

Watford Borough Council

Green Spaces Strategy

January 2007 – March 2012

Introduction from Mayor

Dorothy Thornhill

To be added following consideration and adoption of the Strategy by Cabinet.

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1. Strategy Aims and Objectives

The aim of the Strategy is:

To provide green spaces to be proud of, which will benefit the whole community, improving health, well being and quality of life.

The objectives of the strategy are:

- To identify the issues and aspirations of residents, partners and users.
- To provide clear policies for the provision of Green Spaces.
- To provide clear policies for the management of Green Spaces.
- To produce a clear action plan to address the issues and aspirations identified in the study.
- To inform the production of the Council's Local Development Framework in terms of open space policies.
- To provide a comprehensive analysis of open space.
- To set local area standards of qualitative and quantitative provision of open space for each of the PPG17 typologies of open space.
- To identify areas of deficiency in each typology and prioritise policy and future investment to address these deficiencies.

2. Local Character and Area Profile

Watford is situated in the Eastern region of England on the northern edge of London. The borough is geographically small, covering an area of 2136 hectares (8.25 square miles). It is predominantly urban in nature although the Gade Valley, Colne Valley and Cassiobury Parks provide open space and nature resources.

It is a densely populated borough with a population of 79,300 (2004 mid year statistics) of which 79.1% of the population are white British and 20.9% are from other ethnic groups.

Watford itself is the retail and entertainment centre for the area and a major transport hub which has led to traffic congestion becoming a significant problem for the borough. The borough is relatively prosperous and has a low level of unemployment (1.8 per cent compared to the national average of 4.4 per cent) although there are some pockets of deprivation that have attracted European Development Funds.

Watford ranks 223 out of 354 districts on the indices of deprivation, where position one is the most deprived area in the country and number 354 the least deprived. (Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2004).

Watford borough was granted a Royal Charter in 1922.

The Council is led by a directly elected Liberal Democrat mayor (elected in May 2002) supported by a Cabinet with three scrutiny panels. The Council has 36 Councillors and the directly elected Mayor. (29 Liberal Democrats (including the Mayor), 3 Conservatives, 3 Green 1 Labour and 1 Independent.)

3. Methodology

Background information

An extensive range of desk top/background information has been reviewed, including the relevant national and local strategies, policies and action plans.

Demographic data was collected from the Office of National Statistics web site and analysed at Super Output Area level. Super Output Areas (SOAs) are a new geographic hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics, which were introduced nationally in February 2004. The areas are of consistent size and their boundaries will not change. There are 53 SOAs within Watford and 32,482 in England in total.

Green Space Identification and Analysis

A database has been created to identify all Green Spaces within the Borough of Watford, as well as those outside of the Borough boundaries that provide for Watford residents. The database includes data on size, location, ownership, access, quality and typology. The database has been analysed at ward level at this stage, but a spatial study will be completed as part of the strategy action plan. A spatial study maps the areas of deficiency much more accurately than a ward area analysis.

The quality of Green Spaces was evaluated through the use of an assessment proforma, examining the security, location, condition and proximity of the sites. The criteria are based upon the Green Flag Award standards.

Play areas were visited and provided with designations in line with National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standards and equipped play areas were measured as part of this assessment. The quality of play areas were assessed through a specific play analysis sheet, based upon NPFA guidelines.

Street Survey

A street survey was undertaken by MRUK during November and December 2004. The street survey provides an overview of user and non users' views on the provision of open spaces within Watford.

Community Consultation

An extensive community consultation has been undertaken by consultants, Knight, Kavanagh and Page (KKP) and Borough Officers. A community partner workshop was held at the Colosseum on 22nd September 2005 to which 63 community groups contributed. Additionally, focus groups and interviews were held with our partners, other statutory services, friends groups, Councillors and Borough Officers to discuss and determine the key issues and service priorities for the future.

A full list of consultees and focus groups is included in the appendices to this strategy.

Development of the Strategy

The Strategy was developed and written by the Green Spaces project team with assistance being sought from specialists in other areas as required. The team reviewed all the data and information collated during the research stages and wrote the strategy following the CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) guidance on producing Green Space Strategies. The members of the project team are Dave Cobb, Paul Burgess, Chrissie Cassidy-Wilms, Ian Mather, Dave Jenkins and John Priestley, all officers in the Leisure and Community Services department involved with Green Spaces issues.

4. Strategic Context

In developing a Green Spaces Strategy for Watford we have considered and brought together both national and local factors that provide a framework for the strategy and influence our way forward.

4.1 Overview of Relevant National Policies and Initiatives.

Over the last few years, the Government has expressed concern about the loss of open space, sport and recreation facilities and has introduced policies and national guidance to address this. The importance of green space has been highlighted as a critical element in creating sustainable communities by the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce report (2002) which stresses the importance of assessing open spaces in terms of accessibility, quality and quantity.

Other policies and strategies relating to open spaces have also been developed by various government departments and external agencies, which demonstrate the breadth of issues open space development covers. The policies also provide a broad framework to influence open space initiatives. Below is a list of relevant strategies.

- PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002)
- DTLR: Urban Greens Spaces Taskforce, Neighbourhood Renewal
- DTLR: Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, Green Spaces Better Places (2001)
- DCMS: Local Cultural Strategies
- DfES: Protection of School Playing Fields, Consultation on revision of Circular No: 3/99
- Urban Parks Forum: Public Parks Assessment
- New Urban Landscape Transnational Programme
- Rural White Paper, Our Countryside: the Future A Fair Deal for Rural England. (2000)
- Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A companion guide to PPG17 (2002).
- DEFRA: Strategy for Sustainable Development
- CABESpace: The Value of Public Space

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

The revised Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (PPG17), published in 2002, advises local planning authorities to provide the strongest protection for open space, to resist development pressures that could diminish recreational provision and to adopt a strategic approach to the provision and protection of sports facilities. PPG17 identifies the requirement for all local authorities to assess the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sport and recreational facilities.

The Parks Assessment Report (2001)

The Parks Assessment 2001 report, written by the Urban Parks Forum, is the first attempt at a comprehensive statistical analysis of open space issues. It demonstrates a continued decline in the quality of open spaces on a national basis:

- 82% of the population does not have access to good quality parks.
- 32% of historic urban parks are declining from fair to poor condition.
- Provision of basic visitor facilities like toilets and shelters has declined by over 25% in the last twenty years.

Wasted Space, CABE (2003)

The Urban Green Spaces Task Force recommends a strategic approach to improve parks and green spaces. CABE Space was created to fill this strategic gap.

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'CABE aims to inspire and support everyone who is working to make the most of our public spaces'.

Urban Green Task Force research demonstrates the need for open spaces assessments of this kind and investment in public spaces. Public polls conducted by MORI Social Research Institute reveal that urban green space is a popular emotive issue.

Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener: A response from the Urban Parks Forum

The report seeks to establish parks and green spaces as an integral element of public space and the built environment. The Urban Parks Forum believes that the creation of cross cutting opportunities will justify parks gaining a greater share of financial resources, allowing parks to fulfil a central role in their communities.

4.2 Overview of Relevant Local Policies and Initiatives.

Community Plan

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), who have adopted the title of One Watford have produced a new Community Plan for 2006-2026. The vision for the Community Plan is:

'A town to be proud of, where people will always choose to live, work and visit'

The objectives of the Plan are:

- **a town with a high quality environment**
- **a safer town**
- **a healthy town**
- **a good town for business, skills and learning**
- **a well-informed community where everyone can contribute**
- **a town to be proud of**

Watford Borough Council Corporate Objectives

Watford Borough Council has adopted the six One Watford objectives as corporate objectives and have added one additional objective specifically for the Council:

- **An efficient, effective, value for money Council**

Watford Borough Council: District Plan

The Watford District Plan 2000 (WDP2000) sets out the Council's policies and proposals for the development of land in the Borough. Objectives within the plan that are relevant to the Open Space Assessment include:

- 9.4.1. To support the provision and development of a range of high quality and accessible leisure opportunities throughout the Borough.
- 9.4.2. To ensure a more equitable provision and distribution of open spaces accessible to all.
- 9.4.3. To ensure the retention of allotment land for horticultural purposes or other uses compatible with its status as open space. Such uses include wildlife areas, leisure gardens and orchards.

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There are a range of policies that relate to the protection of open space, including playing fields, parks, children's play areas and allotments. Reference should be made to WDP2000 policies L4 to L12. These seek to:

- protect private or public open space from development for any other use;
- secure additional open space, especially in areas identified as having a deficiency of open space, as part of new developments through planning obligations or conditions, particularly where the development would lead to an increase in demand for open space;
- encourage dual use of open spaces, such as school playing fields, where appropriate;
- provide "pocket parks" on development sites greater than 0.2ha;
- provide open space and children's play space in new housing developments in accordance with accepted standards (NPFA);
- secure funds through planning obligations for the maintenance of open spaces and play areas; and
- protect allotments, and where they become redundant, seek their re-use for other forms of open space before considering other uses.

Local Area Agreements

Hertfordshire Forward, the strategic partnership for Hertfordshire, has negotiated a Local Area Agreement (LAA) with local partners, including One Watford, and central government. This agreement allows areas to focus on a core set of outcomes and use funding streams with more freedom to be able to spend money on local priorities. The agreement runs for three years until 2009.

The four block areas are:

- Healthier Communities and older people
- Safer and stronger communities
- Economic development and enterprise
- Children and young people

Some targets that relate to the outcomes have pump-priming funding attached, with a reward available at the end of the three year period for meeting 'stretched' targets.

The safer and stronger communities block contains targets for the improvement of Green Spaces across Hertfordshire which is measured by the achievement of the Green Flag award. The County stretch target for Green Flags is fifteen, with Watford potentially achieving up to four green flag awards.

The pump priming funding for the Green Flag target will be used to provide training and support to the Districts applying for Green Flags. Should we be successful in achieving the stretch targets, the financial reward will be paid to One Watford to direct to their priorities for action.

Updates on the Local Area Agreements can be found at ?? (web address to be included before publication)

A 'Community Safety Strategy 2005/08'

We work with the 'Watford Community Safety Partnership'. The strategy has six priorities:

- Reduce Crime,
- Reduce the Effects of Substance Misuse,
- Making the Town Safer,

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- Challenging Crimes of Hate & Domestic Violence,
- Tackling Anti- social Behaviour,
- Reduce fear of Crime

Key partners are Herts.Constabulary, Herts. County Council, Herts. Fire & Rescue Service, Herts. Police Authority, **Watford & Three Rivers Primary Care Trust**

Watford's Cultural Strategy

This Green Spaces strategy is part of the overarching Cultural Strategy for the Borough. Public consultation is being undertaken during summer 2006 on the draft priorities for action for the Cultural Strategy and a strategy is expected to be adopted before the end of 2006.

5. Supply Analysis

5.1 Identification of Green Spaces and their Functions

To develop this strategy each Green Space has been classified into one of the nine typologies listed below. These typologies are those recommended by the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the document: *Assessing Needs and Opportunities: Planning Policy Guidance 17 Companion Guide*.

Parks and Gardens

Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events.

Natural and Semi-natural Greenspaces, including Urban Woodland.

Wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.

Green Corridors

Walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel, and opportunities for wildlife migration.

Outdoor Sports Facilities

Participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics or countryside and water sports.

Amenity Greenspace

Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.

Provision for Children and Young People

Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, ball courts, skateboard areas and teenage shelters.

Allotments, Community Gardens and Urban Farms.

Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion.

Cemeteries, Disused Churchyards and Other Burial Grounds.

Quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

Civic and Market Squares and Hard Surfaced Areas Designed for Pedestrians

Providing a setting for civic buildings, public demonstrations and community events.

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5.2 Definition of Existing Provision Based on Appropriate Green Space Typology

Listed below are the existing spaces that have been identified in this study.

Parks and Gardens	Natural and Semi Natural Green Spaces	Children and Young People
Cassiobury Park Woodside Playing Fields Lea Farm Recreation Ground Leavesden Green Rec Grd Meriden Park Munden Drive Harebreaks Rec Ground Goodwood Rec Ground Cheslyn Gardens Callowland Rec Ground Knutsford Playing Fields Radlett Road Playing Fields Waterfields Rec Ground Watford Fields Rec Ground Oxhey Park Oxhey Village Green Riverside Road Rec Ground Harwoods Rec Ground King George V Playing Fields Garston Park Cassio Common North Watford Playing Fields Oxhey Grange Grange Park Stanborough Park	Harebreaks Wood LNR Cassiobury Park LNR Whippendell Wood (SSSI) Alban Woods LNR Garston LNR Buryfield Nature Garden Lairage Land LNR Nth Watford Cem Woodland Russell Lane Wood Green Bank Wood Willow Lane	Meriden Park Meriden Comm Cent Meriden Gadswell Close Woodside PF Upper Woodside PF Lower Boundary Way (Throstle) Boundary Way (Robin) Boundary Way (Magpie) Garston Park Woodside Comm Cent Aspen Park Drive Lea Farm Edward Amey Close East Drive Fern Way Leavesden Green Rec Ridgehurst Avenue Hill Farm Meriden Park Youth Shelter Garston Park Youth Shelter Callowland Rec North Watford PF Goodwood Rec Harebreaks Rec Courtlands Close St Johns Road Stamford Road(Nascot) Norbury Avenue Monica Close Knutsford PF Southwold Road Waterfields Rec Foxhill Central Primary School Estcourt Road Berry Avenue Harebreaks Youth Shelter Skate Park Riverside Rec Oxhey Green Oxhey Park Watford Fields Chater School Harwoods Rec King George V Croxley View Chiltern Pines Redding House Cassiobury Park (Pools) Cassiobury Park (Tea Pavillion) Himalayan Way Jellico Road Stripling Way Riverside Park (Play) Riverside Park (Skate/Kick) Riverside Rec Youth Shelter Harwoods Adventure PG Harebreaks Adventure PG

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Outdoor Sports	Cemeteries and Churchyards	Civic Spaces
School playing fields West Herts golf course Bromet School School's playing field Playing field, Watford Grammar School for Girls By Watford Boys' Grammar School Sports Ground Sports ground in 'other' ownership West Herts College Playing Fields Chater Juniors ATP Central Primary Sch MUGA Fullarians ATP Westfield ATP Watford LC ATP The Gardens Tennis Club Sun Postal Sports Ground	Vicarage Road cemetery North Watford cemetery St Mary's Church	Library Square The Parade High Street Charter Place Queens Road St Mary's Square Vicarage Road Precinct

Green Corridors	Allotments	Amenity Greenspace
Green corridor 1 Green corridor 2 Green corridor 3 Green corridor 4 Green corridor 5 Green corridor 6 Green corridor 7 Green corridor 8 Green corridor 9 Green corridor 10 Green corridor 11 Green corridor 12 Green corridor 13 Green corridor 14 Green corridor 15 Green corridor 16 Green corridor 17 Green corridor 18 Green corridor 19 Green corridor 20 Green corridor 21 Green corridor 22 Green corridor 23 Green corridor 24 Green corridor 25 Green corridor 26 NB. These are the green corridors identified in the district plan. They will be named to ease interpretation as part of the spatial study.	Callowland allotments Chester Road allotments Holywell Farm allotments Brightwell Allotments Rose Gardens Allotments Farm Terrace allotments Oxhey Grange allotments Briar Road allotments Cherry Tree Allotments Tavistock Road Allotments Timberlake Allotments Wigenhall Allotments Paddock Road Allotments	Dell Side – housing o/s Thrums – housing o/s Valley Rise – housing o/s Stud Green – housing o/s Weall Green - housing o/s Cobb Green - housing o/s Hope Green - housing o/s Greenbanks St Mary's Off Tolpits Lane South of Cassio College North of Cassio College Off Croxley View By Kytes Drive East of Greenbank Road, around Mulberry Close Leggatts Way Watford Heath, off Pinner rd Behind St Anthony's Primary Westfield School North Croxley View Glen Way open space Ash Close woodland Lea Farm open space Colne Valley Colne Valley nr Cardiff Road By Caxton Way Gade Valley area Colne Valley area Colne Valley area Gade Valley Gade Valley, Leavesden Off High Road, Leavesden Old Pit Canterbury Road Pocket Park Grange Close OS Lingfield Way Croxley View OS West Herts College Frontage

5.3 Quantitative Audit and Assessment of Existing Provision

The table below shows the accessible open spaces that have been identified in the study. Open spaces that are not accessible to the general public have been excluded from this table, as the study is seeking to identify the amount of open space that is available for local residents to use.

Ward	Accessible Open Space (Hectares)
Callowland	5.25
Central	18.51
Holywell	46.51
Leggatts	25.56
Meriden	25.53
Nascot	14.51
Oxhey	14.38
Park	100.53
Stanborough	40.53
Tudor	6.78
Vicarage	11.33
Woodside	27.57

The study has been analysed on a ward by ward basis, which begins to give an indication of the issues, but does not reflect the true catchment areas of open spaces. Catchment areas will span across wards, so the benefit of open space in neighbouring wards is not shown in this table. Also, within wards there can be physical barriers such as major roads and railway lines that actually make some open spaces relatively inaccessible to people in that ward.

A spatial mapping exercise will be completed to accurately map the catchment areas of green spaces and identify the areas of deficiency (those households who are not within the catchment of accessible, quality open space). The spatial study will take each individual open space and plot its unique catchment area. Once all the catchment areas are plotted and overlaid, the areas that have little or no access to open space will be clearly identified. This will be completed by June 2007 and used to determine the open space policy of the new Local Development Framework (the new District Plan).

There are a number of sites that Watford Borough Council manages that are outside of the boundaries of the Borough. These sites are: Whippendell Wood (totally within Three Rivers BC, although owned by Watford BC); Paddock Road Allotments (partially within Three Rivers DC); Paddock Road Nursery (totally within Three Rivers DC); Ridgehurst Avenue Playground (totally within Three Rivers DC) and Oxhey Grange (partially within Three Rivers DC). The future management of these sites will be considered once the areas of deficiency have been identified.

5.4 Playing Field Audit

An initial review of playing fields was undertaken by consultants as part of this strategy, however, following consultation with the football league a number of omissions and errors were identified.

A playing pitch strategy needs to be based upon a comprehensive audit of all clubs and pitches available within the Borough and further work will be undertaken to complete this audit.

The provision of changing accommodation also needs to be accurately assessed, as modern league and governing body requirements generally require the provision of separate, home, away and referees changing rooms for each pitch. The current provision within the Borough falls well below these standards with a number of pitches having no changing provision at all.

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5.5 Assessment of Existing Capital and Revenue Funding of Green Space.

Watford Borough Council provides a significant level of revenue funding for parks and open spaces, which currently stands at £2,004,028 per annum for 2006/07.

The provision of quality Green Spaces is a high priority for Watford Council, as Green Spaces make a significant contribution to the Council's Corporate Objectives and the quality of life of its residents. The Council is committed to achieving value for money and to modernising services to meet modern standards.

The revenue funds in 2005/06 are allocated to the following areas:

Parks Operational	£1,684,370
Cemeteries	£158,530
Grounds overhead	£77,898
Paddock Road	£11,910
Woods	£43,030
Parks development	£28,290
Total	£2,004,028

The Council has not had a planned capital investment programme for parks and open spaces. Recent capital investment has been subject to bidding in the annual capital programme and has been approached on an ad hoc service level basis.

Section 106 payments (contributions from developers to the planning department for the improvement of local amenities) are a significant source of capital funds for Green Spaces. Watford's Planning and Development department has introduced a scheme that enables the majority of section 106 funds to be allocated to the priority areas across the whole Borough, rather than solely in the direct proximity of the particular development. This allows for a degree of equitable provision across the Borough and ensures that areas where there is limited development can still secure funds for the improvements to open space.

6. Demand Analysis

6.1 Socio-economic and Demographic Structure of Area

Socio-economic and demographic data for Watford has been drawn from the Office of National Statistics web site, which provides data at Super Output Area level (SOA). A super output area is a new analysis level that was first introduced in 2004 when the Indices of Multiple Deprivation were first published. They provide a more accurate analysis and comparison than ward and borough level, as they have been specifically selected for comparison and are of a reasonably comparable population size.

Deprivation

Watford is a relatively affluent area and scores well compared to other areas of the country on the indices of multiple deprivation. There are 32,382 super output areas in England in total and no areas in Watford are within the top 25% of deprived wards in the country. Eighteen of the 53 SOA's that make up the Borough of Watford are within the top 25% least deprived in the country

Population Density

Watford is a largely urban area and is situated on the fringes of London. It has areas that are moderately densely populated and the eight most densely populated areas are listed below. These areas fall within the wards that were identified earlier as having the lowest provision of accessible open space, which is to be expected.

Ward	Super Output Area	Number of people per hectare	Ranking by indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) (of 53 in Watford)	Percentage of households with no vehicle
Vicarage	10B	137.97	27	20.0
Vicarage	10E	136.84	20	26.6
Callowland	6B	107.43	37	22.1
Vicarage	10A	88.69	18	26.6
Holywell	11A	84.67	34	22.0
Vicarage	10C	80.62	23	23.3
Callowland	6D	78.27	35	17.9
Callowland	6C	76.21	13	25.5

NB. IMD Ranking of 1 is the most deprived SOA within Watford, 53 the least deprived.

There is no significant correlation between population density and deprivation, however, the wards that are most densely populated have the highest percentage of households with no vehicles. This is to be expected, as those wards are generally close to the town centre and benefit from the public transport routes to the town centre.

Households Without Vehicles

31 of the 53 SOA's within Watford have more than 20% of households with no car, with 7 areas having 30% of households with no car. This means that accessing parks and open spaces by car is not possible for a significant percentage of the population.

The GIS spatial study to be undertaken by June 2007 will combine the demographic data with the park catchment areas and will clearly identify the areas where we need to either increase the amount of open space, or improve the access to and quality of neighbouring open spaces.

Ethnic Minority Population

Watford has a population of 79,300 (2004 mid-year statistics) with 79.1% being White British and the most significant minority groups being:

Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	4.6%
White: Other White	3.9%
White: Irish	2.9%
Asian or Asian British: Indian	2.4%

When broken down into the super output areas, there are significant Asian or Asian British: Pakistani communities within the individual super output areas.

The table below shows all minority groups where the percentage of the overall SOA population is greater than 10%.

Ward	Super Output Area	Percentage of residents who are Asian or Asian British: Pakistani
Vicarage	10B	24.4%
Vicarage	10A	23.6%
Vicarage	10E	21.2%
Holywell	11C	15.3%
Holywell	11A	14.5%
Callowland	6C	13.5%
Leggatts	4B	11.6%
Leggatts	4C	11.0%
Central	9C	10.8%
Oxhey	12B	10.4%

6.2 Street Survey Results

The street survey conducted by MRUK, who are a specialist market research company, took place in November and December 2004. Respondents were questioned in four areas across the District.

Six hundred respondents were surveyed in total, of which 89% described their ethnic origin as White British. Over one third of respondents (42%) are in full time employment. A large majority of respondents (73%) have access to private transport. No respondents included in the survey live outside the Watford Borough.

Over one third of respondents (38%) have children living at home. Most respondents with children (78%) have offspring aged 15 years old and above.

Private garden access is generally high in Watford, as 81% of respondents own a private garden. Less than a tenth (9%) only have access to a communal garden.

Respondents demonstrated that the most common reasons for using open space, sport and recreation sites are:

- To exercise (48%).
- To take children to play/use play area (41%).
- For a family outing (28%).
- Playing sports/games informally (12%).
- Enjoying floral displays/nature (12%).
- Observing wildlife (11%).
- Seeing events (11%).
- Playing sport/games formally (4%).
- Spending lunchtime (3%).

Respondents are most likely to walk to an open space site (45%). Travelling by car to an open space site is also popular (41%). Using public transport is the least used method of travelling to open space sites with only a tenth (11%) of respondents using bus or train.

Open spaces are important to respondents. Almost all respondents (92%) stated that open spaces are very important or quite important to them.

Generally respondents felt that open spaces in the Borough could be improved by the following:

- Better maintenance 24%
- Improving cleanliness 7%
- Increasing safety/CCTV 6%
- Rubbish removal 5%
- Stopping dog fouling 5%.

6.3 Assessment of User Numbers

It is very difficult to estimate user numbers at this point in time, as no recording or sampling has been undertaken in the past. It is proposed to implement a system of sampling user numbers at key points and times. The sampling will be undertaken in a consistent manner, so that over a period of time the information becomes increasingly reliable and reflective of the average usage patterns.

An analysis and review of the survey information will be undertaken annually to assist in reviewing the strategy and continuing to develop the action plan.

7. Analysis of Issues, Opportunities and Priorities

This section summarises the issues, opportunities and priorities identified through the research and sets out proposed policies for each aspect of the service.

7.1 Community Safety

Community Safety was consistently raised as a key issue by all groups throughout the consultation period and is a high priority. Our parks should provide a safe and welcoming environment and we will continuously work to reduce the impact of crime and anti social behaviour.

The parks management team have been working with the community safety partnership to tackle incidents, which has led to some short term improvements. It is important to build upon this work and develop systems that will continue to address these issues in the long term.

We will identify a lead officer for community safety issues within the parks management team, who will link to the community safety partnership and coordinate our actions to tackle crime and anti social behaviour.

The reporting and monitoring systems for incidents are currently ad hoc and undertaken by different departments with no cross correlation. A single reporting system will be developed to record and map all incidents in our parks. This will enable us to fully understand the range and volume of incidents happening and to direct resources effectively to resolve them.

The Council has a team of three park rangers who patrol our parks on a daily basis working from 8am to 1am. The rangers visit the main parks and anti social behaviour hot spots each day and are equipped with an off road vehicle, so that they can reach all areas of the parks.

The consultation confirmed that the rangers are valued by the community, but a consistent message was that the rangers did not have a visible enough presence. We will consider ways in which we can achieve this, including expanding the ranger service, training volunteer rangers to work alongside the park rangers and relocating them to a more prominent base.

The design of our parks is an important consideration in our efforts to reduce the impact of crime and anti social behaviour. The reduction of vegetation to improve sight lines can make an immediate improvement, but any measures taken must be carefully considered to maintain the biodiversity and natural beauty of the parks. We consider all aspects of site design to reduce the impact of anti social behaviour and improve fencing, lighting and other security measures, where appropriate.

The community safety partnership has enabled us to develop excellent relationships with the Police and Fire Service and we will consult them on all future developments to benefit from their expert advice. We will also investigate the potential to receive training and support from the Police to widen the enforcement powers of our park rangers through an accreditation scheme and operate joint patrols where we identify recurring incidents.

Motorbikes are a recurring problem within our parks, causing problems of noise and annoyance to neighbours and also the risks of accidents to park users. The Police operations have been very effective in reducing this. We will continue to work with the police to take enforcement action, as well as make improvements to restrict motorcycle access and to provide better signage and education in problem areas.

Graffiti is a cause for concern for some groups consulted, although the community plan consultation has shown that it is not a significant concern for residents. The Council does not have a written graffiti policy at present, but it has been proactive in catching and prosecuting offenders. Graffiti has been allowed in our two skate parks, although there is no formal policy to adopt these as areas where graffiti is 'legal'. It is recognised that the absence of a graffiti policy, despite the

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prosecution and provision of graffiti sites give mixed messages to the community. In order to ensure our policy is clear, we will work with our community safety partners to develop and implement a formal graffiti policy.

Dog fouling is a significant issue raised during the consultation. Many dog owners are responsible and clear up after their dogs, but those that do not cause a significant problem. The Environmental Services department of the Council are proactive in enforcing dog fouling legislation and providing dog waste bins. We will continue to work with Environmental Health colleagues to tackle the offenders; to ensure clear signage; to continue to provide bins in suitable locations; to provide dog free areas for families and children's play; to provide information for dog walkers, and to provide well signed dog walking routes.

The Council's Parks bye laws have not been updated for some time and no longer cover all of our parks and open spaces. We will review our bye laws and update them, improving the signage and promotion.

We will consider the development of a Park Watch scheme and utilise our partnerships and links with the community to ensure that we are all working together and communicating effectively in order to reduce the impact of crime and anti social behaviour.

One of the most effective means of promoting our parks as a safe and welcoming place is to encourage a diverse and varied programme of activities so that more people use them. We want our parks to be vibrant and active and we will work with all our partners to ensure that our parks offer a wide range of facilities and opportunities for positive activities.

Policy 1: Community Safety

- 1.1 The Council will work with the community safety partnership to ensure that our parks and open spaces remain safe and secure.**
- 1.2 The Council will consult the emergency services when developing our open spaces to ensure that we utilise their skills and experience from the design stage in order to reduce the impact of crime and anti social behaviour.**
- 1.3 The Council will record and analyse all incidents and take positive action to reduce their impact on our neighbours and park users.**
- 1.4 The Council will continue to deliver a park ranger service and provide them with the support and training to tackle crime and anti social behaviour issues.**

7.2 Community Consultation and Engagement

Consultation and engagement with our community are key to achieving our corporate objective of 'a well-informed community where everyone can contribute'.

It is important for the Council to understand fully the needs of the local community, so that the facilities and services within our parks can meet those local needs. We will therefore consult with local stakeholders on any significant developments to our parks, so that local issues are properly addressed. We will also consult with organisations with special expertise such as English Nature and the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust on issues relating to the management of green spaces.

The Council recognises that there is currently limited information about the users and non users of green spaces. We will therefore implement a programme of surveys to rectify this knowledge gap. We will repeat the surveys regularly, so that up to date knowledge is maintained. We will use the

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survey findings to inform the continued development of the strategy and individual site management plans.

In forming this strategy the Council held a community consultation event at the Colosseum to identify the priorities and issues of the community groups that use our parks and open spaces. The event was very successful and gave the community groups an opportunity to challenge and discuss the issues that we are all facing. The Council will continue to consult with community groups and will hold an annual 'Green Forum' where our community partners can discuss current issues and contribute to the ongoing development of the Strategy.

In producing this strategy the Council consulted a wide cross section of the community and our partners, but it is recognised that there was insufficient input from young people, ethnic groups and people with disabilities. The Council commits to undertake further research in the first year of the strategy to identify any specific needs from these three groups and update the strategy action plan to incorporate the findings.

The Council measures customer satisfaction on a regular basis and will continue to do so. In the last two years we have achieved the following customer satisfaction levels:

Resident Satisfaction

Parks and open spaces (MORI 2003-4)	79%
Parks and open spaces (Citizens Panel 2005-06)	82%

Customer Satisfaction

Fixed equipment playgrounds (adults)	82%
Fixed equipment playgrounds (children)	81%
Adventure playgrounds (adults)	100%
Adventure playgrounds (children)	81%
Conservation	93%
Allotments	73%

Policy 2: Community Consultation and Engagement

- 2.1 The Council will consult with local stakeholders on any significant developments and changes to our green spaces.**
- 2.2 The Council will undertake a regular programme of research to ensure that changing customer needs are fully reflected in the strategy.**
- 2.3 The Council will hold an annual Green Forum where community partners can contribute to the continued development of the strategy.**
- 2.4 The Council will ensure that our research is fully representative of our community.**
- 2.5 The Council will continue to measure customer satisfaction.**

7.3 Friends of Parks

Friends of Parks groups provide an opportunity to consult and involve the local community in the management and development of parks and open spaces. There are a number of groups already in existence within Watford, which play a vital role in the management of the parks.

On the whole, these groups are working well, however, the links to the Council are largely informal. This leads to an inconsistency in the way that we work with the different friends groups and leaves some groups feeling isolated from the decision making process. The key agreements and actions are not documented in a consistent manner and do not link to the parks management team and the

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strategy at the moment. A simple reporting system will be introduced to record key decisions with friends groups and to enable closer links to the parks management team.

A lead officer will be identified to coordinate all work with friends' groups and ensure a consistent approach and links to the strategy implementation.

New friends' groups will be encouraged in the future and the Council will instigate a start up grant scheme and give assistance and advice in establishing new friends groups. The Council provides guidance and support to friends' groups, but we will review our documents and procedures to ensure that they are up to date and consistent.

Policy 3: Friends Groups

- 3.1 The Council will support and encourage the development of friends' groups for all of our main Green Spaces.**
- 3.2 The Council will involve the friends' groups in the development and implementation of individual parks management plans.**
- 3.3 The Council will involve all friends' groups in the annual Green Forum.**
- 3.4 The Council will provide start up grants for new friends groups.**

7.4 Partnerships

Partnerships offer the opportunity to share resources, skills and knowledge, as well as to increase capacity and secure external funding. The Council will be seeking to maximise the benefits of partnership working and work with our partners to continuously improve services and efficiency.

Partnership projects have been completed with Groundwork Hertfordshire, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). However, there is potential to create a stronger partnership and further joint projects. These partners status as an independent trust enables them to access grants that are not available to a Council directly and they have a wide range of specialist skills that could be utilised to support local projects The Council will be seeking to develop its partnership with Groundwork Hertfordshire, HMWT, BTCV and other suitable partners and identify potential new joint projects.

Watford has recently joined the county wide Green Heart Partnership, which aims to place the Arts at the heart of future developments from the earliest stages. The Partnership is establishing a reputation for high quality and innovative approaches. The Council has begun working with the Green Heart Partnership on the Bushey Arches project and will seek additional projects where we can work together.

A partnership project has been established with Watford FC, Groundwork Hertfordshire and Barclays Spaces for Sports to improve the hard surface sports area at King George V Playing Fields. We will complete the consultation at KGV and report the proposed improvements to Cabinet for consideration.

There are further opportunities to develop partnerships with sports clubs, arts organisations and businesses and the Council will investigate these in order to provide additional resources, skills and services within our parks. Partnerships will be prioritised to favour those that assist us in resolving local issues, provide benefits for the local community and deliver on our corporate objectives.

Policy 4: Partnerships

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4.1 The Council will seek partnership arrangements to increase capacity, share resources and secure external funding.

7.5 Children's Play

Parks and open spaces provide a very valuable resource for children and young people to play, learn and interact with each other and the environment. Children and young people are one of our most important user groups and were consistently a high priority throughout the consultation.

Watford has fifty unsupervised fixed equipment playgrounds and two supervised adventure playgrounds, which is a significantly greater provision than most similar sized Councils. The adventure playgrounds are managed and developed by the Council's play development team, with whom the parks management team have a close working relationship.

The play development team will be producing a Play Strategy in 2007 as part of the Cultural Strategy and parks management will work with them to ensure that the Council develops activities and services within the parks to meet the play needs of children and young people in the Borough. As well as our fixed equipment playgrounds, Green Spaces provide opportunities to play using natural materials such as water and fallen logs, as well as the potential for den building and tree climbing. The Council will ensure that young people are involved in the design of future new playgrounds.

The quality and play value of playgrounds is somewhat more important than the quantity or size, as a small playground with modern, challenging equipment will attract far more children than a large area with outdated, static equipment. The play value of the majority of playgrounds has been assessed during this study and the remaining playgrounds will be completed during 2006. The Council will also undertake a spatial mapping exercise (plotting all our playgrounds and their catchment areas onto a GIS mapping system) to identify the deficiencies in provision. From this, the priority areas for development will be identified and a programme of improvements made to provide a network of good quality playgrounds.

There is currently no specific provision of playground equipment for children with disabilities, but a number of playgrounds include equipment that is accessible. The Council will ensure that all new or refurbished playgrounds include accessible equipment for children with disabilities. The Council will also develop a playground specifically for children with disabilities, which will include a broad range of equipment to provide for a stimulating and challenging environment for children with different needs.

There are national standards for playgrounds that have been developed by the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) and the Council will ensure that all new and refurbished playgrounds meet the Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) Standard. A LEAP playground should have at least five types of play equipment, be 400 square metres, cater up for to 8 year olds, be fenced and provide seats, bins and signage. All refurbished playgrounds will comply with relevant legislation and playground standards.

Unfortunately, some of our playgrounds suffer from a significant level of vandalism, including graffiti, broken glass and fires. The Council repairs the damage as soon as is reasonably practical but damage caused by fire is often very costly and requires the complete replacement of older pieces of equipment. Modern equipment is increasingly fire resistant and modular (i.e. sections that we can unbolt and replace easily without replacing the entire piece of equipment) enabling quicker replacement of damaged parts. The Council will carefully select equipment in the future to ensure that it is of a high play value and is resistant to vandalism. The equipment installed will also be standardised so that stocks of replacement parts can be held and damage repaired quickly. Many existing playgrounds have a bark safety surfacing, from which it is extremely difficult to remove broken glass. This surface also makes access for buggies and people with disabilities more difficult and can be messy when it rains. Rubber wet pour absorbent surfaces are now

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becoming a standard for playgrounds and the Council will ensure that rubber wet pour safety surfaces are used for all new and refurbished playgrounds.

Policy 5: Children's Play

- 5.1 The Council will ensure that all new and refurbished playgrounds meet the NPFA Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) Standard.**
- 5.2 All refurbished playgrounds will comply with relevant legislation and playground standards.**
- 5.3 The Council will work to involve children in the design of future new playgrounds.**
- 5.4 The Council will select new equipment that is of a high play value and is resistant to vandalism.**
- 5.5 The Council will also begin to standardise the type of equipment installed across the Borough to enable quicker repairs.**
- 5.6 The Council will provide rubber wet pour safety surfaces to all new and refurbished playgrounds.**
- 5.7 The Council will ensure that all new or refurbished playgrounds include accessible equipment for children with disabilities.**
- 5.8 The Council will develop a playground specifically for children with disabilities.**

7.6 Provision for Young People

Groups of young people regularly use our parks as meeting points, but there are very few facilities that have been designed for their use. The Council will develop facilities to provide for young people and seek to involve them in the design process.

There are 7 Tennis, 2 basketball and 3 five a side football all weather courts in the parks, which are free of charge and available for everyone to use. There are also two skate parks and 5 youth shelters. However, there are approximately six thousand teenagers living in the borough. The Council recognises this unmet need and intends to increase the number and range of facilities for young people and ensure that there is an even geographical spread. The current facilities will be assessed and a programme of refurbishment developed, so that they do not deteriorate to an unsuitable standard.

The Council will also promote the use of hard surfaced sports areas, so that individuals and sports clubs are aware that they are available and free of charge.

The skate park in the town centre has been extremely successful since it was opened in 2004. The park is used daily and is in a very prominent position in the town, so attracts a lot of attention from passing motorists and visitors to the Watford. As the park is in such a prominent position, it is important that it is well maintained and portrays a positive image. The fencing was not replaced when the park was constructed and is near the end of its useful life. The Council will replace the fencing with a more robust and attractive fence, ensuring that there are suitable safe access points for users. The skate park is a major attraction for teenagers and a skate forum will be developed

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as a mechanism for the Council to work with skaters to continue to develop skating facilities to meet their needs.

Policy 6: Teenage Provision

6.1 The Council will develop facilities for teenagers across the borough and involve them in the design process.

7.7 Sports Development

Green spaces provide a range of facilities and opportunities for sports, both formally and informally and the strategy will aim to enhance this provision.

Informal sports are generally free of charge and can be played on grassed areas, but also on purpose built facilities, such as tennis courts, basketball courts, five a side areas and skate parks. The Council will improve the existing informal areas and seek to extend the range of informal facilities to meet the needs of young people. The consultation has identified that dog fouling is an issue on grassed areas and the strategy will create more dog free areas to reduce the impact of dog fouling.

Formal sports provision currently provides facilities for football, rugby, cricket, croquet, tennis, athletics and bowls. A playing pitch strategy will be developed by March 2007 and this is covered in more detail in section 5.4.

Sports clubs present an opportunity to form partnerships to improve the quality and range of facilities, as well as to increase the opportunities for people to participate in sporting and social activities. The Council currently has a limited range of partnership arrangements with sports clubs and intends to develop these links for mutual benefit. A higher priority will be given to those clubs who contribute to the Council's corporate objectives; who draw members from the neighbourhood where their club plays and who can secure external funding to support their development. Any partnership proposals will be carefully assessed to ensure the long term sustainability of the partnership and the Council will provide advice and training to support clubs.

All clubs will be surveyed to identify those that are keen and able to develop partnership working. Self management gives the clubs the responsibility for the maintenance and management of their facilities and enables them to direct their resources to achieve their ambitions. A number of clubs have indicated their interest in self management and the Council will discuss the opportunities with all clubs.

A lead officer within the parks management team will be identified to monitor and coordinate all partnership arrangements with the clubs and the Council's relevant internal departments.

Woodside Playing Fields is the Council's primary sports park, where lease arrangements are already in place with bowls, cricket and athletics clubs. This site has been subject to significant levels of vandalism over a sustained period and the Council will work with all parties to investigate potential solutions to these issues and development opportunities.

National Governing Body (NGB) Club Accreditation Schemes have been developed in the last five years to enable clubs to demonstrate that they meet minimum quality standards. Each NGB has slightly different criteria, although most require a child protection policy, qualified first aider, a qualified coach, a fair play policy, an equity policy, suitable insurance, proper accounting procedures and a constitution. The Council encourages and supports clubs to achieve these standards and will make them a requirement for hiring our facilities or entering any partnership

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arrangements from September 2007. Newly formed clubs will need to register with their NGB and achieve the accreditation within one year.

Policy 7: Sports Development

- 7.1 The Council will require all clubs who hire facilities to achieve their NGB club accreditation by September 2007. Newly formed clubs will need to register with their NGB and achieve the accreditation within one year.**
- 7.2 The Council will encourage and support the development of local clubs and club facilities and work in partnership to provide opportunities for all local residents**

7.8 Health

Green Spaces play an important role in delivering our corporate objective of 'a healthy town'. The Council's conservation, environmental sustainability and tree management policies each contribute to preservation and enhancement of the environment which will bring health benefits.

Green Spaces also play an important role in providing a place to exercise, socialise and relax. Many people use parks for informal exercise, and the Council is eager to do more to promote and encourage healthy activities.

The Walking for Health scheme which the Council has developed with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) has been very successful and the Council will continue to support this. Many walking routes exist and the Council will produce walks leaflets, signage for the routes and interpretation boards for points of interest to encourage more people to walk in our parks. Walking routes could also be linked to nature trails and other activities to encourage more people to participate. The Council's parks management staff will actively promote this ideal.

Running routes and fitness trails could be successful in larger parks, such as Cassiobury Park and Woodside Playing Fields. The Council will investigate the potential to include these, working with partners, the friends groups and local residents.

Many parks link to the cycle route network and the Council will encourage more cycling to our parks by providing facilities to securely lock cycles. There can be a conflict between cyclists and walkers and the Council will carefully plan cycle paths through our parks, separating them from footpaths wherever possible. Officers are instructed to explore how linkages to the cycle and pedestrian network can be increased to improve and extend cycle and pedestrian access further.

There are health benefits to the conservation and volunteering work that already exists and we will seek to extend the programme to offer more opportunities for volunteering and community involvement. Allotments also provide a healthy activity and a source of fresh fruit and vegetables for healthy eating. Allotments are covered in detail in section 7.14

Parks are busiest in the summer months and the Council is working to provide sun safety advice and shade where possible. The paddling pools in Cassiobury Park are the busiest and most exposed facility and the Council will be working with the operator to implement improvements. Drinking water is important in the hot summer months and the Council will consider providing fountains at appropriate sites.

To further develop the contribution that green spaces can make to the health agenda, the Council will meet with our health partners and develop an action plan.

Policy 8: Health

- 8.1 The Council will develop and promote facilities and activities within green spaces to enable people to live healthier lives.**

7.9 Cultural Heritage, the Historic Environment, Tourism and the Arts.

Green Spaces and Civic Spaces are a natural setting for the Arts providing a meeting place, a classroom and a studio. Parks can host events and activities and the Council will work to promote the use of our parks to the arts community.

Through the Green Heart Partnership, the Council will involve artists from the outset of development proposals, and use models of creative consultation to inform the design brief and develop community ownership.

The Council will also seek partnerships with arts groups to extend the range of services and activities in our parks. Cha Cha Cha, the cafeteria in Cassiobury Park, is an excellent example of a partnership with the arts community where local artists not only provide refreshments and toilet facilities to park users, but also a meeting place and a year round arts programme.

Public Art can enhance public open space and there are many examples within the town centre. Parks also provide an ideal setting for public art and the Council will work with the Green Heart Partnership to integrate art into the design of parks, working with artists who can interpret the local character and history and develop innovative projects that develop interest and encourage debate.

Watford draws visitors from many miles around to Cassiobury Park and the towns' extensive shopping facilities. Local parks and open spaces support the corporate objectives of 'a town to be proud of' and 'a town with a high quality environment' and the developments from this strategy will provide a greater attraction to visitors. The Council intends that a programme of events should take place in the open spaces within the town centre.

Many of our parks have been established for many years and have cultural and historical features. The Council will seek to provide information on the Council's web site and interpretation within the parks themselves.

Cassiobury Park is the largest and most frequently visited park in the Borough and has a rich cultural history. The Council intends to investigate the potential to develop and enhance this park through a Heritage Lottery bid.

Policy 9: Cultural Heritage, The Historic Environment, Tourism and the Arts.

- 9.1 The Council will work with the arts community to incorporate art into our parks and open spaces.**
- 9.2 The Council will strive to protect and enhance the historic environment.**
- 9.3 The Council will work to provide a high quality environment that will provide for local residents and attract visitors to Watford.**

7.10 Events and Activities

The parks currently host a wide range of events throughout the year, from fun fairs through to firework displays. The Council provides a limited events programme directly and works with

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partners to provide the venues for them to provide community events. This approach has been successful and we will consider how we can extend the number and range of events.

New legislation and event safety guidance have placed extra demands upon event organisers and the Council will support and advise them in how to organise a safe and successful event. All event organisers will need to produce a risk assessment and adequate insurance cover before a booking can be accepted, in order to ensure that the planning of events properly considers the safety and welfare of all. Where an event draws significant numbers or has significant risks, the event will need to be approved by the Council's Safety Advisory Group. We will provide support to event organisers to assist them in organising safe events that meet modern standards.

Policy 10: Events and Activities

10.1 The Council will continue to support community events by providing the venue.

10.2 The Council will provide support and advice to help event organisers meet current legislative requirements and event industry standards.

7.11 Wildlife Conservation

Watford's Green Spaces contain a number of important wildlife habitats, including its nature reserves and other sites of importance to wildlife. These will be protected through Watford's Local Development Framework (the replacement for the District Plan) and managed by the Council to maximise biodiversity.

Biodiversity means the "variety of life around us". The Council will protect and enhance biodiversity on all parks and open spaces under its management. It will also encourage other landowners and householders to manage for wildlife.

By 2007 the Council will complete its Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). On the principle of "thinking globally and acting locally", this LBAP will form part of the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which in turn contributes to the UK's BAP. The LBAP will have a Species Action Plan that will identify key wildlife species for Watford and also a Habitat Action Plan.

A number of 'Green' corridors run through Watford. These are important for a variety of wildlife to migrate through the town. These corridors include the Rivers Gade and Colne; the Grand Union Canal; the disused railway in West Watford and the main and suburban railway lines.

Some of Watford's parks and open spaces are located on these corridors and Watford Council manages some sections of the two Rivers. The green corridors will be highlighted for protection and management in the LBAP. Landscaping works in the river corridors will be sympathetic to the character of the rivers and planted with appropriate native species. A programme of removal of invasive species, such as Himalayan balsam, is already underway. This programme will be extended to all our parks and documented.

There are more than thirty County Wildlife Sites in Watford and these are the town's "wildlife jewels in the crown". Cassiobury Park; Harebreaks Wood; Lairage Land; Alban Wood; Garston Park, and Whippendell Wood SSSI, are particularly important sites for biodiversity. They are all protected and managed, either wholly, or in part, for their biodiversity and are existing or pending Local Nature Reserves (LNR) status. The Council aims to have one hectare of LNR per 1,000 head of population.

A number of other open spaces and allotment sites are also important for biodiversity and the Council will seek to enhance the biodiversity of these sites to produce a net habitat and biodiversity

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gain in Watford. The Council will seek opportunities to create new habitats, such as nature gardens, on suitable land.

Where possible access will be provided on all conservation sites. Paths suitable for wheelchairs will be constructed on some sites, including Harebreaks Wood LNR. However, much wildlife is vulnerable to disturbance and some areas will have limited access. Refuge areas will be created on all sites if at all possible.

Policy 11: Wildlife Conservation

- 11.1 The Council will protect its nature reserves and other sites important to wildlife.**
- 11.2 The Council will record and control invasive species.**
- 11.3 The Council will seek opportunities to create new wildlife areas to increase the range of biodiversity.**
- 11.4 The Council will work to increase the provision of Local Nature Reserves to meet our target of one hectare per 1000 population.**

7.12 Environmental Sustainability

Sustainability is about meeting today's needs without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet needs of their own. This is often expressed by local authorities in Local Agenda 21 and biodiversity strategies. Sustainability seeks to find a balance between social, economic and environmental concerns.

Both Local Agenda 21 and Biodiversity Action Plans set out a framework for action and require implementation at a local level. The Council has an important role to 'think globally and act locally' when managing green spaces.

The Council will review its working practices and sets policies that protect the environment. These policies cover key sustainability issues including: use of water, peat and pesticides; vehicles and machinery; bonfires; waste generation and recycling; buildings and energy consumption; and procurement of goods and services. We will require contractors, partners and all others involved in our Green Spaces to implement these policies.

Policy 12: Environmental Sustainability

- 12.1 The Council will develop and implement environmental sustainability policies to protect and enhance the environment in ways which are environmentally sustainable.**

7.13 Tree Management

Trees are a unique component of the landscape, they are vulnerable to damage by vandalism, development, pests, diseases and the climate. Many trees are long-lived, offering enjoyment and a diversity of benefits. Mature trees provide a direct link with the past history of the landscape with some trees being of individual historical significance, commemorating past events or people.

Trees are normally the largest living organism in any open space and have essential links with other elements of the local wildlife such as birds, insects, fungi and bats. Trees can help provide habitats for wildlife and bring nature into the heart of our towns. Trees are fundamental in achieving

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objectives for nature conservation which assists in conserving and enhancing biodiversity. Vitally important to people's health and well-being, trees are an environmental regulator. They can grow to become large parasols to provide shade from the sun and shelter from the wind and rain. They help to control temperature, soil erosion and flooding, reduce noise, dirt and dust and reduce pollution.

Trees help to soften the built environment, provide landscape features such as avenues, vistas and focal points and provide colour and interest all year round. Careful species selection and planting, and encouraging greater awareness and education of the many benefits trees provide can avoid future problems and disputes.

Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the council has powers to make and enforce Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) and designate Conservation Areas (CA's) within which all established trees are protected. It is usually only in cases of potential threat that a local authority will seek to legally protect trees by use of TPO's. The Council will continue its work of making TPO's to protect those trees that are threatened.

Watford will develop a planned and strategic approach to tree management. Green Spaces contain tens of thousands of trees and it is not realistic to identify and record each one in the short term. However, the Council will consider introducing a system of recording trees linked to a Geographical Information (GIS) system, utilising hand held and Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) technology. A tree and woodland strategy will be developed and planned management of the tree stock introduced once the GIS system is fully operational.

There are several established woodlands which require special conservation and protection. Whippendell Wood, although outside the boundary of Watford, is owned and managed by Watford Borough Council. The woodland is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Council will continue to fulfil its statutory duty to conserve and enhance the special features of the SSI site.

Policy 13: Tree Management

- 13.1 The Council will ensure that the tree stock is protected and conserved**
- 13.2 The Council will safeguard the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) status of Whippendell Wood and continue to manage it in favourable condition.**
- 13.3 The Council will continue to maintain and manage an up to date Tree Preservation Order register.**

7.14 Allotments

Allotments provide an opportunity for those who want to grow their own food. This is especially important for households with limited or no garden space. Allotments also provide a green space, which improves the environment and provides a haven for wildlife.

The Council produced an Allotment Strategy in 2002 and has been actively promoting the provision of allotments. In the past few years, there has been a significant improvement in the service, which is reflected in the growing occupancy rates (89% in Sept 2006) and a satisfaction level of 73% . The Allotment Strategy will be reviewed and updated.

It is essential to protect our allotments and ensure that they are secure, so that the produce from the hard work of the allotment holders is protected from vandalism and theft. A number of sites have had new fencing installed since 2002 and the Council will develop a programme of fencing replacement for the remaining allotments.

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The Council will seek to improve the infrastructure of allotments to ensure that all sites have basic facilities. A water supply is essential to allotment holders and the Council will aim to provide water supplies that are accessible on every site. In keeping with Environmental Policies, a programme of water conservation will be developed, including investigating the potential for rainwater harvesting.

There is a demand for toilet facilities on allotment sites, as many of the allotment holders spend many hours working their allotments. Some sites already have toilet and ancillary facilities and the Council will seek to expand this provision to other sites when possible. A green building running on renewable energy has been developed at Holywell Allotments as a partnership with NHS Herts Partnership Trust, HCC Social Services (Balmoral Centre) and Groundwork Hertfordshire (Barclays SiteSavers). This is an excellent example of partnership working and the Council will seek similar partnerships on other sites.

Partnership is a key theme of all Watford Council strategies and with increasing demands on the Council's resources, we will be seeking more partnerships that enable development of ownership and skills within the community. The Council will promote self management of allotment sites and work with management groups to sustain and develop the service. The aim is for all allotments to be self managing by 2015, with two sites under self management by 2008.

An organic training programme was introduced in 2004, which has been well received by allotment holders. This work will continue for at least the next two years.

Allotments provide a valuable wildlife habitat, which needs protecting and enhancing. The Council will ensure that allotment holders meet the Council's environmental policies, so that allotments continue to contribute to improving the environment. The Council aims to have no bonfires and will consult allotment tenants during the allotment strategy review to identify how this policy can be implemented, which could include alternative waste disposal methods.

Policy 14: Allotments

- 14.1 The Council will protect land designated as allotment space from inappropriate development.**
- 14.2 No bonfires will be allowed on allotment sites.**
- 14.3 The Council will work to ensure that allotments sites are secure.**
- 14.4 All allotment sites will become self managing by 2015.**
- 14.5 The Council will provide water facilities at all allotments.**
- 14.6 Allotment tenants must follow the Council's environmental policy.**
- 14.7 The Council will protect and enhance the wildlife habitat within our allotments.**

7.15 Cemeteries

The council provides two cemeteries: North Watford and Vicarage Road.

North Watford Cemetery was opened in 1931 and is on 35 acres of land. Sections are available for the principal religious denominations and there are special sections for children. A Garden of Rest and a Garden of Remembrance have been provided for the interment of cremated remains. All sections are laid to lawn.

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Vicarage Road Cemetery was opened in 1858 and is on 14 acres of land. The cemetery is now full with no new grave spaces available for burials. A Garden of Rest has been provided for the interment of cremated remains.

The Borough does not directly operate a Crematorium, but the West Herts Crematorium is situated on the A405 near to Junction 6 on the M1, which provides the local crematorium service.

Cemeteries are a valuable part of the Green Space provision within the town, providing for a place for remembrance and quiet contemplation, as well as providing for important wildlife habitats. A considerable amount of local history is also reflected within the cemeteries.

The Council has recently adopted the 'Charter for the Bereaved', and is currently developing an action plan that seeks to develop the level of service provided. It is intended to provide a high quality burial service and ensure that the grounds are managed to a high standard.

The need to provide new cemetery space will also need to be considered, particularly as the amount of available space at North Watford Cemetery is running out. The Council will annually review the amount of burial space remaining and develop policies and proposals for the time that burial space runs out at North Watford Cemetery.

Policy 15: Cemeteries

- 15.1 The Council will continue to contribute to the West Herts Crematorium.**
- 15.2 The Council will provide a high quality burial service and ensure that grounds are managed to a high standard.**
- 15.3 The Council will monitor the remaining burial space on an annual basis and develop policies and proposals for the time that burial space runs out at North Watford Cemetery.**

7.16 Site Management Plans

Management Plans are an important tool in the management of our Parks and Open Spaces and management plans will be produced for all the key sites that are managed by the Council by 2010. Management plans are already in place for our key nature conservation sites and these will be reviewed and updated.

The Council hopes to achieve the Green Flag Award for Cassiobury Park by the summer of 2007, which will require a site management plan to be in place by December 2006. Cassiobury Park is the Borough's biggest Park with a diverse range of habitats, uses and facilities, so it will be the most complex management plan, but will provide the framework for the production of plans for all other sites.

The Council commits to following the CABE guidance on the production of management plans and to work with Friends' groups and other partners to develop and implement them. A management plan is a tool, not a document to sit on a shelf, and processes will be put in place to ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and kept up to date.

The management plans will determine how parks and open spaces are managed and what the maintenance programme will be. As management plans are developed, management systems will be updated so that records accurately reflect the way in which sites are being managed. The Council will also ensure that grounds maintenance staff are properly trained and developed to be able to deliver the management plan and will use specialist contractors where appropriate.

Policy 16: Site Management Plans

- 16.1 All key parks and open spaces will have a site management plan by 2010.**
- 16.2 Management plans will be working documents, updated on an annual basis.**

7.17 Social Inclusion

Parks and open spaces are available to the whole community and it is important that all needs are effectively met. Consultation and community engagement are a key theme of this strategy and regular surveys will be undertaken to continue development of services to meet local needs.

There are, however, a number of harder to reach groups who may not always be properly represented in general surveys and the Council will work to identify any specific needs that they may have.

The demographic analysis supporting this strategy has identified that there are significant Asian or Asian British: Pakistani communities resident in a number of our wards and further research will be undertaken with these communities to identify any particular needs and aspirations that they may have.

A full equalities impact assessment (EIA) has been undertaken, which will challenge the issues, priorities and policies that are proposed. A summary of the equalities issues that have been considered in the development of this strategy is included in Appendix ???. (To be inserted on final publication).

Policy 17: Social Inclusion

- 17.1 The Council will ensure that all parks and open spaces are accessible and provide activities and facilities for the whole community.**

7.18 Staffing

The management for Parks and Open spaces has been split across two departments, which has led to some confusion and inefficiencies. From January 2006, the management of parks and open spaces has been combined under the Head of Leisure and Community Services within one single department. A full review of the staffing structure will be undertaken during 2006 to ensure that there is an effective structure to be able to deliver the strategy.

A modern parks service requires a wide range of skills from horticulture to strategic management, conservation to marketing and enforcement to ICT. The Council will recruit quality staff and ensure that they have the opportunity to develop personally.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit young, skilled staff and to address this problem the Council will investigate the potential to provide an apprenticeship or training scheme.

Policy 18: Staffing

- 18.1 To Council will recruit and develop a skilled workforce.**

7.19 Management Systems

To support the implementation of the strategy it is important to have modern management systems to enable accurately record keeping and analysis.

The Council will be investing in a GIS (Geographical Information System) in 2006. This will enable mapping of parks and open spaces and completion of the spatial studies for children's play provision and overall access to parks.

Sound systems for recording and analysing incidents, managing the tree stock and managing grounds maintenance tasks will also be needed. It would be most efficient and beneficial to link these to the GIS system with the appropriate technology to support the front line service. For instance, it would be more efficient for some front line staff such as the park rangers to use hand-held technology, enabling them to electronically link to the GIS system, where it can be analysed and acted on. The Council will investigate appropriate ICT systems to provide this.

The Council will ensure that effective management systems are in place to support implementation of the strategy and check that it delivers measurable improvements. The strategy will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and an annual report produced that will record progress and update the action plan.

The service will be managed in accordance with best practice and industry standards using external accreditation schemes to judge the quality of achievements. The Green Flag Accreditation Scheme is the national standard for parks and an application for Cassiobury Park will be submitted in the next round of evaluation in January 2007. The Council will seek to maintain Green Flag status for Cassiobury Park once achieved and meet the LAA targets.

In common with other services, the Council will continually review it to ensure that it is efficient and offers good value for money. Fees and charges will be reviewed annually to ensure that the pricing policy and any subsidy provided matches the corporate objectives. A Best Value review of the grounds maintenance service will be undertaken and improvements implemented to ensure the service delivers good value for money.

Policy 19: Management Systems

- 19.1 The Council will strive to achieve and maintain a Green Flag Award for Cassiobury Park**
- 19.2 The Council will implement and maintain efficient computer management systems for parks and open space management.**
- 19.3 The Council will continue to measure satisfaction levels and manage the service to maintain high ratings.**
- 19.4 The Council will develop and monitor local performance indicators so that measures are in place to reflect those aspects of the service that are important to local people.**

7.20 Health & Safety

Watford Borough Council is committed to providing parks and open spaces that are managed and maintained so that people feel safe and secure to visit.

The council operates within the guidelines of the Health & Safety At Work Act 1974 and ensures that working practices are updated to comply with new legislation and industry guidelines. The

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council and all staff have a responsibility to ensure that so far as is reasonable practicable, that its work activities do not endanger the health & safety of others (e.g. members of the public) who may be affected by the council's activities.

The council provides information, instruction, training and supervision to enable our employees to avoid hazards and contribute positively to both their own health and safety and that of our visitors and users.

We not only have a responsibility for our own staff, but also for those of contractors, partners, clubs, voluntary organisations, businesses and individuals that use our parks. We will provide support to partner organisations to fulfil their health and safety obligations. Parks are inspected on a regular basis to ensure those providing services or activities in parks meet current health and safety requirements.

Policy 20: Health and Safety

- 20.1 The Council will ensure that parks and open spaces are safe places and will maintain inspection records.**
- 20.2 The Council will ensure that working practices are regularly updated to comply with new legislation and industry guidelines.**
- 20.3 The Council will maintain up to date operational risk assessments and codes of practice.**
- 20.4 The Council will ensure that all staff receive up to date health and safety training.**
- 20.5 The Council will ensure anyone providing activities or services in parks meet current health and safety requirements.**

7.21 Catering

The consultation has identified a need for improved catering facilities within key parks. The provision of catering is currently limited and even within Cassiobury Park, when compared to the vast numbers of people who visit, the provision could be expanded. The Cha Cha Cha tea pavilion and Paddling Pools concessions are both relatively successful in Cassiobury Park, however they are not capable of providing adequately for the vast visitor numbers in the summer months or to the large crowds attracted to some events.

The provision of new catering facilities will be considered where it can be sustained and can be financially successful in the long term. In the short term, it is intended to investigate the provision of mobile catering facilities, as this can be achieved with no financial outlay. The Council will also investigate the potential to link with neighbouring facilities, particularly those already operated by the Council.

All catering providers will be made responsible for the management of litter generated from their provision.

Policy 21: Catering

- 21.1 The Council will encourage the provision of catering facilities by partner organisations and work actively to expand catering within parks.**

7.22 Toilets

The consultation also identified a demand for public toilets. There are currently toilet facilities in three locations in the town centre and within Cassiobury Park, Woodside Playing Fields, North Watford Cemetery, Vicarage Road Cemetery, Holywell Allotments and Cheslyn Gardens.

The management of toilet facilities to ensure that they are clean and that inappropriate use is controlled can take significant resources. Toilet provision will be maintained in areas where there is a high public demand, although partnership arrangements for their management will be considered. Both of the catering providers within Cassiobury Park provide toilet facilities, as part of their lease agreements. Investigations will be carried out to see if access to toilets can be increased through partnership arrangements. This could be through existing partnerships with sports clubs or any new partnerships that may develop.

There are a number of toilet blocks that are now disused and are beyond economic repair or refurbishment. These blocks will either be considered for alternative use or demolished and removed.

Policy 22: Toilets

22.1 Toilet provision will be maintained in areas where it is demonstrated that there is a high public demand.

22.2 To consider alternative use for disused toilet blocks or demolish and remove them.

7.23 Transport and Access

The Council will be undertaking a spatial study to identify the deficiencies in open space provision and set planning policies to support the creation of new open spaces to meet this need, wherever possible. Any new open spaces should be of a size that makes them practical for the public to use and economic to maintain. It is recommended that the minimum size for any new open spaces is 0.2 hectares. (2000 sq m, 50m by 40m).

Where it is not possible to develop new open space in areas of deficiency, the Council will prioritise improvements to the nearest green spaces and improvements to the quality of those spaces. Working with Hertfordshire County Council, we will seek to improve access to green spaces through improved crossings, improved signage or physical improvements to make routes safer and easier to use.

The Council promotes the use of alternative transport to cars and provides information on buses, trains and other means of transport to bring people to our parks. The Council have produced and implemented Cycling and Pedestrian strategies and are working to develop a network of facilities to support the use of bikes and walking, which will include adequate cycle storage facilities, where appropriate.

Wherever possible cycle and pedestrian networks will be linked to parks and the network extended further. The Council will work to open up the River Colne footpath throughout its length. The Council prefers to separate cycle paths from footpaths where possible, and will carefully design the entrance points to restrict motorcycle access, but provide for buggies and disabled users.

The Council is intending to undertake research with disability groups in 2006 to identify improvements within our parks for users with disabilities. This could lead to improvements to car

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parking, access paths and signage, but it is important to ensure that any investment meets the needs of disability groups before committing resources. Any new developments will comply with relevant legislation, including the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Free car parking is currently available at all parks but this will be reviewed as the Council develops its environmental sustainability policies.

Policy 23: Transport and Access

23.1 The Council will promote 'green' travel plans for key parks.

7.24 Education and Lifelong Learning

Good communication links with local schools and education providers are important and the Council is looking to identify ways in which we can work together for mutual benefit. The Council is committed to working with friends' groups, sports clubs and other partners to provide educational benefits from the services and activities that they provide.

The Council proposes to develop promotional and information sources to support the education and lifelong learning goals of partners through One Watford (the Local Strategic Partnership), providing information packs and curriculum support material where appropriate.

The Council will consider appropriate facilities to support education, lifelong learning and the positive use of our Green Spaces, however, any new facilities must be cost effective and provide for a clearly identified community need.

The Council will work to include signage and interpretation boards in green spaces to provide information and an opportunity to learn, including downloads on the Council's web site.

Policy 24: Education and Lifelong Learning

24.1 The Council will work in partnership to develop resources and services to support the education and lifelong learning objectives of the Council and Local Strategic Partnership – One Watford.

7.25 Promotion

Effective promotion of the green spaces within Watford is important if the objectives of the Strategy are to be achieved. It is important to utilise the full range of promotional media, as well as promoting an image of good quality and professional service.

The Council recognises that the range of material currently available is limited and needs to be reviewed to ensure that it provides an appropriate level of promotion to every green space. The Council is committed to ensuring that all promotional material is of a high quality and professional standard.

The internet is becoming increasingly accessible to residents and visitors to Watford. The Council will ensure that all green spaces are listed on the Council's web site with key facilities and maps provided. Links to partner agencies, such as the Friends of Parks Groups and sports clubs will be made available.

All publicity produced will meet the council's corporate accessibility standard for publications.

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The Council will ensure that signage is clear and consistent and that the Council's customer service centre contact number is used throughout. New signage that meets green flag standards will be introduced at all our key sites. Where appropriate, directional road signs will be provided to guide people to our key parks.

The promotion of the strategy, the action plans and our progress are also important. The final strategy document will be widely circulate to all partners and neighbours and made available for download from our web site. Regular strategy updates will be produced and also published on the web site.

Policy 25: Promotion

- 25.1 The Council will produce high quality, professional promotional material which meets the Council's accessibility standards.**
- 25.2 The Council will increase the range of material available on the Council's web site, but still provide alternative media for those that do not have access to the internet.**
- 25.3 The Council will produce a range of leaflets and information for all key facilities and services.**
- 25.4 The Council will produce a range of walks and interpretation guides to enable visitors to learn about and explore the local environment.**

8. Action Plan

The Green Spaces Strategy will initially cover the period from January 2007 – March 2012, however, many of the policies, aims and objectives have been set to protect and enhance the provision of Green Spaces for the long term and will have influences well beyond the term of this strategy.

The Strategy will be fully reviewed from April 2011 to March 2012 with the intention of publishing the new strategy in April 2012.

The following action plan shows the tasks identified in this Green Spaces Strategy, along with target date, lead officer, expenditure, a performance measure and the key corporate objective that the task supports.

Glossary

BAP Biodiversity Action Plan

CABE Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. CABE is the government's advisor of architecture, urban design and public space.

GIS Geographic Information Systems

Invasive Species A species that has moved into an area and reproduces so aggressively that it has replaced some of the original species. An invasive species is usually an introduced alien, such as Japanese Knotweed or Rhododendron. They are generally poor in supporting native wildlife (e.g. insects) and replace less vigorous native species which support a much greater diversity of wildlife.

LAA Local Area Agreement. This is an agreement between central government and local statutory agencies and other partners to work together to deliver key government policies at a local level.

LBAP Local Biodiversity Action Plan

LNR Local Nature Reserve

Office of National Statistics (ONS) The government department that provides statistical and registration services. ONS is responsible for producing a wide range of economic and social statistics. It also registers life events and holds the decennial census of the population. ONS is the source of all the demographic data that we have used in producing the Green Spaces Strategy.

PPG 17 Planning Policy Guidance note 17. This is a guidance note produced by government to assist Local Authorities in the assessment of the provision of Green Spaces within their area. It is used to inform the Local Development framework, which is the replacement of the District Plan.

Pump-priming Funding This is funding that is given to enable a new project or service to start. The funding is used to cover start up costs and the annual revenue costs should be planned for from another source.

SOA / Super Output Area Super Output Areas (SOAs) are a new geographic hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics, which were introduced nationally in February 2004. The areas are of consistent size and their boundaries will not change. There are 53 SOAs within Watford and 32,482 in England in total.

Stretched Targets This is a term that is being used by the Government through the Local Area Agreements to challenge local providers of services to 'stretch' their service to achieve enhanced targets, therefore, providing a better service that meets the needs of that local community. The stretch targets are set to be beyond the normal expectation of service standards.

If there are any terms used within or elements of the strategy that you would like further information upon or an explanation, please contact us at any time.