external funding opportunities to supplement NHDC's capital investment programme for maintaining key elements of green space.

8.0 Planning Policy and Evidence

Development proposals can contribute to the provision and improvements to open space through on-site provision, planning conditions, planning obligations, or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Since April 2015 local authorities are no longer able to pool more than five Section 106 planning obligations to pay for a single infrastructure project. The Council is yet to take a corporate decision as to whether to take forward CIL.

The Council's emerging Local Plan contains proposals for significant growth in housing, which creates a demand for open space provision. In order to provide the evidence base for new open space provision the Council has undertaken a Playing Pitch Strategy (2015) ([insert link](#)) and the Open Spaces Review and Standards (2016) ([insert link](#)). These set the standards and level of open space provision required to meet the anticipated growth in the population. In both documents the agreed actions for the Council directly link to this Green Space Management Strategy.

The emerging policies in the Council's Local Plan set out where relevant development proposals will be expected to contribute towards open space provision in the District.¹ The Council's Open Space Standards set out the quantity of open space required based on different types of open space. It is acknowledged that some types of open space (e.g. outdoor sports facilities) can only realistically be delivered on a larger scale due to the amount of space that would be required and management arrangements. In exceptional circumstances (for example where the full amount of open space cannot realistically be delivered on-site) it may be acceptable for financial contributions to be provided towards the provision of new, or improvements to existing open space. The Council's emerging planning policies also make provision for facilities within open spaces where they are small scale and ancillary to the primary use.

For any new open spaces, long term management regimes should be demonstrated (such as private management companies secured through S106 Obligations), or arrangements made for a commuted sum to cover the cost of long term maintenance.

¹ Notwithstanding the open space standards, development proposals may be required to provide open space on-site, for instance to accord with other Local Plan policies and guidance, such as Policy D1 Sustainable Design, or to provide buffers or Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) for example.

9.0 What the Next Four Years of the Strategy Will Cover

NHDC's Green Space Management Strategy has been developed to ensure there is financial stability for green space managed by the Council over the next four years. It will need to be flexible to ensure maximum investment in green space is possible whilst accommodating the Council's 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, water splash park, bowling green, pavilion etc.

To align with the Councils 2016 Draft Local Plan 'Open Space Review document' and 'Playing Pitch Strategy' the green space across the district has been classified into the following types:

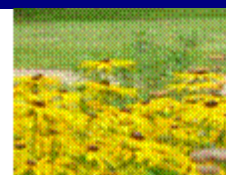
- Parks and Gardens
- Amenity Green Space
- Provision for Children and Young People (equipped play areas)
- Outdoor Sports Facilities
- Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space
- Green Corridors
- Cemeteries and Churchyards
- Allotments

9.1 PARKS & GARDENS

These are areas of land often located near town centres, designed, managed and maintained as a public park or garden. Often these sites are the most visited (see results of 2014 Citizen Panel) and should continue to be maintained to a high standard and be the focus for future investment. 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. With the exception of Bancroft Gardens / Recreation Ground in Hitchin these sites are currently in a relatively good condition and should require minimal additional investment within the next four years. In the case of Bancroft on the 16th December 2014 the Council resolved '*that a phased approach to deliver incremental affordable improvements to Bancroft Recreation Ground based on the principles outlined in the most recent version of the master plan set out in the report to Cabinet on 28 January 2014 be agreed, using Section 106 and other limited internal and external financial resources*'.

Policy for Parks & Gardens:

The Council's Town Centre Parks remain the highest priority for future investment and maintenance.



Actions for Parks & Gardens:

- To ensure there is adequate management by the Council and the contractor at these sites to ensure these facilities meet the needs of our communities within available budgets.
- To monitor condition of all Parks & Gardens and include essential improvement works in future capital bids funded from external grants and / or developer contributions.

9.2 AMENITY GREEN SPACE

These sites are often 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 that 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 greater range of facilities to Parks & Gardens, such as a number of sport pitches, equipped play areas youth facilities including skate parks as well as informal open space.

Policy for Amenity Green Space (including recreation spaces):

Retain intrinsic value of green space and trees. Within financial constraints provide adequate infrastructure for other activities.

Actions for Amenity Green Space (including recreation spaces):

- Retain maintenance budgets for grass cutting and tree work.
- Reduce funding for infrastructure that has a lower community value (*see 9.3 provision for children and young people & 9.4 outdoor sports facilities*)
- Monitor condition of retained infrastructure such as paths, fences, games areas etc. and undertake essential health and safety works as and when required.

9.3 PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE / PLAY AREAS

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. It should be noted that children's play and social interaction is not confined to equipped play areas alone. Play England endorse the importance of play in the wider natural environment as opposed to play in small fenced in equipped formal play areas.

If the current investment level continues there will be insufficient funds to maintain all NHDC's 47 equipped play areas. This will lead to a gradual decline in all play areas. Those play areas which are well used and valued most by the community such as town centre parks, however will be the first to wear out and require decommissioning, while other sites that are little used and have limited play value will survive and continue to command ongoing revenue expenditure for maintenance. For example Howard Park play area in Letchworth, which has high community value and receives high use, will wear out much quicker than a play area located in a small housing estate serving only a few residents. Both however have ongoing revenue direct cost.

In May 2016 surveys of all NHDC's 47 play areas were undertaken. The level of wear around items of equipment was recorded and converted into anticipated use i.e. the higher the wear the greater the use. It is accepted that the survey work undertaken does not provide scientific evidence of the use of each play areas but it identified that in general the larger play area sites have much more use than smaller play areas.

NHDC did investigate installing CCTV at play areas to record the level of use but were advised that due to data protection issues this was not possible; we therefore adopted the level of wear approach as a viable alternative.

The results of NHDC's Citizen Panel focus groups on green space clearly demonstrate that residents valued all play areas large with high use and smaller sites with lower use and would like the Council to look at alternative ways to retain all play areas.

As previously stated recognising that the Council will not be able to continue to resource current levels of service given the ongoing scale and pace of funding cuts. Therefore a strategic approach is being adopted to best enable the possible retention of all 47 of the Councils equipped play areas within available budgets.

Currently NHDC provide and maintain play areas in Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock, Royston and Great Ashby. In NHDC's Parishes the Parish Council has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of children's play areas.

NHDC's play areas have categorized into the following groups:

1. Large play areas that the Council will maintain and endeavour to provide full Capital investment to refurbish approximately every fifteen years. (14 sites).
2. Local neighbourhood play area that the Council will maintain and endeavour to provide limited capital investment to replace individual items of play equipment when they wear out. (20 sites).
3. Local neighbourhood play areas identified as low use that prior to removing equipment from the Council shall allow a period of one year for interested parties to put forward sustainable proposals that would fund both the capital and revenue requirements to safely continue to provide such facilities.
4. (13 sites).

This four year strategy allocates £340,000 for improvements to children's play areas. Ground Work Hertfordshire are contracted to deliver our improvement programme and for each project they will endeavour to secure additional funding to increase the project value.

Policy for Provision for Children and Young People:

Work with partners to maintain an adequate provision of play areas for North Hertfordshire.

Actions for Children and Young People / Play Areas:

Listed below are detailed actions for each of the 47 play areas currently managed by NHDC. In summary the actions are:

PLAY AREA INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Provide full Capital investment and maintain:

- 5 large play areas in Hitchin
- 3 large play areas in Letchworth
- 2 large play areas in Baldock
- 3 large play areas in Royston
- 1 large play area in Gt. Ashby

Provide limited Capital investment and maintain:

- 5 neighbourhood play areas in Hitchin
- 6 neighbourhood play areas in Letchworth
- 2 neighbourhood play areas in Baldock
- 3 neighbourhood play areas in Royston
- 4 neighbourhood play areas in Gt. Ashby

Transfer the asset to third parties or remove equipment from:

- 3 neighbourhood play areas in Hitchin,
- 3 neighbourhood play areas in Letchworth
- 1 less used neighbourhood play areas in Baldock
- 2 less used neighbourhood play areas in Royston
- 4 less used neighbourhood play areas Gt. Ashby

Detailed actions for Provision for Play Areas:

Green	Large play areas that the Council will maintain and endeavour to provide full Capital investment in to refurbish approximately every fifteen years. (14 sites)
Amber	Local neighbourhood play area that the Council will maintain and endeavour to provide limited capital investment to replace individual items of play equipment when they wear out. (20 sites)
Red	Local neighbourhood play areas identified as low use that the Council shall allow a period of one year (until March 2018) for interested parties to put forward sustainable proposals that would fund both the capital and revenue requirements to safely continue to provide such facilities. (13 sites)

Town	Site	Size	Usage	Notes
Royston	Betjeman Road	Small	Low	Limited wear around equipment. Close to larger Serby Avenue play area. Very limited amenity value.
Royston	Meridian	Medium	Medium	Play area serving large housing estate but on fringe of town.
Royston	Newmarket Rd	Large	High	Toddler and senior play areas serving large housing estates. Currently located on fringe of town but adjacent land shortly to be developed for new large housing estate.

Town	Site	Size	Usage	Notes
Royston	Priory Gardens	Large	High	Large town centre play area. Main play area for all Royston residents.
Royston	Serby Avenue	Large	Medium	Centrally located play area serving large housing estates.
Royston	Studlands Rise	Medium	Medium	Small play area serving local residents.
Royston	York Way	Medium	Medium	Play area serving housing estate but located on fringe of town.
Royston	Farriar Court	Small	Low	Little or no wear to surfacing around equipment. Very limited catchment area only for very local residents. Very limited amenity value. Suggest possible hand over of amenity space for residents / Royston Town Council to maintain.
Royston	Ivy farm	Medium	Low	Play area serving housing estate but located on fringe of town. However future housing development is planned in this area.
Baldock	Avenue Park	Large	High	Main town centre park serving all residents.
Baldock	Bush Springs	Large	High	Only play area for large housing development away from main town.
Baldock	Chiltern Road	Medium	Medium	Medium sized play area serving local residents.
Baldock	Holroyd Cres	Medium	Medium	Large play area serving large housing development.
Baldock	Ivel Road	Medium	Low	Limited access and catchment area for site. Old equipment with little sign of use.
Hitchin	Bancroft Recreation Ground	Large	High	Main town centre play area currently under refurbishment.
Hitchin	Broadmead	Medium	Medium	Good catchment area for housing estate
Hitchin	Brook View	Medium	Medium	Limited catchment area close to Broadmead. Old equipment.
Hitchin	Dacre Road	Small	Low	Small site with limited catchment. Old equipment with little sign of use.
Hitchin	King George V	Large	High	Large play area with good catchment area.

Town	Site	Size	Usage	Notes
Hitchin	Purwell Recreation Ground	Large	High	Large play area with good range of equipment serving large housing development.
Hitchin	Ransoms Recreation Ground	Large	High	Large play area recently refurbished in one of the towns main recreation grounds.
Hitchin	Rosehill	Medium	Low	Limited access to the site little sign of use of equipment.
Hitchin	Smithsons Recreation Ground	Medium	High	Play area for west side of Hitchin. Equipment mainly for younger children
Hitchin	St Johns Recreation Ground	Medium	High	Well used play area by local residents.
Hitchin	Symons Rd	Small	Low	Aging equipment with little signs of use. Very limited catchment area.
Hitchin	Walsworth Common	Large	High	Large play area recently refurbished in one of the towns main recreation grounds.
Letchworth	Baldock Road Recreation Ground	Large	Medium	Good range of equipment for all ages but limited catchment area.
Letchworth	Grange Central	Medium	Medium	Equipment for younger children. Good catchment area in centre of housing estate.
Letchworth	Grange Recreation Ground	Large	High	Main play area for Grange Estate.
Letchworth	Hillbrow Rec	Medium	Medium	Poor catchment area located on edge of housing estate. Consider possible relocation to more central location.
Letchworth	Howard Park	Large	High	Town centre location with very high use.
Letchworth	Jackmans Central	Large	Medium	Main play area for large housing estate. Lower than expected use may be caused by poor equipment. Due for refurbishment in 2017.
Letchworth	Jackmans Recreation Ground	Medium	Low	Not centrally located with equipment for younger children. Little signs of much use.
Letchworth	Linnet	Small	Low	Very limited catchment area. Equipment only

Town	Site	Size	Usage	Notes
	Close			for younger children. Consider alternative use of site.
Letchworth	Norton Common	Large	Medium	Range of equipment for all ages.
Letchworth	Oaktree Close	Small	Low	Very limited catchment area. Equipment only for younger children in small private development.
Letchworth	Temple Rec	Medium	Medium	Good catchment area. Range of equipment for all ages.
Letchworth	Wilbury Recreation Ground	Medium	Medium	Good catchment area with range of equipment for all ages.
Gt. Ashby	District Park	Large	High	Main play area for GT. Ashby.
Gt. Ashby	Chilterns	LAP	Low	Very small play with little sign of use. Within catchment area of larger play area.
Gt. Ashby	Cleveland Way	LAP	Low	Small play area with limited signs of use. Within catchment area of larger play area.
Gt. Ashby	Fairfield Cres	LAP	Low	Small play area with limited signs of use. Within catchment area of larger play area.
Gt. Ashby	Foyle Close	LEAP	Medium	Medium sized play area used by local residents.
Gt. Ashby	Mendip Way	LEAP	Low	Medium sized play area used by local residents. Low usage possibly due to poor selection of equipment. Retain if Chilterns play area has equipment removed.
Gt. Ashby	Merrick Close	LAP	Low	Very small play with limited signs of use. Within catchment area of larger play area.
Gt. Ashby	Quantock Close	LEAP	Medium	Medium sized play area with good range of equipment.
Gt. Ashby	Snowdon Way	LEAP	Medium	Medium sized play area serving local residents.

9.4 OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES

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

Sport England has recognised that nationally football played on grass pitches in parks is in decline. There is a growing trend for games to be played on artificial turf pitches or indoors in sport centres. Some Councils have already removed their football pitches. Currently NHDC has 24 football pitches. The use of pitches varies on a site by site basis with some sites receiving little use. The cost to maintain a football pitch is £450 per year. Therefore there is only the potential to make small revenue savings by removing pitches.

Football Pavilions that are only used by a small percentage of the community and are in a poor state of repair can give the whole park a feeling of neglect and disrepair. Their removal and landscaping back to green space can enhance the appearance of the whole site and adjoining neighbourhood. Currently NHDC has seven football pavilions. Pavilions are normally only used for a few hours each weekend during the football season. Pavilions have an ongoing revenue cost and many of our current buildings require significant capital investment if they are to be retained. Four of the seven pavilions have been assessed as being beyond economic repair. Prior to the potential demolition of these pavilions it is proposed to seek opportunities for assets to be transferred into community ownership

In respect to wheeled sports, tennis courts, MUGA's, bowling greens etc. in general it is proposed to retain the existing provision without developing further.

Policy for Outdoor Sports Facilities:

Retain adequate key green space sporting facilities to meet the needs of the local community within available budgets.

Actions for Provision for Outdoor Sports Facilities:

- Monitor level of use of football pitches at smaller sites and if supply exceeds demand aim to reduce number of pitches accordingly linking provision with planning guidance.
- Subject to Section 106 contributions create a new large hub site for football at Walsworth Common, Hitchin by increasing the number of pitches.
- Close pavilions identified as being beyond economic repair (Bakers Close, Baldock. St. Johns Road, Cadwell Lane and Walsworth Common, Hitchin. Prior to removing pavilions allow a period of time until March 2018 for interested parties to put forward sustainable proposals that would fund both the capital and revenue requirements to safely continue to provide such facilities.
- Endeavour to provide new football pavilion at Walsworth Common, Hitchin.
- Following construction of new Walsworth pavilion close pavilions at Swinburn and Ransoms Recreation Grounds. Allow a period of one year for interested parties to put forward sustainable proposals that would fund both the capital and revenue requirements to safely continue to provide such facilities.
- If not transferred within one year of construction of new Walsworth pavilion, demolish pavilions.
- Not to develop further the provision of wheeled sports, tennis courts, MUGA's, bowling greens etc. With the exception of the agreed master plan to refurbish Bancroft Recreation Ground, Hitchin which aims to secure external funding to provide a new Multi Use Games Area.

9.5 NATURAL AND SEMI-NATURAL GREEN SPACE

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 in partnership with the Countryside Management Service conservation management plans have been developed which volunteers play a key role in delivering. The key sites have also obtained Local Nature Reserve status.

Policy for Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces:

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

Actions for Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces:

- Agree annual work programmes with the Countryside Management Services.
- Produce 5 year Green Space Action Plans for key sites.

9.6 GREEN CORRIDORS

These include smaller highway verges along with larger 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 and for wildlife migration.

Policy for Green Corridors:

To support key partnership such as the Hertfordshire County Council Highway Authority, Countryside Management Service and work with stakeholders to provide habitat and recreational improvements to green space.

Actions for Green Corridors:

- Continue with contractual arrangement with Hertfordshire County Council to maintain quality of highway grass verges and trees.
- Agree annual work programmes with the Countryside Management Services for sites that are of high biodiversity and / or recreational importance.

9.7 CEMETERIES AND CHURCHYARDS

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 to meet the current and future needs for the district.

Policy for Cemeteries and Churchyards:

To expand and invest in Wilbury Hills as the district wide cemetery.

Actions for Cemeteries and Churchyards:

- Open up new sections of Wilbury Hills Cemetery by extending network of roads.
- Work in partnership with the Countryside Management Service to review the management of the district's historic cemeteries with an aim to improving biodiversity.

9.8 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. Royston Town Council is responsible for the provision of allotments in Royston. The allotment function in Baldock has been transferred to the Allotment Association. NHDC have retained allotments in Letchworth and Hitchin.

Policy for Allotments:

To provide a cost neutral provision of allotments.

Actions for Allotments:

- Promote the benefits of allotments

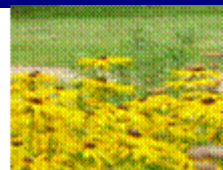
9.9 PARISH COUNCILS

Facilities in parishes are provided and maintained by Parish Councils. Within available resources NHDC will continue to offer help and guidance for improvements to parish green spaces.

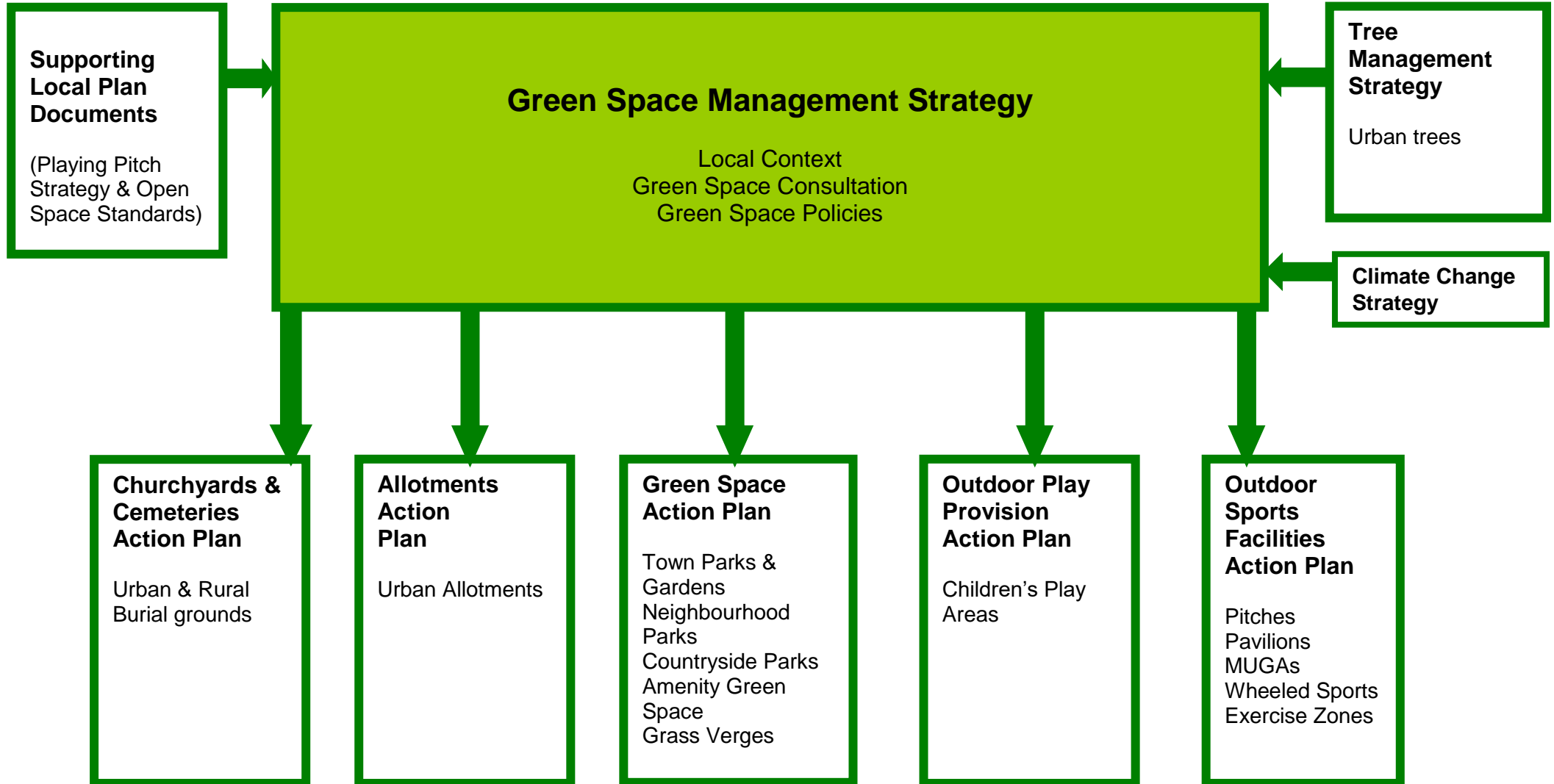
10.0 Green Space Action Plans

The action plans for the next four years provide a focused investment programme that focus on retaining the key elements of green space that are most valued by our local communities. The action plans rely heavily on partnership working with Groundwork Hertfordshire and the Countryside Management Service for their delivery and securing external funding.

The following flow chart identifies how the Green Space Policies flow into the Action Plans:



10.1 Green Space Management Strategy Flow Chart



11.0 Investment Programme 2017 – 2021

Listed below is a summary of the investment programme for the next four years. These will be subject to annual review by the Council and dependant on the financial situation of the council may have to be reviewed.

11.1 CHURCHYARD & CEMETERY ACTION PLAN

Description	Project Detail	Year	NHDC Capital
Construction of pathway and roadway, Wilbury Hills Cemetery, Letchworth	Required as cemetery expands into new sections. Meets a district wide need.	2018/19	£35,000
		Total	£35,000

11.2 ALLOTMENTS ACTION PLAN

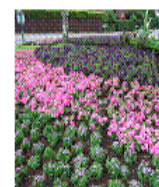
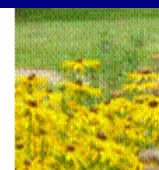
Maintain allotment provision at zero cost to the Council.

11.3 GREEN SPACE ACTION PLAN

Description	Project Detail	Year	NHDC Capital
Tarmac car park, Walsworth Common, Hitchin	Existing car park in very poor condition. Additional parking will be required when pitch number increases and site becomes the Hitchin hub for football.	2017/18	£30,000
		Total	£30,000

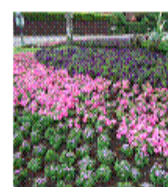
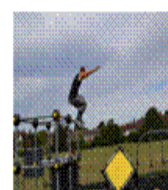
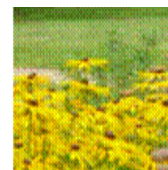
11.4 OUTDOOR PLAY PROVISION ACTION PLAN

Description	Project Detail	Year	NHDC Capital
Renovate play area, Jackmans Central, Letchworth	Large play areas in Letchworth serving large housing estate. In need of refurbishment.	2017/18	£75,000
Replace items of equipment, Brook View, Hitchin	Timber items of equipment worn and in need of replacing.	2017/18	£10,000
Renovate play area, District Park, Gt. Ashby	Main play area for Gt. Ashby in need of refurbishment.	2018/19	£75,000
Replace items of play equipment, Chiltern Road, Baldock	Some items recently removed and in need of replacement.	2018/19	£10,000
*Decommission play areas	Remove equipment from 13 play areas and return to green space.	2018/19	£130,000
Renovate play area King George V Recreation Ground, Hitchin	One of the main neighbourhood play areas in Hitchin serving large housing estate. In need of refurbishment.	2019/20	£75,000
Replace items of play	Some items of equipment	2019/20	£10,000



Description	Project Detail	Year	NHDC Capital
equipment Wilbury Recreation Ground, Letchworth	nearing end of life and in need of replacement.		
Renovate play area Howard Park, Letchworth	Town centre play with heavy use which causes wear on equipment.	2020/21	£75,000
Replace items of play equipment Holroyd Cres, Baldock	Some items of equipment nearing end of life and in need of replacement	2020/21	£10,000
		Total	£470,000

* Only required for sites not transferred to third parties.



11.5 OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES ACTION PLAN

Description	Project Detail	Year	NHDC Capital
*Pitch improvements, Walsworth Common, Hitchin	Main football site in Hitchin. Intention to level ground and provide two additional pitches. £20k is capital contribution towards £102,760 project funded by section 106 contributions.	2017/18	£20,000
*Multi Use games area, Bancroft Rec, Hitchin	Capital contribution of £24k towards £170k Multi Use Games Area. Remainder to be funded by section 106 & external grant.	2017/18	£24,000
**Decommission 4 pavilions identified as beyond economic repair and return to green space	Bakers Close, Baldock. St. Johns Road, Cadwell Lane & Walsworth Common, Hitchin.	2018/19	£120,000
*New changing rooms, Walsworth Common, Hitchin	Main football site in Hitchin. £300,000 scheme funded by £50K Capital contribution & section 106 contributions / external grants.	2020/21	£50,000
**Decommission pavilions	Following construction of new Walsworth Common pavilion, decommission Swinburn & Ransoms pavilions and return to green space.	2020/21	£60,000
		Total	£274,000

NHDC's Total four year Capital investment £809,000

* Project is dependant on securing section 106 contributions and or external grants

** Only required if pavilions not transferred into community ownership.

(NHDC's capital investment for all projects may be reduced if additional section 106/ CIL contributions can be secured)



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