

A Green Spaces Strategy for Watford

Green Spaces Better Places

2013-2023

Service update 2020



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A Green Spaces Vision for Watford

Watford will have a network of accessible, high quality and highly valued green spaces to be proud of, promoting sustainability, supporting bio-diversity and extensively contributing to the economic, social and environmental aspirations of the town.



Contents:

	Page:
Executive Summary & Update	
1.0 Introduction	3
1.1 The Purpose of this Green Spaces Strategy	3
1.2 The Watford Green Spaces Strategy 2007-2012 - A Review	3
1.3 The Aims and Objectives of the revised Watford Green Spaces Strategy	5
1.4 What will this Green Spaces Strategy Cover?	5
1.5 Benefits of Green Spaces	7
2.0 Background Research and Consultation - The Watford Context	9
2.1 Local Character and Area Profile	9
2.2 Watford Consultation	10
2.3 Involving Communities	10
2.4 Policy Context and Background	13
3.0 Our Methodology - Green Spaces Audits and Standards - Quality, Quantity and Accessibility	23
3.1 Identifying and Prioritising	23
3.2 Investment in Green Spaces	24
3.3 Value for Money vs Cost Recovery	24
3.4 Quality and Value Audits and Standards	24
4.0 Analysis of Findings - The Audit Results	27
4.1 The Audit Results	27
4.2 Quality Standards	33
4.3 Investment Priorities	34
4.4 Quantity Audits and Standards - Green Infrastructure	34
4.5 Accessibility Audits and Distance Thresholds	39
4.6 Accessibility Audit Findings	39
4.7 Setting, Developing and Applying Local Provision Standards	44
5.0 The Strategic and Local Green Space Network - Policies and Aspirations	53
5.1 Our Vision	53
5.2 Delivering Change	53
5.3 The Strategic Borough Wide Network	55
5.4 The Strategic Borough Wide Network Map	57
5.5 The Watford Provision Level	57
5.6 Opportunities and Sites for Review	57

6.0	Key Green Spaces Issues - Our Vision and Strategy	58
6.1	Introduction	58
6.2	The Vision for Watford's Green Spaces	58
6.3	Key Issues	61
6.4	Contributions to the Enhancement of Existing Provision	66
6.5	Performance Indicators - Measuring Progress	67
6.6	Site Classification by Use - Grounds Maintenance Implications	68
6.7	Sustainable Design and Development	69
6.8	Anti-Social Behaviour	69
7.0	Action Plan	71
7.1	Stewardship	72
7.2	Management	73
7.3	Use	76
7.4	Environmental Protection	83

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & UPDATE

What is a Green Spaces Strategy? It sets out how a local authority will invest in and manage the open space in its area. This is exactly what this 10 year strategy set out to do when it was adopted in 2013. It applies to all open space in Watford (excluding spaces within housing estates) and applies primarily to parks and open spaces, squares, play space, allotments and our natural green space assets, especially valuable in an urban community such as ours. It provides the evidence, sets the direction and helps secure funds for continued investment in open space. In 2018, we re-assessed our Green Space priorities and re-visited our Action Plan to assess our achievements and our plans moving forward in an ever changing environment.

Our 10 year strategy remains ambitious despite continued challenging economic times that we all face and Watford is not alone in embracing these challenges head on. When it was written and adopted, it recognised and acknowledged the benefits of green spaces to Watford as a town as well as those that live, work and visit. As a town, we continue to grow and the last census indicated substantial growth in our population and changes in the demographic make-up of it. Involving communities is an important aspect of how we manage and provide green spaces and the strategy advocates strong community engagement, from children and young people, to minority groups across the town.

Ongoing research and changes in policy direction at a national level are recognised, in particular, the importance of the National Planning Policy Framework Guidance on open space, sports and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space and the importance of Green Infrastructure as set out in the 2016 guidance on the Natural environment, and more locally, our Corporate Plan to 2020, where our vision is *to create a bold and progressive future for Watford*. The important messages from these and others is that green spaces still matter and must deliver clear benefits for local people, wildlife and the long term sustainability of Watford.

The original evidence that was provided through a range of green spaces audits, where we assessed quality, quantity and accessibility through a comprehensive on site audit and analysis was subsequently mapped onto a Geographical Information System (GIS). These audits covered many issues such as maintenance, cleanliness, biodiversity, usage, recreational value, facilities available and management regimes. A tried and tested methodology, this gave us the evidence we needed to build up a picture, identifying what we have and allowing us to prioritise. We have reassessed these audits and updated them within the strategy.

As a reminder, we assessed the quality and value of our green spaces, how good were they and what contribution they were making to local amenity, looking at a range of typologies, which included parks, gardens and recreation grounds, allotments, play areas, natural green space, cemeteries and sports facilities. We categorised each space as to whether it was high or low quality or high or low community value. The updated results are summarised within the strategy but the overall result in 2013 was that the quality and value of open spaces across Watford was mixed, with some good examples such as the three Green Flag parks at that time and play areas in particular, reflected in the significant investment over the last few years. In 2019, the picture is very different, with most of our parks and open spaces now high quality and of high value. In 2019, the Council had obtained 12 Green Flag awards, compared to 3 in 2013.

There is still often a perception among residents that *“there is never enough green space”*, but when we assessed the amount of green space over the range of typologies, as a town, Watford is in fact very well endowed, and many of our wards have excellent provision of green space over a range of typologies. Some small deficiencies do still occur, especially with regards to natural green space, but overall, we are well provided for. However, accessibility is an issue for many and the strategy continues to advocate adopting green infrastructure principles and developing a strategic green space network for the town. By setting standards of provision we would expect to maintain in Watford, we can concentrate on those sites that are most important to us which need to be protected at all costs as well as continually enhanced. This allows the council to deliver change through improving the quality, value and accessibility of our green space network, making Watford a better place to live. The network proposed was formed of regional, community and local parks, along with a network of strategic sports hubs and green links with an emphasis on enhancement, accessibility, protection and increasing community and stakeholder involvement. This still remains the case in 2019.

But what about those sites which do not perform well and are deemed low quality and/or low value? Originally 50 sites fell into this category including some of our most important parks. There is a clear policy on how we treat these sites. We looked at enhancing the quality of many of these green spaces as long as it was possible to improve and enhance the value of them. If this was not possible, we would consider the space surplus to requirements in terms of its current use if the value cannot be improved and consider alternative uses. However, this must still be considered in the light of wider planning policies such as the need to determine other typology deficiencies in the area within distance thresholds, whether enhancement is realistic and determine community value by local consultation. In 2019, only 35 sites now fall into the category of low quality and low value with many of these outside council ownership. Significantly, none of our main parks, allotments or play areas fall into this category.

The Council continues to set a challenging vision with a number of key components, based on stewardship, management, use and environmental protection. We identified that because we cannot do it all, we need to work in partnership with local stakeholders. We currently do this in many of our green spaces and communities, but there are significant opportunities to develop further partnerships across Watford. This may range from community tidy ups in open spaces with a Friends group or a joint working arrangement with a major organisation such as Groundwork, Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust or the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Funding continues to be a significant issue, and we need to identify further ways we can make changes, particularly through income generation, or partnering, developing self-management options or by altering management and maintenance regimes.

How will we know if we are continuing to make a difference? We continue to see Green Flag as the key performance indicator and we are very proud of the increase from the 3 that we had originally to the 12 (2019 figures) that we now hold, but we want to build on this further and seek further Green Flags for Watford. These include Green Flags for Garston Park, King George V Playing Fields, Watford Heath with Oxhey Grange Playing Fields and Harebreaks Recreation Ground. We have reassessed the quality and value scores of every site to assess what progress has been made, and will continue to do so.

The point of any strategy is to get things done and the most important aspect of this is the Action Plan and we developed a comprehensive, challenging, yet stretched series of actions to ensure this strategy actually *“gets things done”*. We have refreshed this in 2019 and have updated what Action Plans have been achieved.

Progress over the first 5 years of the strategy has been excellent and Watford’s green spaces are well considered, much loved and the improvements are there to be seen. This updated Green Spaces Strategy, however, continues to provide a realistic, yet challenging target for continued improvement for the remaining 5 years.



Cheslyn House and Gardens

1 Introduction

Green spaces play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for local communities in Watford. They improve the appearance of the town, and provide for informal recreation, sport and play. This comprehensive and updated Green Spaces Strategy for 2013 -2023 and Action Plan aims to ensure that Watford continues to achieve an appropriate balance between quantity of provision, quality, and the enhancement of existing green spaces.

This updated and revised Green Spaces Strategy revisits what the Council aims to do, in conjunction with its partners, to ensure protection of green spaces and sustainable provision, management and maintenance to meet the needs of the Watford community, as well as visitors to the town. It provides a vision and sets directions, priorities and actions for the remaining years.

1.1 The Purpose of this Green Spaces Strategy

This Green Spaces Strategy offers a major opportunity to improve parks and green spaces. Government guidance emphasises the need for a more strategic approach to green space. The former CABE Space (now the Design Council) guidance originally identified the role of Green Spaces Strategies and these are still relevant today. These are to:

- ❑ Generate political and inter-departmental support for parks and green spaces and establish clear lines of responsibility;
- ❑ Develop a vision shared by politicians, officers, key partners, stakeholders and communities;
- ❑ Define the value and role of parks and green spaces in meeting corporate and community aims;
- ❑ Create a comprehensive policy framework for the protection, enhancement, accessibility and use of parks and green spaces;
- ❑ Make sure that green spaces enhance the quality and diversity of the environment, the life of local communities and promote civic pride and social inclusion;
- ❑ Ensure that the green space network meets the needs of local people, now and in the future;
- ❑ Provide a framework for resource allocation that maximises funding to support improvements from internal revenue budgets and external funding; and
- ❑ Create a framework for voluntary and community groups to participate in green space provision and management.

'Green Space Strategies - a good practice guide' CABE Space.

1.2 The Watford Green Spaces Strategy 2007-2012 - A Review

In 2007, Watford adopted its first Green Spaces Strategy with an aim 'to provide green spaces to be proud of, which will benefit the whole community, improving health, well-being and quality of life'. It identified a number of objectives and outlined an Action Plan that has achieved much but has also identified further work that needs 'carrying forward'. Successes included:

- Spatial mapping of Watford's green spaces, identifying areas of deficiency;
- Improved links to Friends Groups;

- Continued improvements to Woodside Playing Fields;
- Improvements to children’s playgrounds and youth facilities, including outdoor gyms and fitness trails;
- A successful Cassiobury Park Round 1 HLF bid in 2012;
- Charter for the Bereaved for the Cemeteries;
- Continued retention of Green Flag for Cassiobury Park, Woodside Playing Fields and Cheslyn House and Gardens;
- Review and updating of the Allotments Strategy in 2013;
- Self- Management of Cherry Tree allotments;
- Sports Facilities Study completed;
- Program of signage replacement for all parks; and
- Provision of dog bins reviewed.

Other improvements were introduced with the allocation of Section 106 funding in 2011 and included the following:

- Litter bin replacement across all parks and green spaces;
- £4.6 million improvement program to parks and play areas, including Oxhey Park, Callowland Recreation Ground, King George V Playing Fields, Vicarage Road Cemetery, North Watford Cemetery, Radlett Road Playing Fields, Waterfields Recreation Ground, Knutsford Playing Fields and North Watford Playing Fields;
- Colne River Project and continued support for the Trust for Conservation Volunteers (TCV);
- Sports Legacy Zone at Meriden Park; and
- New Multi Use Games Areas at Leavesden Green, Callowland Recreation Ground and Radlett Road Playing Fields.

As part of this current strategy, the 2007-12 Green Spaces Strategy and Action Plan was reviewed and outstanding and relevant actions were carried forward. The last few years have brought a number of significant challenges for local authorities as they respond to changing government requirements and expectations, as well as the substantial reduction in government funding. These continue and are exacerbated by the loss of the Government’s Revenue Support Grant with the Council having to find further efficiencies.

The Council continues to work hard to achieve savings and to minimise the impact on the council, the services we deliver, the local community and on its staff. However, we have had to take some very difficult decisions and know that there will be more to be made as we work through the announcement of our government funding for the next number of years.

As a result of these national reductions in funding, many local authorities have seen reductions in standards across parks and green spaces and this has also impacted in Watford. However, the Council remains committed to its continued green space vision for Watford underpinned by this revised Green Spaces Strategy, whilst recognising and facing the challenges that the Council, the town and local people now face.

1.3 The Aims and Objectives of the revised Watford Green Spaces Strategy

The aims and objectives for this updated Watford Green Spaces Strategy are;

- To provide and enhance the strategic network of accessible, high quality green space throughout Watford;
- To provide guidance for the effective planning and protection of open space, sport and recreational facilities which meet local needs by:
 - providing appropriate green space planning policies and standards which provide clarity and reasonable certainty for developers and landowners, which will be taken forward as part of the Core Strategy;
 - designating all open spaces identified within the strategic network as Local Green Space, thereby protecting them against development due to their importance to local communities;
 - promoting good green space design and management principles in all new and existing developments.
- To strengthen local community involvement and interest in Watford's green spaces by:
 - encouraging community participation in the design, management and care of their local green spaces;
 - promoting the value of green space as a major contributor to health and social well being, via its use for recreational, educational and sporting activities;
 - promoting awareness and understanding of the heritage of our green spaces;
 - ensuring green spaces are locally valued and well used community assets.
- To improve green spaces by:
 - ensuring green spaces are high quality and locally accessible, clean, attractive, well maintained, fit for purpose and safe;
 - improving the existing green spaces contribution to the landscape, biodiversity and cultural value of Watford;
 - providing a more sustainable and long term approach to green spaces management and maintenance, looking at income generation opportunities and in some cases, full cost recovery of services.

1.4 What will this Green Spaces Strategy Cover?

This Green Spaces Strategy covers the following types of accessible green space as listed below. Much of it is owned and managed by Watford Borough Council but some are also owned by other public bodies like the County Council / Police Crime Commissioner with others in private ownership such as Watford Community Housing. The following is based on the typology of open space specified in the former Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17) and is a typology that the Council is continuing to work with.

■ Parks, Gardens and Recreation Grounds (PGRG)

These areas of land are normally enclosed, designed, managed and maintained as a public park or garden or recreation ground. Their primary purpose is to provide accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events.

■ **Amenity Green Spaces (AGS)**

These are landscaped areas that are a visual amenity and/or have separate land uses e.g. major areas of grass within housing areas and business parks that are usable for informal recreation, social activities and informal play. Their primary purpose is to provide opportunities for informal recreation close to home or work, or to enhance the appearance of residential and other areas.

■ **Green Corridors (GC)**

These are green routes/linkages including river and canal corridors, major road verges and hedgerows connecting different areas within urban and rural areas and joining green spaces together. Their primary purpose is for walking, cycling or horse riding routes and for wildlife migration.

■ **Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces (NGS)**

These are areas of undeveloped or previously undeveloped land with residual natural habitats. Their primary purpose is for wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.

■ **Allotments and Community Gardens (ACG)**

Areas of land rented for growing vegetables, fruits or flowers. Their primary purpose is to provide opportunities for people to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion.

■ **Churchyards and Cemeteries (CC)**

This category includes municipal cemeteries, churchyards and other burial grounds with legitimate public access. Their primary purpose is for burial of the dead and quiet contemplation, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

■ **Civic Space (CS)**

This includes squares and streets, predominantly of hard landscaping that provide a focus for pedestrian activity and civic or cultural events, and can make connections for people and for wildlife.

■ **Play Space for Children and Young People (CYP)**

This includes equipped play areas, ball courts, skateboard areas and multi-use games areas (MUGA) for children and young people. Where these are within larger parks and gardens or areas of amenity space they will be recorded as a subtype to the predominant type.

■ **Outdoor Sports Facilities (OSF)**

These are large and generally flat areas of grassland or specially designed surfaces used for designated sports e.g. playing fields, tennis courts and bowling greens – areas which can generally be booked and whose primary purpose is for playing of sport. Where these are within parks or large recreation grounds they will be recorded as a subtype to the predominant type.

■ **School Grounds/Playing Fields (EDUC)**

These are large areas of open space associated with primary and secondary schools and are generally flat areas of grassland with a combination of playing fields, play grounds, play facilities or other areas of sport such as tennis, cricket or football. Most are inaccessible to the public but several have multi-use purposes and are used by the public after school hours and at weekends.

The following green spaces are not covered unless they are accessible to and available for use by the public:

- ❑ Large back gardens; and
- ❑ Private historic gardens.

This Green Spaces Strategy however, recognises that these areas may contribute significant and wide ranging benefits as part of the broader green infrastructure of the town, and that in some cases, where they are accessible and available for public use, they provide opportunities that meet the requirements and definition of local green space.

1.5 Benefits of Green Spaces

Green spaces are widely accepted as offering lasting social, economic, cultural, educational, environmental, and health benefits and this was endorsed by detailed research carried out by the former CAGE Space. This is summarised below.

1.5.1 Social Benefits and Opportunities

Perhaps the most obvious benefits and opportunities that green spaces provide for urban living are social – they create opportunities for people to do things, take part in events and activities or just to be.

- **Children’s Play** – children’s play is one of the main reasons for visiting open spaces. The importance of play for a child’s development is supported by a wide range of research and is now increasingly accepted by professionals as well as ordinary people. Despite the importance of play for a child’s development, there are some issues in the urban context that restrict the opportunities for play in the external environment for many children including parental anxiety about children’s safety to poor provision of play facilities;
- **Passive Recreation** – walking the dog, watching your children play, wildlife, people, looking at views, reading or resting or just meeting people. Research has shown the importance of passive recreation is far more important to individuals lives than active recreation and most parks and open space users will use an open space for passive use rather than sport or events;
- **Active Recreation** – organised sport, children’s play, music, and a range of events. Despite being the minority user of parks and open spaces, nationally it is estimated that up to 16% of park users will visit for active recreation alone and account for 7.5 million visitors each year;
- **Community Focus** – festivals, meeting people formally or informally. Research in recent years has confirmed the importance of parks and open spaces as a focus for the community, or as places for people to meet each other, both formally and informally. This may be through organised events which may increase the sense of community. However, it is not only large and formally organised events that are important to the community. Studies have shown that about one third of people entering parks do so on their own, one third with a friend and one third with a large group;
- **Cultural Focus** – different ethnic backgrounds have different requirements from open spaces. There may be approaches related to design and management of parks and open spaces that could be investigated that would encourage wider use of these areas by these groups;
- **Open Spaces as Educational Resources** – The benefits to children have included sensory perception, children’s behaviour, outdoor learning opportunities, different patterns of play.

1.5.2 Health Benefits and Opportunities

Research shows that contact with the natural world can benefit mental and physical health. Access to a quality green environment not only benefits health in preventative terms, but speeds recovery and plays a vital part in our mental well-being.

Physical inactivity has been estimated to cost the NHS about 2-3% of its total budget, according to Dr. William Bird medical advisor to the British Heart Foundation.

Keeping active greatly reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease, and of developing diabetes, hypertension, obesity and certain cancers and helps maintain health and independence in older adults.

1.5.3 Environmental Benefits and Opportunities

Our green spaces and street trees can ameliorate urban environments, making it feel more liveable by screening eyesores, reducing noise and absorbing harmful pollutants. They support diverse wildlife habitats in our town, connecting people with nature close to home, school or work. The environmental benefits of urban open spaces and adjacent countryside are there for all regardless of social class, creed, ethnic background or gender.

1.5.4 Wildlife - Opportunities for Habitats and Human Experience

Watford is a busy and active town and as a result there are significant pressures on wildlife and therefore habitats for wildlife are much more significant. Watford has a range of habitats including two river corridors, 5 Local Nature Reserves (LNR) as well as Whippendell Wood which is our only Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and also a number of County Wildlife Sites. Within these are many habitats and designated wildlife spaces across the town that are managed by the Council and its partners, including Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT), Trust for Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and a number of Friends Groups such as the Friends of Cassiobury Park and Friends of Harebreaks Woods who continue to improve our sites for wildlife as well as accessibility, management and visitor potential.

1.5.5 Economic Value of Green Spaces

There has been significant research over recent years between the link of having high quality green spaces and benefits to economic vitality particularly by CABI Space and GreenSpace. It is recognised that a clean attractive green environment not only gives social, recreational and health benefits to our citizens but is a vital part of attracting investments.

“Environmental enhancement not only makes places more attractive and pleasant but green space initiatives can result in community strengthening and local economic stimulation as well as improvement to local environmental quality”

“Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces” Former ODPM



North Watford Cemetery

2 Background Research and Consultation - The Watford Context

2.1 Local Character and Area Profile

Watford is an urban borough in South West Hertfordshire, on the edge of the East of England region to the north-west of London. It covers an area of 2,142 hectares (8.3 square miles), and is the only non-metropolitan borough wholly contained within the M25. However, about 20% of the Borough forms part of the Metropolitan Green Belt and this is supplemented by a variety of open spaces. The Rivers Colne and Gade and the Grand Union Canal give structure to the main open areas, which include the Colne Valley Linear Park/Watling Chase Community Forest and Cassiobury Park, a historic park with a Green Flag award, the national standard for quality parks and green spaces. The Borough has excellent transport links with direct mainline rail connections to London, Gatwick Airport, the Midlands and the North, Underground and Overground connections to London, its north-west suburbs and the rural Chilterns, community rail connections to St Albans, national coach services to Heathrow, Luton and Stansted airports, and convenient road connections via the M1, M25 and A41.

A long established urban centre, with a market charter dating to the 12th century, Watford expanded rapidly from its linear layout along the historic High Street during the nineteenth century with the coming of the railway line. Much of the character of the area is formed by the streets of terraced Victorian housing, which were followed by an extensive variety of planned housing estates during the twentieth century. These estates, along with their associated employment areas, reflect the styles of design that predominated at the time of their construction, with the resulting diversity of urban character visible across the Borough. Watford is the centre of a sub-region serving around 500,000 people, living within a 20 minute travelling time catchment. Known for traditional industries including printing, the town has successfully diversified into an attractive and popular regional shopping and business centre and a focus for culture and recreation.

As part of the London commuter belt, Watford is strongly influenced by London; and whilst this brings the benefits of a buoyant economy, it also brings significant environmental pressures such as high levels of traffic congestion, high house prices and, with limited land available for development, pressure on all land, including the green belt. Green space in Watford is also varied in type, form, pattern, character and design, and ranges from the historic parks of Cassiobury and Oxhey Park, to local recreation grounds, allotments, play areas, sports pitches and playing fields, to the significant areas of semi-natural green space along the river corridors and Whippendell Wood.

2.1.1 Demographic Background

The importance of demographic information is important as without it, it is not possible to determine whether we have enough open space or even too much and where these gaps may exist.

Watford currently (June 2016) has a population of 96,800. This is an increase of 21.4% compared to the figure of 79,726 from the 2001 Census.

Key Census Day statistics for Watford:

- ❑ Watford's population on Census Day 2011 was 90,301, of which 49.6% were male and 50.4% female; The last mid-year estimate of Watford's population (June 2016), showed the population as 96,800 of which 49.5% were male and 50.5% female. Projections indicate that the borough is likely to reach a population of 100,000 over the next year.
- ❑ Watford has a high population density, which has risen to just under 46 people per hectare (up from 42 people per hectare 2011, compared with an average of just under 7 persons per hectare in Hertfordshire and just over 4 persons per hectare in England overall
- ❑ The non-white British proportion of Watford's population increased from 25% in 2001 to 38% in 2011. This is significantly higher than the national level of 20% and the Eastern region level of 15% and reflects Watford's broad mix of cultures. Significantly, the Asian population in Watford has increased from 8.2% in 2001 to 17.9% in 2011
Voted 9th happiest place to live in the country

Source: Census © Crown Copyright (KS02).

2.2 Watford Consultation

As part of the development of this Green Spaces Strategy, some early, but limited consultation was carried out and is discussed further in the following section under “Involving Communities”.

Research in recent years by a range of investigators, in particular English Heritage, GreenSpace, Natural England, the former CABE Space, and Comedia Demos (*‘Park Life’* report) has confirmed the importance of parks and open spaces as a focus for the community, or as a place for people to meet each other, both formally and informally. This may be through organised events which can increase the sense of community.

However, it is not only large and formally organised events that are important to the community. National studies have shown that about one third of people entering parks do so on their own, one third with a friend and one third with a large group. Different ethnic groups have also been identified as having different approaches to active and passive recreation.

Considering many of these issues, it is important to “involve communities” and define green space stakeholders in developing any strategic overview for the development, management and maintenance of green spaces in Watford. A report by the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2016 also highlights the popularity of parks with over 2.6 billion visits per year to public parks. Over 70% of park managers have recorded increased visitor numbers to their principal parks between 2013 and 2014. Yet 86% of park managers report cuts to revenue budgets since 2010 and they expect the trend to continue for the next few years. Just as worrying is that 71% of households with children under 10 years of age are concerned that reductions in council budgets could have a negative impact on the condition of their local park. The involvement of local communities has therefore never been more important.

2.3 Involving Communities

2.3.1 Green Spaces Stakeholders

Stakeholders are people who have an interest, so when we talk about green spaces, this potentially means everyone. They may use them passively (walking through them on their way to work, school or the shops), or actively (playing sport, visiting a facility there, or an event, or walking the dog), or live or work next to a green space. Green space impacts on most of us. We carried out some initial consultation as part of the strategy development but recognise that ongoing work with the Green Spaces Strategy will require continuing and ongoing consultation.

Taking into account local views is fundamental to achieving a successful green space network that people are satisfied with and feel safe using.

The local community was therefore engaged through the following methods:

1. Friends Groups, Sports Clubs and Residents Associations through *Survey Monkey*;
2. Members;
3. Citizens Panel consultation;
4. Project based consultation;
5. Annual Parks Forum; and
6. Annual Allotments Forum.

Table 2.3 – Summary of Early Consultation Issues (opposite)

Key Questions

A simple questionnaire was devised that was seeking local people's views on their local green spaces and in Watford as a whole. This included specific questions on quality, accessibility and quantity of open space. Questions were also asked in relation to the kind of activities local people engaged in green spaces.

Feedback (based on 164 responses)

- The most popular activity is walking with 92% of respondents taking part in it regularly, followed by 71% meeting friends, 37% observing wildlife, and 32% cycling.

Quality

- Within their **local areas**, 43% felt allotments were good to very good with only 12% saying they were poor or very poor; 83% said children's play areas were good to very good; 89% said that parks were good to very good and 73% said that recreation grounds were good to very good.
- 79% of respondents replied that woodlands and natural green spaces were good to very good.
- Facilities in open spaces was variable, with sports pitches (56%) good to very good but youth facilities, tennis courts and changing facilities poor to very poor.

- Within **Watford as a whole**, 49% felt allotments were good to very good, with 12% poor to very poor. 79% said children's play areas were good to very good, 94% said that parks were good to very good; 74% felt that recreations grounds were good to very good; 84% also said that woodlands and natural green spaces were good to very good. In relation to facilities, the results reflected the local areas results.

Quantity

In relation to quantity of green spaces in their local areas, most respondents felt that there were enough allotments, play areas, parks and recreation grounds, but many felt that there was not enough woodlands or natural green spaces. Youth facilities were significantly lacking in most respondents views. These responses were echoed within Watford as a whole.

Accessibility

A question was asked in relation as to how long a user would be willing to walk to certain green spaces facilities. Most allotment tenants were prepared to spend up to 10 minutes (44%) and 20 minutes (20%). Children's play areas were primarily within 10 minutes (42%), natural green spaces up to 20 minutes (49%); a local park within 10 minutes (55%); Recreation ground, between 10 and 20 minutes (70%).

Comments

Many comments were made in relation to green spaces ranging from the love of Cassiobury Park to the perceived development threats on open spaces and the high quality of children's play areas.

Key Issues

- Quality of green spaces is high especially parks and children's play areas;
- Quality of changing facilities, some sports and youth facilities is variable;
- Quantity of most green spaces is about right although youth facilities are an issue along with natural green spaces.
- Most users were prepared to walk between 10 and 20 minutes to a local green space depending on the typology.

2.3.2 Consultation with Young People

In 2011, 40% of Watford's population is made up of young people up to the age of 29, with just less than 20% under the age of 15. They are a difficult group to involve in decision making, design and management of the green spaces they use. There have been successes to date and developments continue in relation to involving young people. However more work is required to ensure the Council fully engages with young people. Their needs depend on age and level of parental dependency. Young children need access to safe green spaces closer to home though older children want to play alone or meet friends but still be relatively close to home. Older teenagers will travel quite independently within their own or an adjacent neighbourhood or simply "hang out" and be well away from other residents to avoid potential conflict.

Also, a previous study by the Heritage Lottery Fund shows that 86% of parents with children aged 11 or under, say that on a warm day their children would rather go to the park than sit watching a television program. The consultation highlighted a lack of facilities for young people in relation to teenagers.

2.3.3 Consultation with Ethnic Minority Groups

The 2011 census identifies that approximately 21% of the population in Watford comes from black and ethnic minority groups and is increasing with the remainder primarily white British. People from ethnic minority backgrounds face a variety of problems when accessing services. These may be through cultural differences, accessibility issues, as well as language barriers or fear of prejudice or harassment (real and perceived). An Action Plan will be developed that will look at how increased usage of open spaces by BME groups can be delivered with reference to the Black Environment Network Research, *'Ethnic Communities and Green Spaces – Guidance for Green Space Managers'*.

2.3.4 Improving Access for All - The Health of our Population

The NHS Health Profile 2012 for Watford, similarly to 2011, indicates that priorities include physical activity and obesity, particularly among younger people and older people's health.

The amount of physically active adults has improved again since last year (8.8% in 2010, 10% in 2011, and 10.5% in 2012) and is not far from the England average (11.2%). The amount of healthy eating adults has remained the same at 32.2%, better than the national average of 28.7%, as has the proportion of obese adults at 17.3%, below the England average of 24.2% but the percentage of obese children in Year 6 has again increased both in Watford (from 16.4% to 18%) and in England (18.7% to 19%).

In the council's original Corporate Plan 2012-16, the first objective was to 'Improve the health of the town and enhance its heritage'. Many Watford residents are already enjoying the benefits of the modernised leisure centres, Woodside and Watford Central, illustrated by Watford being ranked first in the country in 'satisfaction with sport and leisure facilities' in the Place Survey 2008-09. Ensuring that our leisure centres and our parks and open spaces are maintained to a high standard all contributes to a potentially healthier town.

However, it is recognised that we still need to increase participation in sports and leisure activities amongst our community as this has a positive impact on issues such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease. There is also a link in the council's other aims, for example, tackling problems such as alcohol and drug abuse has a positive impact on health as well as crime levels.

2.3.5 Consultation with Older People

As previously noted, nearly 17% of the population are over pension-able age. Older people are a diverse and expanding group and regular users of parks and green spaces for activities such as walking dogs, relaxing or taking grandchildren to play. They are also often the ones who are most likely to fill in a questionnaire or form a Friend's Group!

2.3.6 "Friend's in Green Spaces"

Watford currently has a number of Friends Groups across the town but also has a number of Residents Associations who are involved in enhancing their local communities. The Council and its partner, Veolia, are keen

to support these groups in relation to specific open spaces and local communities. Friend's Groups and Residents Associations are very important to parks and open spaces within the town's communities, as they have one common goal – to improve their local community green space. They create an important focus for the community and many successful partnerships have developed in areas where the “park” is at the heart of their community.

The support from Watford Council and Veolia is essential to ensure these groups are supported effectively. The work to support such groups will form part of an Action Plan of this Green Spaces Strategy and part of a wider Veolia initiative called 'Friends in Green Spaces' (FIGS).

2.3.7 Summary of Local Consultation

Any consultation exercise is always difficult to ensure as many views are taken into account as possible. The response for Watford was reasonable with over 150+ responses to the online survey. Several key issues have been highlighted as part of the consultation and were summarised above based on:-

- Local people's perception of the quantity of open space in Watford;
- Local people's perception of the quality of open space in Watford;
- Local people's perception on how accessible open space is in Watford;
- Time prepared to travel to different types of open space in Watford; and
- Current usage of open space

2.4 Policy Context and Background

The gathering of data that has been carried out in the development of this Green Spaces Strategy is important in setting local standards for the type, location, quantity, quality and accessibility of green spaces, helping to identify gaps in provision and to define key priorities for investment.

At a national level the key policy and guidance documents that underpin this strategy and set out clear expectations for local authorities to take a strategic approach to green space are:

- The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP);
- The Biodiversity Strategy for England (BSE);
- The Localism Act, 2011;
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF);
- Making Space for Nature (MSN);
- Natural England's Green Infrastructure Guidance (GIG); and
- DEFRA's Green Infrastructure Partnership (GIP).

■ ***The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP)***

The NEWP (2011) states the government's view that the quality of the natural environment is in decline, highly fragmented and unable to respond to the pressures that will follow from climate change.

The NEWP is based largely on the concept of “ecosystem services” and the benefits that society gains from natural resources and functional natural systems – benefits such as food and water, fertile soils and clean air. It concludes that many ecosystems are in decline and therefore the benefits society derives from them are also in decline. As a result it argues for the creation and maintenance of a “resilient ecological network across England”.

It aims to halt biodiversity loss by 2020; to support networks. It also refers to urban green infrastructure as completing “the links in our national ecological network” and “one of the most effective tools available to us in managing environmental risks such as flooding and heat waves”.

The White Paper introduced a number of new policy initiatives, including:

- ❑ Local Nature Partnerships, intended to work at a strategic scale for a better natural environment;
- ❑ Nature Improvement Areas intended to enhance and reconnect nature on a significant scale;
- ❑ Biodiversity offsets, designed to deliver biodiversity benefits for losses through compensatory habitat expansion or restoration elsewhere; and
- ❑ A Green Infrastructure (GI) Partnership designed to support the development of GI in England.

■ ***The Biodiversity Strategy for England (BSE)***

The BSE, Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England’s Wildlife and Ecosystem Services sets out how the Government intends to implement international and EU commitments. It aims to reduce the environmental pressures created by development by “taking a strategic approach to planning for nature” and by retaining “the protection and improvement of the natural environment as core objectives of the planning system”.

■ ***The Localism Act, 2011***

The Localism Act sets out an ambitious aim of “taking power away from officials and putting it into the hands of those who know most about their neighbourhood – local people themselves”. It requires changes to strategic, local and neighbourhood level planning; the most significant for green space planning relate to the neighbourhood level as it empowers Parish Councils or Neighbourhood Forums to develop Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders.

■ ***The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)***

The NPPF (published March 2012) is a streamlined version of the former Planning Policy Guidance and Planning Policy Statements issued by the Government over the years. It starts from the premise that the purpose of planning is to achieve sustainable growth and therefore it has an economic role, a social role and an environmental role. In particular, the planning system should seek to deliver positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment and people’s quality of life. In more detail, the government’s aims for the planning system are that it should help:

- ❑ Build a strong, competitive economy;
- ❑ Ensure the vitality of town centres;
- ❑ Support a prosperous rural economy;
- ❑ Promote sustainable transport;
- ❑ Support high quality communications infrastructure;
- ❑ Deliver a wide choice of high quality homes;
- ❑ Require good design;

- ❑ Promote healthy communities;
- ❑ Protect Green Belt land;
- ❑ Meet the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change;
- ❑ Conserve and enhance the natural environment;
- ❑ Conserve and enhance the historic environment; and
- ❑ Facilitate the sustainable use of minerals.

As a result, the NPPF is structured around these thirteen objectives. Those sections which set out policies for green space and green infrastructure are Section 8, *Promoting Healthy Communities*; Section 9, *Protecting Green Belt Land*; Section 10, *Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change*; and Section 11, *Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment*.

Promoting Healthy Communities

Open space is a vitally important component of sustainable development and is covered in the NPPF objective of Promoting Health Communities. It requires planning authorities:

- ❑ To create a shared vision with communities of the residential environment and facilities they wish to see;
- ❑ To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs;
- ❑ To base their planning policies on “robust and up to date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision” ; in effect, what was known until recently as a “PPG17 assessment” or “green space strategy;”
- ❑ To protect and enhance public rights of way and access.

It provides highly specific guidance:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- ❑ An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- ❑ The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- ❑ The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

Protecting Green Belt Land

The NPPF states unequivocally that “the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open” and requires planning authorities to:-

“... plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land”.

It also states that the construction of buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate, although it also highlights a number of exceptions to this general rule. They include the

“... provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sports, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of providing land within it”.

Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

The NPPF suggests that the planning system should help conserve and enhance the natural environment by:

- ❑ Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
- ❑ Recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
- ❑ Minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government’s commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- ❑ Preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and
- ❑ Remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

Provision Standards

The Framework entitled “Using a proportionate evidence base”, requires that planning authorities

“... set out their policy on local standards in the Local Plan ...they should assess the likely cumulative impacts on development in the area of all existing and proposed local standards, supplementary planning documents and policies that support the development plan, when added to nationally required standards.”

Implicitly, therefore, the NPPF continues the approach set out in the former PPG17 of requiring councils to adopt locally-determined standards for open space, sport and recreation provision, a key outcome of this revised Green Spaces Strategy.

■ **Making Space for Nature (MSN)**

MSN also highlights the decline in biodiversity and fragmentation of wildlife habitats, resulting in a reduction in the benefits that ecosystems deliver. It suggests that the overall aim for England’s ecological networks should be to ensure that

“Compared to the situation in 2000, biodiversity is enhanced and the diversity, functioning and resilience of ecosystems re-established in a network of spaces for nature that can sustain these levels into the future, even given continuing environmental change and human pressures.”

■ *Natural England's Green Infrastructure Guidance (GIG)*

Natural England has been promoting the concept of green infrastructure (GI) for some years. However, its initial attempts concentrated on trying to persuade local authorities to adopt its Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) which set out an aspiration that everyone should be able to access a range of green spaces of different sizes within fixed maximum distances from their home. ANGSt had two main failings. First, it ignored the requirement in the former PPG17 that provision standards for open space should be locally determined; and second, it was simply unachievable in many areas. GI thinking has now moved on to focus more on the planned use of natural systems and processes (ecosystems) than what was ultimately an arbitrarily determined set of standards.

■ *DEFRA's Green Infrastructure Partnership (GIP)*

This is reflected in the work of the Green Infrastructure Partnership, which fulfils a commitment in the Natural Environment Green Paper, it brings together a wide range of organisations with a remit of:

- ❑ Finding ways to provide green infrastructure in towns, cities and rural areas;
- ❑ Address barriers that might prevent this progress;
- ❑ Develop and evidence base on the condition of England's green infrastructure and how it meets the needs of communities;
- ❑ Demonstrate the many benefits that green infrastructure can bring;
- ❑ Look into how communities, planners and decision-makers can best be supported in designing and developing green infrastructure; and
- ❑ Help people to quantify the costs and benefits of investing in green infrastructure and make the case for green infrastructure projects.

The Partnership defines GI as “a planned network of green spaces and other environmental features including street trees, gardens, green roofs, community forests, parks, rivers, canals and wetlands”. It has gone on to commission research on six broad topics:

- ❑ How to design and retrofit GI;
- ❑ How to plan GI for ecosystem services;
- ❑ How to work with communities;
- ❑ How to implement GI at the local level;
- ❑ How to value and make the case for GI; and
- ❑ How to ensure that people have the skills and knowledge to deliver improved GI

There are also a number of key local policy documents that are relevant to the Green Spaces Strategy. These are below:

■ *‘Watford Borough Council’s Corporate Plan to 2020’*

The Council’s Vision - To create a bold and progressive future for Watford

Our vision reflects our approach to the current challenges and opportunities facing the Council as an organisation and the town as a place to live, work, visit and study. We want to champion our town so that it is a place where all our communities thrive and prosper, benefitting from strong economic growth and good quality local services and facilities. This will require the Council to be innovative, explore new ways of working and champion initiatives that will transform the town and the organisation. More of the same isn’t going to secure the future we want for Watford, which is why bold and progressive lie at the heart of our ambitions.

Supporting this vision, the Council has 5 priority areas of work. Our priorities are critical to the Council achieving successful outcomes for its ambitions for the town.

1. Identify ways to manage the borough’s housing needs
2. Champion smart growth and economic prosperity
3. Provide for our vulnerable and disadvantaged communities
4. Deliver a digital Watford to empower our community
5. Secure our own financial future

In addition, our core, day to day business underpins everything we do and all of our work and effort contribute to our success. In particular, we recognise the importance of 3 key areas in making us an effective organisation, in touch with our residents and delivering in the areas and in a way that they expect. These are:

- **Effective two-way engagement and communication**
- **Sound management and high performance**
- **Improving the town’s environment.**

Listening to local people and ensuring they have the opportunities to influence decisions is essential if we are to focus on what matters most to our communities. We are committed to understanding needs and ensuring everyone has an opportunity to have a say.

Through ongoing consultations and engagement our community has told us what is important to them and the town. This has been reflected in our new corporate priorities but it also influences the work we do to deliver these priorities.

In our Community Survey 2012 we asked local people what they thought was important in making somewhere a good place to live. Below are the top five responses and how they link to our new corporate priorities.

TOP FIVE THINGS THAT PEOPLE SAY HELP MAKE THEIR AREA A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE	% response
Level of crime / community safety	72%
Quality of health services	46%
Litter / dirt in the streets	44%
Parks and open spaces	39%
Road and pavement repairs	38%

■ **‘Core Strategy’**

The Core Strategy sets out the overall vision, strategy and strategic objectives for Watford to 2031, and beyond, including the broad locations in which new development will be accommodated. It also sets out the broad framework for the other documents in the Local Development Framework (LDF), and has to be consistent with other strategies including Watford’s Sustainable Community Strategy. Underpinning policies related to green spaces is the Council’s commitment to Green Infrastructure with a range of priorities identified. The council will seek a net gain in the quality and quantity of Green Infrastructure, as well as recognising the benefits of green infrastructure already present and seeking to enhance and improve it.

Any proposals should improve links between sites and not compromise the integrity of the Green Infrastructure network by causing fragmentation, damage to, or isolation of GI assets.

Priorities for Green Infrastructure focus on the projects identified in the Watford Green Infrastructure Plan:

1. Cassiobury Park Enhancement;
2. Whippendell Wood Enhancement;
3. Grand Union Canal Enhancement;
4. Colne Valley Wetland Enhancement;
5. Urban Greening and Legibility for Watford; and
6. Joint working on the Green Herts interactive map

The contribution a development makes to the Green Infrastructure network will be a key consideration when determining planning permission, new development should contribute to the delivery of new Green Infrastructure and the management of a linked network of enhanced open spaces and corridors. In some instances an improvement in the overall quality of Green Infrastructure may make it acceptable for minor open space loss, this will be examined on a case-by-case basis.

The Green Spaces Strategy is relevant to a number of other key Council strategies:

It is important to determine where the Green Spaces Strategy sits within the hierarchy and what the links are. These are especially important when determining local priorities and especially when looking at allocation of available funding. The Green Spaces Strategy is central to the delivery of many of these policies objectives, including health, the economy, quality of life and economic regeneration. A structure is developed below indicating the hierarchy.

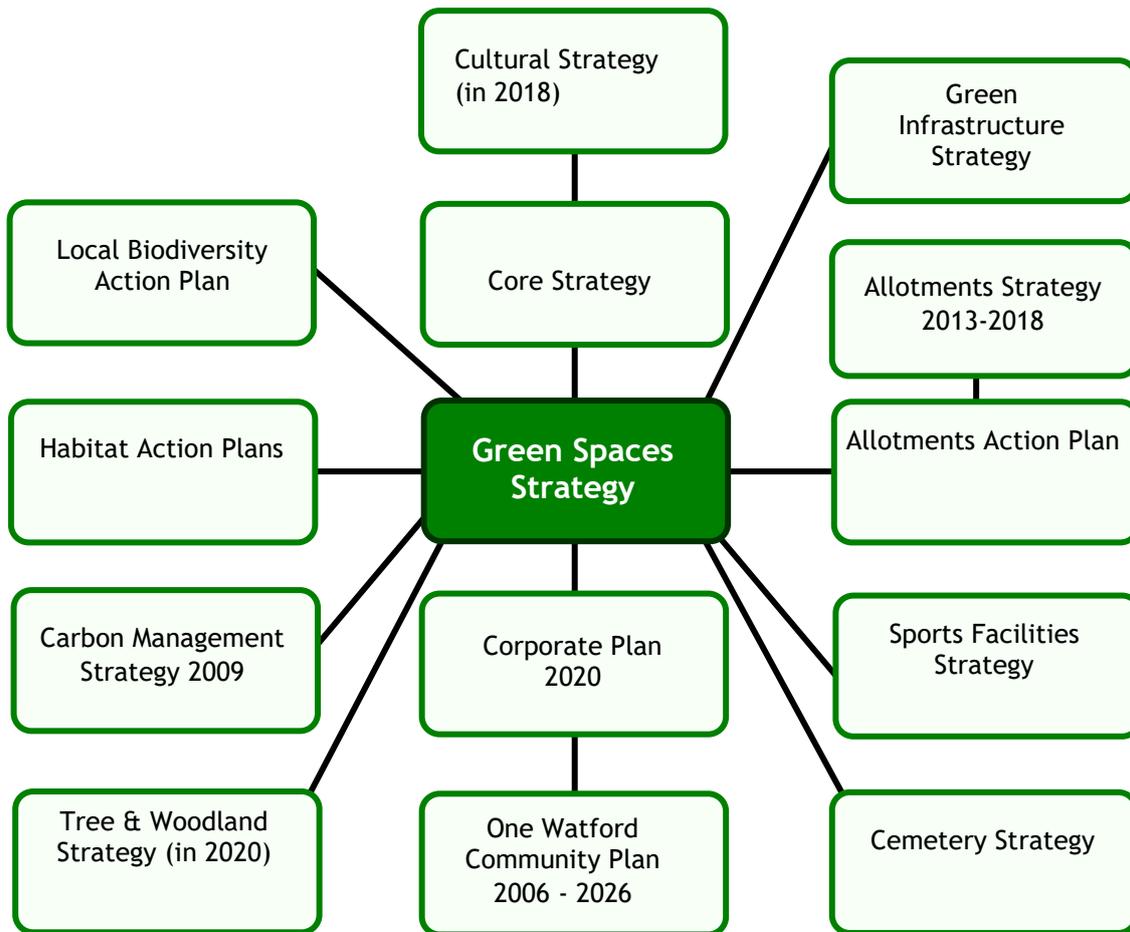


Figure 2.4 - Strategic Relationships

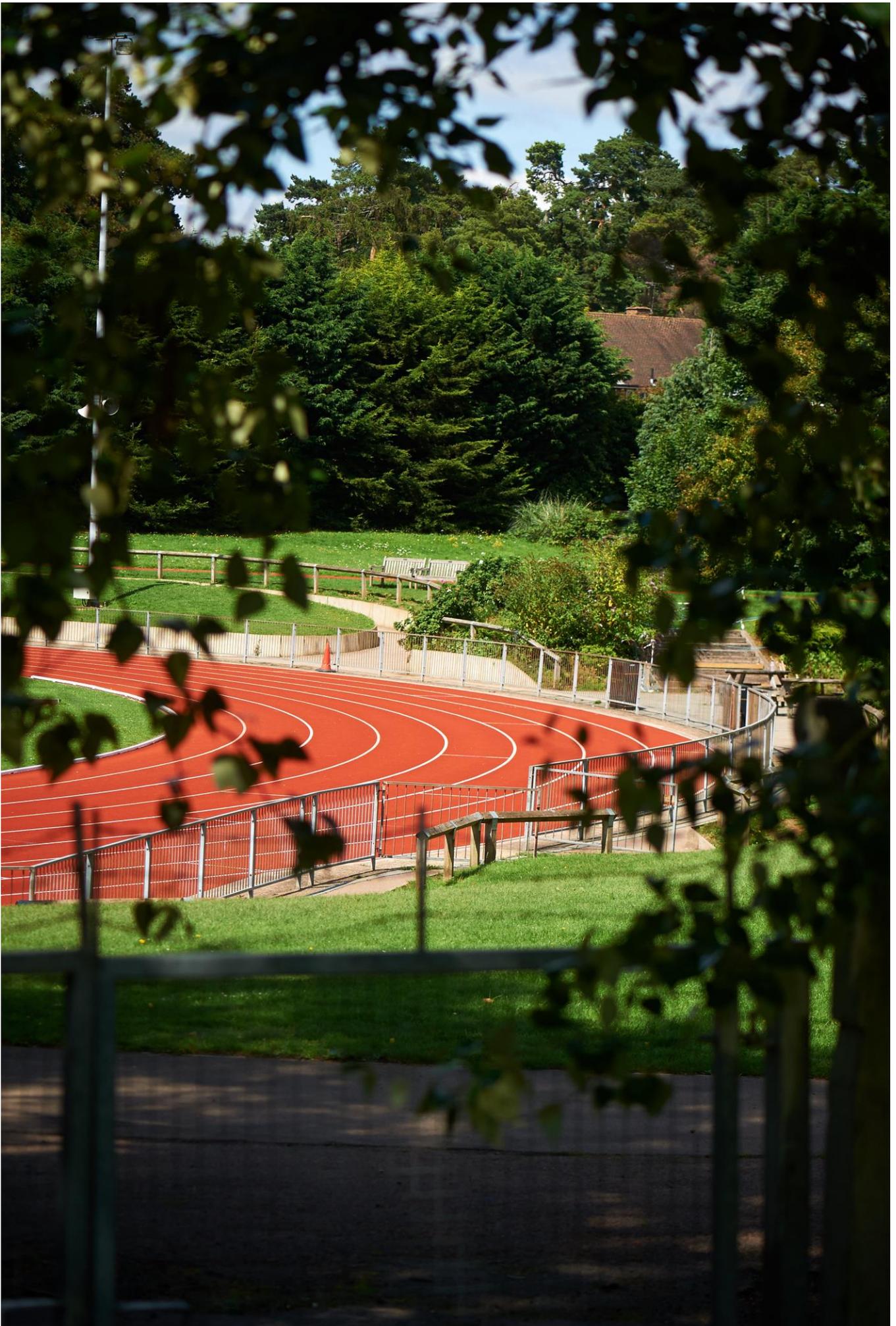
Importantly however, the key messages derived from the policy review are:

- Green space has risen up the national policy priorities in recent years and continues to do so with a recent Parliamentary Public Inquiry concluded in 2016. There has certainly been a change in emphasis from “quantity” to “quality and accessibility” and from “Sport and Open Space” to “Open Space and Physical Activity”;
- Treat green spaces as infrastructure that can deliver clear benefits for local people, wildlife and the long term sustainability of the Borough in a cost-effective manner;
- Take full account of the opportunities created by the NPPF to rationalise and improve provision, if necessary disposing of some poorly located and used spaces to fund the improvement of others;
- Set out clear requirements for developers providing on-site green spaces and how the Council will seek to use the Community Infrastructure Levy to fund new or enhanced green space provision or improve the wider Green Infrastructure network;
- Seek to harness and promote the use of ecosystems to make the Borough and neighbouring authorities more sustainable and deliver significant benefits to the local quality of life;
- As a general principle, seek to enhance biodiversity across the Borough wherever possible;
- A Green Spaces strategy should be “cross-council” and embrace the public health agenda;
- There are wider links to issues like sustainability;

- There is a need to raise the profile of the importance of the quality of Green Spaces in the wider planning process and to highlight its benefits;
- It is important that in developing an Green Spaces Strategy, that in terms of setting a wider framework for the strategy, the links to existing policies and strategies are determined, in particular the important ones highlighted in the policy hierarchy; and
- Green spaces priorities, standards and recommendations need to be **realistic** and **achievable** in an environment of diminishing resources, continuing economic challenges, and with the continued growth of the town, where there is increasing pressure on existing green spaces.



Woodside Playing Fields (above and opposite)



3 Our Methodology - Green Space Audits and Standards - Quality, Quantity and Accessibility

Part of the process of developing this strategy, audits of the quality and value, and the quantity and accessibility of green spaces were initially carried out across Watford in line with the advice in *PPG17* in 2010 (Quantity and Accessibility) and 2012 (Quality and Value). Without a comprehensive audit, we would be unable to set new standards or determine exactly what we had or how accessible it was. In doing this, we used standardised audit forms and GIS analysis to undertake these audits. This process has initiated the development of appropriate local provision standards. These audits covered many issues including:

- Maintenance and Cleanliness;
- Health and Safety;
- Biodiversity;
- Facilities and Management;
- Usage and Recreational value; and
- Negative factors impacting on the green space.

For the purpose of this updated Green Spaces Strategy, in 2017 and 2018, all audits were re-assessed after site visits with a combination of primary and secondary data. In the first instance, a desk-top review of all open spaces was re-undertaken identifying all parcels of open land from existing sources – parks management and maintenance plans, GIS (Geographical Information Systems) and aerial photography and secondly, all open spaces were re-audited including those managed by organisations other than Watford Council, thus enabling a more accurate and up to date assessment of the current provision of open space within the borough.

These sites were then updated using GIS linked to an Excel database. Having reaffirmed the area of open space in the Borough, the next stage was to undertake a more detailed assessment of each open space, looking at its quality and provision for access.

The adequacy of open space provision has traditionally been assessed by comparing the area of open space to the total population within a given geographic area. A key issue is what would be an appropriate open space provision standard for an “urban” district such as Watford, given that it shares common characteristics with many London boroughs rather than other Hertfordshire Districts. This view was retained.

Analysis was re-undertaken on an individual typology basis as opposed to grouping similar types. This reflected different values placed on each typology.

To understand the adequacy of overall provision, the Council took a composite approach to setting open space provision standards. This conforms to the guidance set out in the former *PPG17* and the Companion Guide ‘Assessing Needs and Opportunities’¹ as well as taking into account other options including the application of national standards – for example the National Playing Fields Association (now Fields in Trust) guidance of 2.4 hectares (6 acres) per 1,000 population. The standard was developed to reflect the amount of land required for sports and play facilities for local communities and thus focused on green spaces that are fully accessible to the public and can be used for these purposes.

3.1 Identifying and Prioritising

There was early localised recognition that there needed to be continued improvements to parks and open spaces in Watford and this was identified as a major requirement as part of the early consultation. However, despite the enthusiasm to do so, these continued improvements could not all be brought about at once and action needed to be organised, prioritised, resourced and adequately funded. The quality and value audits are discussed later but it

¹ Note that *PPG17* is no longer Government policy but still provides useful information until further guidance has been issued

is important to acknowledge the importance of these in determining current and future policies on green spaces. With the help of the updated open space audit scores and a quality/value matrix that categorises spaces and places, it will be easier to identify key priorities for action that remain but where progress has also been made.

A comprehensive audit will therefore give:

- Clear guidance for protection linked to prescribed and identified sites;
- Give an indication of what progress has been made where investment has occurred;
- Give specific recommendations by area where there are opportunities to improve accessibility and quality of green spaces;
- Clear understanding through custodianship of the areas to be retained and protected;
- Criteria for sites that may lead to occasional disposal; and
- Determine what additional resources are required to build on existing good practice.

3.2 Investment in Green Spaces

Watford has invested in many parks and open spaces over the last 5 years, primarily as a result of significant Section 106 funding and capital investment brought about by this Green Spaces Strategy, and it continues to recognise the need to maintain open spaces across the town to a high standard. Capital investment is still required across a number of areas of open space in Watford, particularly in local parks infrastructure, outdoor sports facilities, cemeteries, teenage facilities and this is confirmed by the latest updated qualitative audit.

National Government through the NPPF continues to advise Local Government to undertake rigorous audits of parks and open spaces, and to use this as a basis for future investment. This must be linked to the Development Plan, Core Strategy and other regeneration and economic initiatives. A comprehensive audit allows priorities to be determined on the ground as the Council will have the base data detailing how well or poorly an open space is doing. It allows policies to be determined in relation to improvement, re-allocation or rationalisation. It also allows the Council to assist in allocating existing and future resources, whether through developer contributions or a funding provider. Specifically, the NPPF states:-

‘Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required’.

3.3 Value for Money vs Cost Recovery

One of the greatest assets from parks and open spaces is that they are freely available for everyone to use. However, development, management and maintenance costs are considerable, but in comparison to other leisure facilities, offer excellent value for money. The cost per visit per person to a public park nationally is less than 50p! Cost effective asset management is about getting the best out of available assets. Can the Council get more out of some of the town’s open spaces by extending the range of facilities on offer or even consider charging for certain facilities and covering costs of the service eg car parking in parks?

The Council also needs to look at space that is under-performing, and may be surplus to requirements (low in value), or too difficult to bring up to standards. If this is the case, the Council may need to seek alternative uses. Local provision standards help to assess whether an open space is surplus to requirements and this aspect of green space provision is explored further in the section that follows.

3.4 Quality and Value Audits and Standards

Essentially a quality and value audit has three purposes:

1. To ascertain the quality and value of each site through evaluating a range of features or characteristics as objectively and consistently as possible;
2. To identify the features or characteristics which result in some sites being of low quality or value, to provide a focus for improvements or enhancements; and
3. To identify those sites that the Council should protect from development; those that would benefit from improvement and enhancement or those that may benefit from consideration for alternative green space uses.

Although driven partly by the previous 'PPG17', the audit encompasses wider implications than land use planning and seeks to provide the basis for prioritising improvements in site management, long term development as well as maintenance.

For the purpose of this Strategy, green space has been classified based on the original 'PPG17' typology. In seeking to maximise consistency, the Kit Campbell Associates Report '*Rethinking Open Space*' recommended the use of standard forms, which were used in the Watford audit and re-audit in 2017.

Over 184 sites were originally audited in Watford in Autumn 2012, to record scores for the quality and value of a variety of site characteristics. All sites were re-audited in 2017 and 2018.

The scores provided a basis for comparing sites and also provided an overview of the present state of open space in Watford. As such, they have provided an identification of those spaces the Council should protect through the planning system and those that are still a priority for future enhancement. The matrix developed in Figure 3.4 shows how this was developed under previous 'PPG17' guidelines. Sites are ultimately classified as either high quality/value or low quality/value. The scores for each site are detailed in Section 4.1.

3.4.1 Definition of Quality and Value

It is also important to define what quality and value actually mean as part of any on site audit:-

Quality relates to the range of facilities or features on a site. The quality audit covers factors such as site accessibility, safety and security, management and maintenance and the presence of planting, trees, seats, and other facilities.

Value relates to the contribution the site makes to local amenity, recreation and well-being, bio-diversity, cultural heritage, community or other strategic objectives.

Sites were audited on the following basis using the 'PPG17' typology:

- Allotments and Community Gardens (ACG);
- Play space for Children and Young People (CYP);
- Teenage facilities (CYP);
- Multi-functional Green Spaces - covering local amenity green spaces (AGS), parks and gardens (PGRG), churchyards and cemeteries (CC), green corridors (GC), natural and semi-natural green spaces (NGS) and Outdoor Sports Facilities (OSF);

We have combined the quality and value audits of local amenity green spaces, parks and gardens, churchyards and cemeteries, natural and semi-natural green space, green corridors and outdoor sports facilities due to the multi-functionality of those open spaces, as well as much of the quality criteria is similar across each typology.

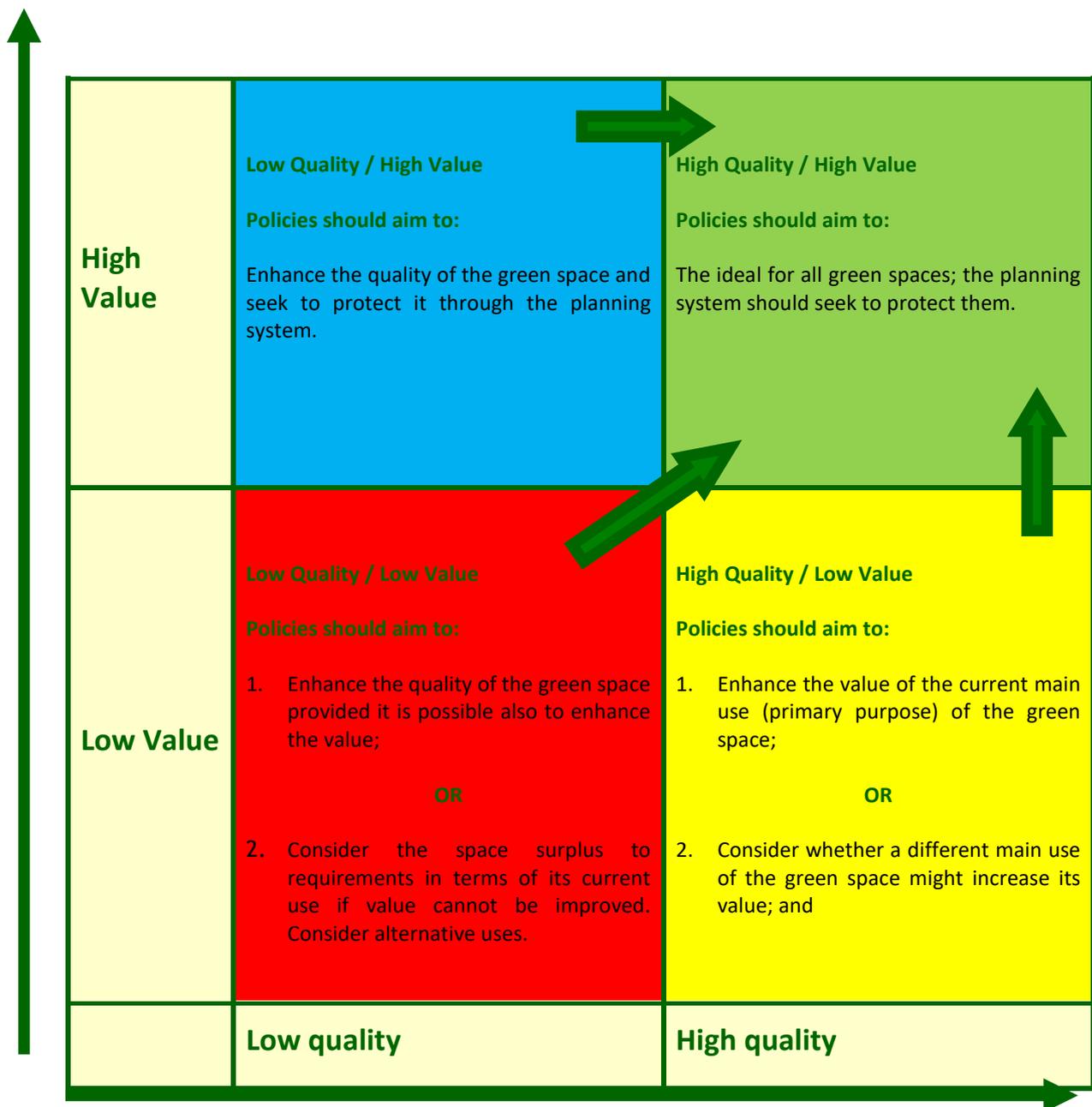


Figure 3.4 – Quality/Value Matrix, as summarised by CABE Space

The result from this work enables Watford Borough Council:

- To rank sites across Watford in terms of value or quality either in general or in relation to specific features or characteristics;
- To analyse the impact of investment in local green spaces and where spaces have improved or declined further;
- To identify priorities for investment and development or possible changes to management and maintenance practices;
- To identify the need for developer contributions to fund the enhancement of existing provision within the vicinity of a proposed development; and
- To enter the audit results into a GIS for mapping purposes.

4 Analysis of Findings - The Audit Results

4.1 The Audit Results

Full details of the **audit results** are too detailed to list within the scope of this strategy. However a **summary** follows in relation to the town and the overall scores are listed below in the table below.

NAME	TPOLOGY	QUALITY	VALUE	CATEGORY	STATUS
Amenity Green Space (AGS)	AGS	70%	66%	HQHV	
Harebreaks Estate South	AGS	81%	50%	HQLV	No change
Beechen Grove	AGS	73%	63%	HQLV	No change
Church Street	AGS	64%	55%	LQLV	No change
Watford Field Road	AGS	62%	71%	LQHV	No change
Raphael Drive	AGS	52%	50%	LQLV	No change
Holywell Estate	AGS	65%	54%	LQLV	No change
Croxley View	AGS	86%	96%	HQHV	No change
Berry Avenue	AGS	56%	29%	LQLV	No change
Harebreaks Estate Greenspace	AGS	75%	48%	HQLV	No change
Gisburne Way	AGS	79%	69%	HQHV	No change
Kytes Estate	AGS	71%	66%	HQHV	No change
Coates Dell	AGS	77%	77%	HQHV	No change
Gaddesden Crescent	AGS	72%	56%	HQLV	No change
Codicote Drive	AGS	60%	25%	LQLV	No change
Kimpton Place	AGS	68%	53%	LQLV	No change
The Gossamers	AGS	83%	72%	HQHV	No change
Meriden	AGS	72%	48%	HQLV	No change
The Meadows	AGS	32%	33%	LQLV	No change
Cow Lane	AGS	66%	47%	LQLV	No change
Russell House/Mulberry Close	AGS	87%	91%	HQHV	No change
Rufford Close	AGS	62%	71%	LQHV	No change
Lingfield Way	AGS	76%	83%	HQHV	No change
Nascot Grange	AGS	87%	84%	HQHV	No change
Grange Close	AGS	85%	66%	HQHV	No change
Willow Grange	AGS	74%	71%	HQHV	No change
Blackwell Drive	AGS	45%	63%	LQLV	No change
Longcroft	AGS	81%	68%	HQHV	No change
The Pastures	AGS	47%	70%	LQHV	No change
Watford Heath	AGS	79%	75%	HQHV	No change
Top of Cassio Road	AGS	35%	72%	LQHV	No change
Cassio Common	AGS	85%	80%	HQHV	No change
Hemming Way	AGS	53%	27%	LQLV	No change
Crown Rise	AGS	55%	20%	LQLV	No change
Douglas Avenue/Tudor Drive	AGS	82%	78%	HQHV	No change
Radlett Road/Bushey Mill Lane	AGS	75%	69%	HQHV	No change
Norbury Avenue	AGS	99%	60%	HQLV	No change
Reeds Crescent	AGS	93%	92%	HQHV	No change
Horseshoe Lane/Boundary Way	AGS	75%	76%	HQHV	No change
Cobb Green	AGS	52%	55%	LQLV	No change
Weall Green	AGS	85%	63%	HQLV	No change
Stud/Weall Green	AGS	54%	40%	LQLV	No change
Stud Green	AGS	65%	42%	LQLV	No change
Alban Wood School	AGS	67%	42%	LQLV	No change
Hope Green	AGS	85%	63%	HQLV	No change
Albans View	AGS	57%	55%	LQLV	No change
Valley Rise	AGS	65%	47%	LQLV	No change

Ganders Ash	AGS	69%	31%	LQLV	
Russell Crescent	AGS	67%	27%	LQLV	
Sherwoods Estate	AGS	79%	50%	HQLV	

NAME	TYPOLOGY	QUALITY	VALUE	CATEGORY	STATUS
Churchyards & Cemeteries (CC)		70%	66%	HQHV	
St Mary's Churchyard	CC	89%	89%	HQHV	Improved
North Watford Cemetery	CC	82%	73%	HQHV	Improved
Vicarage Road Cemetery	CC	63%	66%	LQHV	No change
All Saints Church	CC	63%	90%	LQHV	Declined

NAME	TYPOLOGY	QUALITY	VALUE	CATEGORY	STATUS
Green Corridors (GC)		70%	66%	HQHV	
Timberlake/River Colne GC	GC	84%	84%	HQHV	No change
Ebury Way	GC	70%	89%	HQHV	No change
Tolpits Lane to Ascot Road Cycle Route	GC	82%	80%	HQHV	No change
A41 Colne Way	GC	40%	73%	LQHV	No change
Mundon Drive North	GC	76%	78%	HQHV	No change
Hempstead Road North	GC	43%	46%	LQLV	No change
Hempstead Road South	GC	43%	46%	LQLV	No change
Grand Union Canal	GC	51%	73%	LQHV	No change
Mundon Drive South	GC	90%	96%	HQHV	No change

NAME	TYPOLOGY	QUALITY	VALUE	CATEGORY	STATUS
Allotment and Community Gardens (ACG)		70%	66%	HQHV	
Timberlake	ACG	91%	78%	HQHV	Improved
Holywell	ACG	87%	71%	HQHV	Improved
Brightwell	ACG	85%	67%	HQHV	Improved
Callowland	ACG	86%	71%	HQHV	Improved
Cherry Tree	ACG	95%	66%	HQHV	Improved
Wiggenhall	ACG	90%	27%	HQLV	Improved
Oxhey Grange	ACG	89%	74%	HQHV	Improved
Paddock Road	ACG	89%	77%	HQHV	Improved
Briar Road	ACG	94%	42%	HQLV	Improved
Tavistock Road	ACG	83%	43%	HQLV	Improved
Chester Road	ACG	86%	32%	HQLV	Improved
Garston Manor	ACG	90%	80%	HQHV	Improved



St Mary's Churchyard

NAME	TYPOLOGY	QUALITY	VALUE	CATEGORY	STATUS
Natural Green Space (NGS)		50%	66%	HQHV	
Milton Street Railway	NGS	20%	66%	LQHV	No change
Stephenson Way Land Transfer Natural Area	NGS	17%	52%	LQLV	No change
Ascot Road Semi-natural Area	NGS	53%	74%	HQHV	No change
Tolpits Lane (former Scammell Site)	NGS	16%	43%	LQLV	No change
Lairage Land	NGS	40%	77%	LQHV	No change
Adjacent to Ebury Way and Lairage land	NGS	40%	77%	LQHV	No change
Caractacus View	NGS	40%	77%	LQHV	No change
Brightwells Farm	NGS	40%	77%	LQHV	No change
Tolpits Lane	NGS	22%	52%	LQLV	No change
Harebreaks Woodland	NGS	50%	66%	HQHV	No change
Tunnel Woods	NGS	51%	78%	HQHV	No change
Beechfield School Woodland	NGS	44%	79%	LQHV	No change
Sussex Road/Railway	NGS	30%	55%	LQLV	No change
Park Terrace Wood	NGS	50%	76%	HQHV	No change
Garston Park LNR	NGS	50%	78%	HQHV	No change
Three Valleys Water	NGS	35%	39%	LQLV	No change
Ravenscroft	NGS	60%	65%	HQLV	No change
Russel Lane Wood	NGS	23%	69%	LQHV	No change
Greenbank Wood	NGS	23%	69%	LQHV	No change
Nascot Wood School Woodland	NGS	53%	84%	HQHV	No change
Attenborough Fields	NGS	100%	98%	HQHV	No change
The Grove	NGS	75%	70%	HQHV	No change
The Spinney, Grovemill Lane	NGS	50%	60%	HQLV	No change
Whippendell Wood	NGS	75%	96%	HQHV	No change
Cassiobury Park LNR	NGS	89%	89%	HQHV	No change
Ash Close	NGS	45%	79%	LQHV	No change
Golf driving range woodland	NGS	67%	70%	HQHV	No change
Croxley Green Junction	NGS	37%	55%	LQLV	No change
Land off Riverside Road	NGS	24%	51%	LQLV	No change
Alban Wood	NGS	65%	84%	HQHV	No change
North Orbital Road adjacent to Leisure Park	NGS	56%	36%	HQLV	No change
A405 adjacent to Leverett Close	NGS	58%	38%	HQLV	No change



Goodwood Recreation Ground

NAME	TYPOLOGY	QUALITY	VALUE	CATEGORY	STATUS
Parks, Gardens, Recs Grounds (PGRG)		70%	66%	HQHV	
Buryfield Nature Garden	PGRG	44%	49%	LQLV	No change
Radlett Road Playing Fields	PGRG	73%	70%	HQHV	Improved
Waterfields Recreation Ground	PGRG	82%	85%	HQHV	Improved
Watford Fields Recreation ground	PGRG	70%	70%	HQHV	Improved
Oxhey Park Sports Ground	PGRG	46%	66%	LQHV	No change
Harwoods Recreation Ground	PGRG	89%	79%	HQHV	Improved
King George V Playing Field	PGRG	80%	79%	HQHV	Improved
Harebreaks Recreation Ground	PGRG	71%	81%	HQHV	Improved
Callowland Recreation Ground	PGRG	78%	75%	HQHV	Improved
Garston Park	PGRG	63%	71%	LQHV	Declined
Meriden Park	PGRG	76%	84%	HQHV	No change
Lea Farm Recreation Ground	PGRG	73%	67%	HQHV	Improved
Goodwood Recreation Ground	PGRG	75%	69%	HQHV	Improved
North Watford Playing Field	PGRG	81%	73%	HQHV	Improved
Cheslyn Gardens	PGRG	98%	100%	HQHV	No change
Riverside Road Recreation Ground	PGRG	70%	72%	HQHV	Improved
Oxhey Park	PGRG	91%	83%	HQHV	Improved
Oxhey Grange Playing Field	PGRG	73%	64%	HQLV	Improved
Oxhey Green	PGRG	90%	79%	HQHV	No change
Glen Way Recreation Ground	PGRG	80%	82%	HQHV	No change
Cassiobury Park	PGRG	92%	99%	HQHV	Improved
Leavesden Green	PGRG	58%	54%	LQLV	No change
Stanborough Park	PGRG	83%	87%	HQHV	No change
East Drive Recreation Ground	PGRG	66%	58%	HQLV	Improved
Knutsford Playing Fields	PGRG	70%	75%	HQHV	Improved
Riverside Park	PGRG	70%	75%	HQHV	Improved
Woodside Playing Fields	PGRG	93%	91%	HQHV	Improved
Hill Farm Recreation Ground	PGRG	52%	46%	LQLV	No change
Leavesden Park	PGRG	83%	71%	HQHV	No change



Cassiobury Park Hub

NAME	TYPOLGY	QUALITY	VALUE	CATEGORY	STATUS
Children Young People's facilities (CYP)		70%	66%	HQHV	
Southwold Road	CYP	72%	52%	HQLV	Improved
Waterfields Recreation Ground	CYP	83%	83%	HQHV	Improved
St John's Road	CYP	80%	89%	HQHV	Improved
Estcourt Road Pocket Park	CYP	71%	21%	HQLV	No change
Central Primary School	CYP	85%	42%	HQLV	No change
Watford Fields Play Area	CYP	82%	71%	HQHV	Improved
Himalayan Way	CYP	72%	71%	HQHV	Improved
Harwoods Recreation Ground	CYP	90%	80%	HQHV	Improved
Stripling Way	CYP	73%	26%	HQLV	Improved
KGV Playing Fields	CYP	76%	80%	HQHV	Improved
Jellicoe Road	CYP	70%	72%	HQHV	Improved
Croxley View	CYP	90%	81%	HQHV	No change
Chiltern Pines	CYP	79%	68%	HQHV	No change
Courtlands Close	CYP	86%	68%	HQHV	No change
Berry Avenue	CYP	70%	70%	HQHV	Improved
Harebreaks Recreation Ground	CYP	79%	87%	HQHV	Improved
Foxhill (East Drive)	CYP	78%	84%	HQHV	Improved
Callowland Recreation Ground	CYP	78%	74%	HQHV	Improved
Leggatts Green	CYP	68%	51%	LQLV	No change
Garston Park	CYP	55%	78%	LQHV	Declined
Meriden Community centre	CYP	81%	66%	HQHV	Improved
Meriden Park Playground	CYP	85%	82%	HQHV	Improved
Lea Farm Recreation Ground	CYP	83%	72%	HQHV	Improved
Edward Amey Close	CYP	53%	57%	LQLV	No change
Gadswell Close	CYP	82%	47%	HQLV	No change
Goodwood Recreation Ground	CYP	83%	93%	HQHV	No change
North Watford Playing Field	CYP	84%	86%	HQHV	No change
Nascot Grange	CYP	74%	97%	HQHV	No change
Stamford Road	CYP	82%	89%	HQHV	No change
Riverside Recreation ground	CYP	75%	80%	HQHV	Improved
Oxhey Park	CYP	94%	87%	HQHV	No change
Oxhey Green Play area	CYP	88%	81%	HQHV	No change
Cassiobury park Upper	CYP	80%	95%	HQHV	Improved
Cassiobury Park Lower	CYP	91%	97%	HQHV	Improved
Leavesden Green	CYP	67%	75%	LQHV	Declined
Fern Way Recreation Ground	CYP	70%	82%	HQHV	Improved
Aspen Park Drive	CYP	74%	58%	HQLV	No change
East Drive Recreation Ground	CYP	80%	76%	HQHV	Improved
Knutsford Playing Field	CYP	90%	81%	HQHV	No change
Norbury Avenue	CYP	70%	67%	HQHV	No change
Chater School Play Area	CYP	81%	63%	HQLV	No change
Robin Place	CYP	69%	68%	LQHV	No change
Throstle Place	CYP	78%	68%	HQLV	No change
Magpie Place	CYP	60%	53%	LQLV	
Woodside	CYP	92%	89%	HQHV	No change
Hill Farm Recreation Ground	CYP	69%	64%	LQLV	No change
Ridghurst Avenue	CYP	79%	74%	HQHV	Improved
Radlett Road teen shelter	CYP	76%	21%	HQHV	No change
Derby Road Skatepark	CYP	73%	42%	HQHV	No change
Harwoods Recreation Ground teen shelter	CYP	53%	21%	LQHV	No change
Callowland Recreation Ground	CYP	83%	21%	HQHV	No change



Paddock Road Allotments

4.1.1 West Watford (Holywell, Vicarage, Oxhey)

The overall quality of open space in **West Watford** has improved across most typologies, especially parks, gardens and recreation grounds now scoring high in quality and high in value. Recent improvements to Oxhey Park and Riverside Rec have been significant. Children’s play facilities score highly and reflect the recent investment across the town, as do allotments. The quality of natural green space is also high. Paddock Road allotments is now a Green Flag site.

As expected, the value of most green spaces to the local community is generally high, with key parks such as Oxhey Park (now Green Flag), Riverside Rec, Harwoods Rec and King George V Playing Fields all scoring highly. Vicarage Road Cemetery however as a significant local space in a dense urban area is deemed low quality but high value, and as an important open space, the reasons why need to be analysed further. It is a priority for improvement.

4.1.2 Central Watford (Central, Park, Nascot, Callowland)

The overall quality of green space in **Central Watford** is very good with some high quality open spaces across the full typology range, in particular Cassiobury Park (Green Flag), Whippendell Wood, as well as the recently improved open spaces at Waterfield Rec (Green Flag), North Watford Playing Fields (Green Flag) and Cheslyn House and Gardens (Green Flag). The quality of some open spaces has improved with recent investment and includes Callowland Recreation Ground (Green Flag) and Harebreaks Recreation Ground. Cassiobury Park provides comprehensive sports facilities as well as good play provision not just for Central Watford but for the whole town and has benefitted from nearly £7 million of investment. Likewise, Whippendell Wood, as the only SSSI in Watford provides important access to natural green space for the area and town as a whole.

4.1.3 North Watford (Tudor, Leggatts, Meriden, Stanborough, Woodside)

Open spaces in **North Watford** vary from high in quality and value with some very good sites, in particular Woodside Playing Fields (Green Flag) and Woodside Stadium, Stanborough Park, North Watford Cemetery (Green Flag) to those of lower quality and value, such as Leavesden Green and Lea Farm Recreation Ground. Allotments are generally of a high quality with an excellent site at Garston Manor.

4.2 Quality Standards

The Council has an aspiration that all of the principal spaces and facilities in Watford should be of both high quality and high value. The audit scores obviously provide comparative data on each site, but as stated, it is necessary to use an essentially arbitrary “cut off” point above which sites are classed as high quality or value and below which they are classed as low quality or value. This approach provides an initial method to assess the sites in a “broad brush” manner and underpin further policy assessments, based on the matrix shown in Figure 3.4.

The quality and value audits have detailed what the present levels of standards are in Watford and the re-audit shows whether sites have improved, remained the same or have declined.

These standards have two main uses:

1. They provide benchmarks for the Council to assess and compare the quality of different facilities of the same type within its area as an aid when determining priorities for improvement or changes to management regimes. Given that it will not be always be possible to achieve all aspects of the standards in relation to existing provision (for example because of limited resources) quality standards are an **aspiration**. As such they should be **challenging**, but broadly **achievable**, and the Council will aim to achieve them wherever practical.

Any assessment of the quality of nature of existing open spaces of sport and recreation facilities needs a clear set of benchmarks, related to stated standards and, ideally some form of scoring system. It is also an important opportunity for the “**parks management and grounds maintenance system**” and the “**planning system**” to work together. The aim should be to jointly identify those open spaces or facilities which need enhancement; the form this enhancement should take; and relative priorities;

2. They set out the Councils requirements as a guide for developers on the quality of provision the Council will expect them either to provide or fund. In this context, quality standards are a requirement, although they must obviously be applied in a way which is reasonable given the specific circumstances of a proposed development.

4.3 Investment Priorities

The quality audits carried out give a clear view of how to develop our priorities. These are further developed in Sections 5 and 6. An **investment plan** was drawn up based on the original audits with key details showing proposed timescales, targets and funding possibilities. This was delivered through the development of a **strategic green space hierarchy** which outlined the Council’s **key priorities** in regenerating its green spaces as well as identifying sites that need protection and those that could be disposed of. A new investment plan is proposed from 2019 onwards based on the likely available resources for the remaining duration of the Strategy.

4.4 Quantity Audits and Standards - Green Infrastructure

Green Infrastructure (GI) provides recreational support for communities and provides multiple benefits for the economy, the environment and people. Green spaces benefit the whole community, improving health, well-being and quality of life by providing areas for exercise, recreation, play and for visual relief in an urban area. Watford has experienced considerable population growth in recent years which is set to continue over the plan period. The council wants to ensure that the borough’s historic landscapes, open spaces (of both strategic and local significance) and major watercourses are protected as they are fundamental to the character and heritage of the borough and contribute to the resident’s quality of life.

Green Infrastructure in Watford refers to the networks of green spaces and natural features and includes open spaces, waterways, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, wildlife habitats, street trees and natural heritage. It provides landscape, wildlife, recreation and cultural experiences and can play a key role in adapting to and mitigating climate change.

‘Future Health: sustainable places for health and well-being’ published in Nov 2009 promotes the value of green infrastructure in the prevention of disease and the promotion of long-term health and mental well-being. Access to nature can reduce stress, improve mental well-being and relieve the sense of overcrowding in urban environments. Easily accessible green infrastructure allows people to make healthier choices. The report quoted:

- 91% of people believe public open spaces improve quality of life.
- The likelihood of residents being physically active increases 300% in residential areas with a high level of green infrastructure

DCLG Guidance on the Natural Environment, published in 2016 describes Green Infrastructure as a ‘network of parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, but also street trees, allotments and private gardens’. It references that green infrastructure can also deliver a wide variety of planning policies including:

- Builds a strong and competitive economy
- Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes
- Requires good design
- Promotes healthy communities
- Meets the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Conserves and enhances the natural environment

Watford contains **significant amounts of green infrastructure** for an urban authority and it is important that access to these key assets is maintained and improved. Improving access into strategic sites, such as the River Colne valley corridor and River Gade valley corridor/Grand Union Canal, in turn links into assets outside of the borough creating a wider green infrastructure network. It is important that biodiversity habitats are protected and the green links between them enhanced and protected from development.

There are 34 wildlife sites (including Local Nature Reserves LNR) in Watford covering 260Ha (Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre, November 2010), including Cassiobury Park LNR, Harebreaks Wood LNR, the Lairage Land LNR, Albans Wood LNR and Garston Park LNR all managed in whole or in part for their biodiversity and existing Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Status. The Council is also responsible for managing Whippendell Wood a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on the borough boundary.

Where appropriate, planning proposals should incorporate green infrastructure, in line with local and neighbourhood plan policies and site specific considerations. As a component of sustainable development, green infrastructure should be considered at an early stage of a planning proposal. Depending on individual circumstances, planning obligations, conditions or the Community Infrastructure Levy may all be potential mechanisms for securing and funding green infrastructure.

4.4.1 Green Infrastructure Policy Objectives

The Core Strategy sets out objectives in line with this Green Spaces Strategy. The Council’s strategic objectives for Green Infrastructure are:

- Protect against the loss of all green infrastructure and biodiversity habitats within the borough;

- Enhance the borough's green infrastructure provision, either by making provision for new facilities in identified areas of deficiency based on the council's most up-to-date Open Space Study, or by improving existing open space provision;
- Ensure that new development contributes positively to the character and appearance of the area, increasing recreational and/or biodiversity value, and where appropriate provides or contributes to the provision of accessible green space networks linking urban areas;
- Focus resources into improving access to and enhancing currently underused facilities (particularly parks and play areas) within the borough and adjoining districts to help reduce the impact on other existing resources which are threatened by high user numbers; and
- Seek to maintain and enhance the role of undesignated green infrastructure assets such as urban street trees and incidental green spaces in reducing the impacts of climate and other environmental changes.



Cassiobury Park and the River Gade

Policy GI 1 - Green Infrastructure

All green infrastructure assets identified through the Open Space audit and the Green Infrastructure Study will be protected for their recreational, environmental, visual, and wildlife value. Development which results in a net loss of provision will not normally be acceptable.

Priorities for Green Infrastructure will focus on conserving and enhancing the following key assets and the linkages between them:

- Cassiobury Park;
- Whippendell Wood (outside the borough but owned and managed by Watford Borough Council);
- Colne and Gade Valleys and Grand Union Canal;
- Chalk landscape valleys;
- The borough's sites of Special Scientific Interest; Local Nature Reserves, wildlife sites, key biodiversity areas and priority habitats and species identified by the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Where opportunities arise, new facilities should be provided and enhanced in line with the Green Spaces Strategy, the Green Infrastructure Plan, and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. In particular development proposals located in the town centre and close to the Colne Valley Strategic link will be expected to make provision for better access to or the enhancement of the strategic infrastructure link. Development proposals in areas which are deficient in open space will be expected to improve provision by establishing new open space where possible or improving accessibility to, and the quality of, existing open space.

Proposals for new development should contribute to the creation, extension and enhancement of existing Green Infrastructure provision. Where appropriate contributions to future management and maintenance of new provision will be sought.

Proposals for new development should demonstrate that they are not compromising the integrity of the Green Infrastructure network, by causing fragmentation, damage to, or isolation of Green Infrastructure assets including natural habitats and species. Development proposals will be encouraged to enhance links for wildlife to existing GI assets. In addition to the above, where appropriate proposals which contribute to the following will be encouraged.

- Measures to relieve the impact of current high usage levels of Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Wood.
- Increased quality and numbers of urban street trees.
- Opportunities and land for residents to grow food.
- Wetland enhancement and sustainable water management in the Gade and Colne Valleys

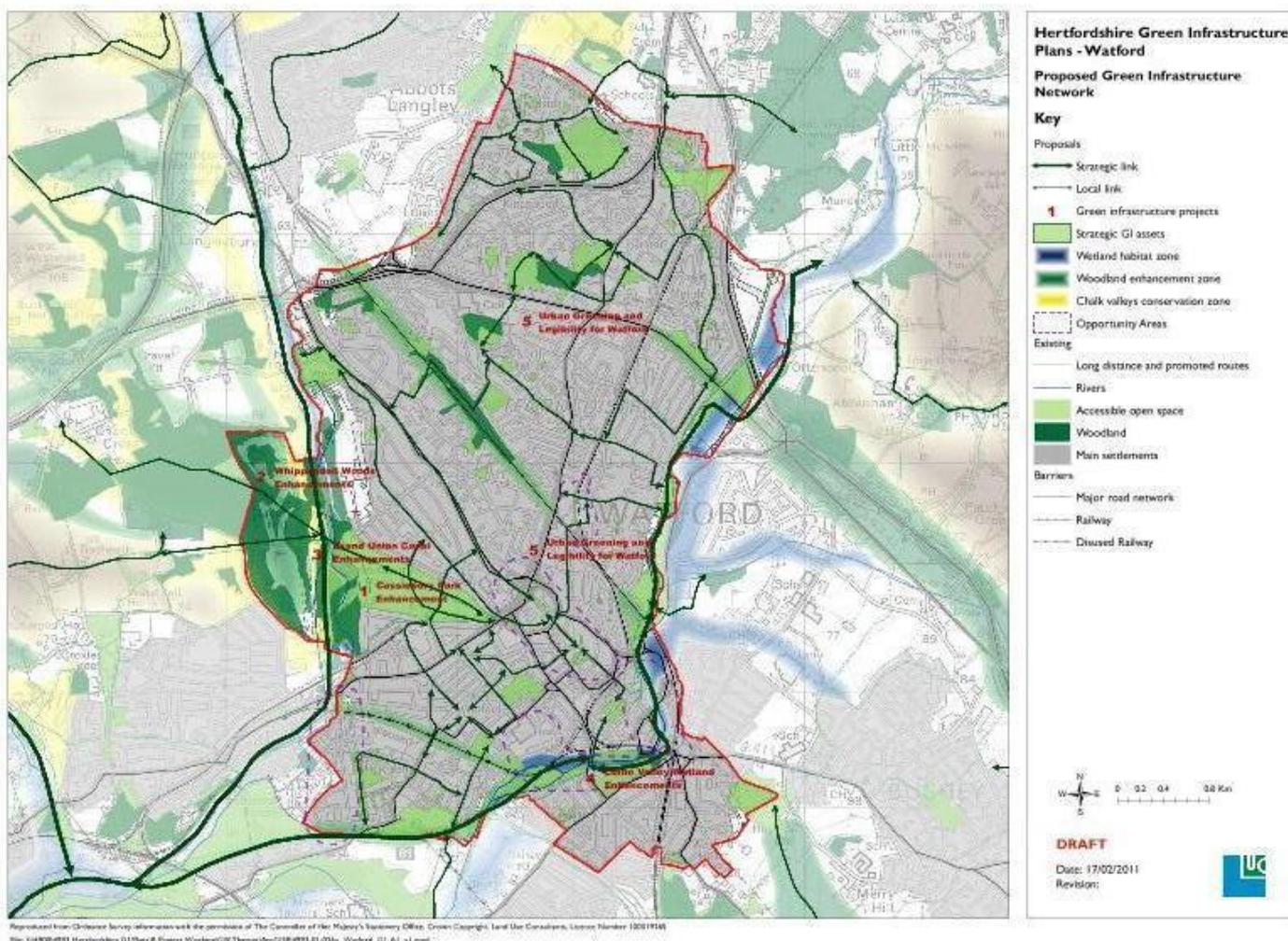
While the principle is to retain the existing **Green Belt boundary**, minor adjustments to deal with some inconsistencies will be considered in the preparation of the Site Allocations DPD and accompanying proposals map. The Green Infrastructure evidence base will inform the Site Allocations DPD and will be considered in assessing applications for new development.

The change (in hectares) of total open space managed by Watford Borough Council will be monitored, as will the amount of eligible open space managed to Green Flag Award standards.

The council will plan for Green Infrastructure in partnership with neighbouring local authorities; Three Rivers, Hertsmere and St Albans; the County Council and other Hertfordshire authorities, as well as relevant interest groups and stakeholders.

Ongoing qualitative analysis will be carried out through updated versions of this Green Spaces Strategy by Watford Borough Council. In some instances an improvement in the quality of Green Infrastructure may make it acceptable for minor open space loss, this will be examined on a case-by-case basis.

The Green Infrastructure Plan will provide details of projects which local communities can be involved in delivering.



Green Infrastructure Plan for Watford

In general, Watford residents considered that there was generally sufficient green space within the town with the exception of natural green space as has been determined through localised consultation. Based on the typology maps resulting from the audit, all green spaces were mapped onto GIS which then allowed quantities of provision to be determined per ward and provision of open space per person for the town. The results are summarised in Table 4.4. These are important as it allows the Council to determine defined provision standards that are locally derived, based on local needs and a local assessment. These results have been reassessed in 2017-18 in relation to quantities in relation to net gain and loss of open spaces. The principal loss is Farm Terrace allotments but this was offset by the new allotments at Paddock Road. Further open space provision is likely as part of the Watford Riverwell project in West Watford as new parks and the improved quality of the River Colne corridor become accessible.

Typology	Cal'land (M ²)	Central (M ²)	Holywell (M ²)	Legg'ts (M ²)	W'side (M ²)	Me'den (M ²)	Nascot (M ²)	Oxhey (M ²)	Park (M ²)	Stanb'g (M ²)	Tudor (M ²)	V'rage (M ²)
Parks & Gardens & Recreation Grounds	37,475	120,962	157,654	76,298	287,102	181,838	83,029	140,361	760,279	128,835	41,700	18,306
Amenity Green Spaces	7,971	7,672	53,176	20,219	40,284	75,274	23,911	21,673	11,241	11,666	20,648	0
Green Corridors	0	4,552	78,337	0	0	17,301	12,641	0	82,969	0	23,696	0
Natural/Semi-Natural Green Spaces	0	81,440	116,759	82,842	44,902	132,979	51,743	168,747	1,017,863	4,780	18,355	24,460
Allotments & Community Gardens	0	15,200	46,900	74,300	23,100	0	0	89,400	0	5,100	3,300	3,200
Churchyards & Cemeteries	0	4,109	0	0	3,925	0	0	0	0	126,059	0	57,889
Outdoor Sports Facilities	0	0	0	52,210	0	0	0	0	150,260	17,440	0	33,360
Children and Young Peoples Facilities	116	4,948	11,454	10,757	2,468	2,514	1,810	3,447	3,259	5,225	928	1,873
TOTAL	45,562	238,883	463,280	316,620	401,781	409,906	173,134	423,628	2,025,871	299,105	108627	139,088
M² per person	6	29	54	42	57	52	23	62	260	42	18	20

Note - Watford in 2012 has 5,065,785 m² of open space, which equates to 56m² per person.

NOTE - Watford in 2017, 5,045,485m² of open space, which equates to 52m² per person. The reduction is due to loss of Farm Terrace and increase in the population to 96,800 in mid-2016.

Table 4.4 - Quantity of Public Open Space in Watford per ward.
(Note: significant outdoor sports facilities are included within Parks, Gardens and Recreation Grounds typology)

4.4.2 Overview of Existing Provision

Watford has a large quantity of green space but a number of clear issues stand out:

- Natural green spaces, outdoor sports facilities and in particular parks, gardens and recreation grounds are the largest green space land uses;
- Provision of allotments in Watford is considerable with a range of sites and geographically well distributed across the town, despite the loss of Farm Terrace allotments (offset by new provision at Lower Paddock Road);
- There are significant opportunities for linking green spaces and enhancing the Green Infrastructure and wider public realm of the town.

4.5 Accessibility Audits and Distance Thresholds

There are three key factors relating to Watford's geography which has an important bearing on the formulation of distance thresholds for the area and determining which communities have "accessibility deficiencies" to different forms of provision.

The key factors are:

1. The compact and urban nature of Watford;
2. The proximity of facilities in neighbouring boroughs and knowledge that local people are likely to use; and
3. The significant lack of opportunities for creating new and extra provision of green space within the borough.

4.5.1 The Nature of Distance Thresholds

Distance thresholds are not hard facts, but a broad and flexible guide to the distance which people in general will be willing to travel in order to use or visit a facility or space. They are affected by many issues such as human factors (age issues) and individual circumstances and variations in external circumstances, such as physical barriers (rail and road corridors).

There are two other key points:

1. The distance that people in any particular area travel to spaces or facilities is a function of the distribution of provision, coupled with the range of factors summarised above. In an area with little provision, empirically established distance thresholds will be much higher than in another area with a high level of well distributed provision;
2. There is a clear difference between people's need to travel and willingness to do so. Rugby players may not be willing to travel more than a mile, for instance, to their local club, but the distance they will need to travel to take part in matches depends primarily on the geographical area covered by the league in which their team plays. The higher a player's standard of skill, the wider this area will be.

4.6 Accessibility Audit Findings

Distance thresholds were mapped using GIS to determine accessibility deficiencies for:

- Parks, Gardens and Recreation Grounds; and
- Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces;

4.6.1 Parks, Gardens and Recreation Grounds

There are 29 sites identified as parks, gardens and recreation grounds in Watford, covering 203 hectares. This equates to 2.1ha per 1,000 population. The standards suggest applying a distance threshold of 600m around parks and gardens, equivalent to a 15 minute walk time. When this is applied, creating buffer zones on the map, clear but very small areas of deficiency of accessible parks and gardens can be identified.

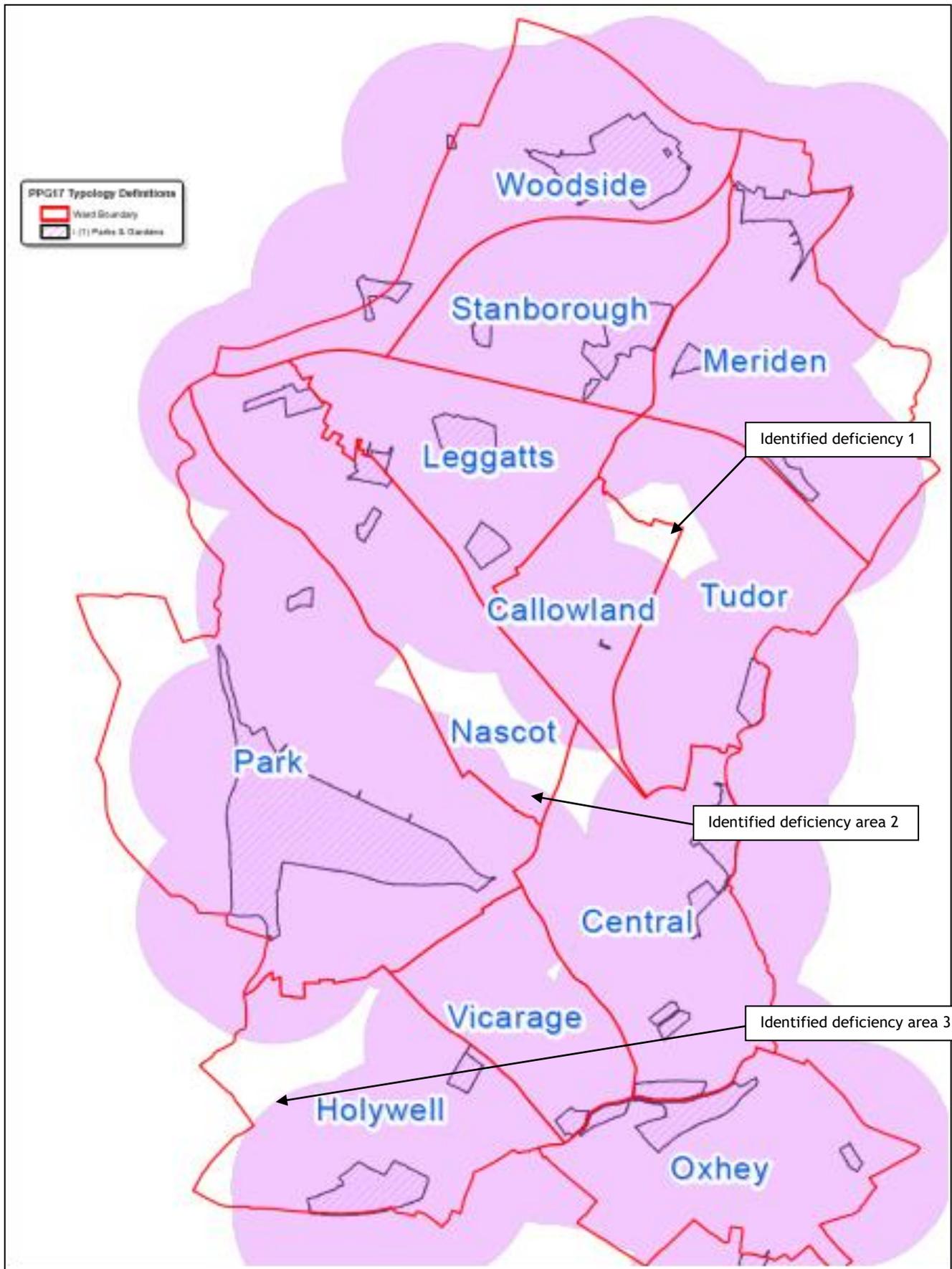
These areas are identified on the map above. Area 1 is in North Watford, around Bushey Mill Lane and the Greycain Industrial Estate. Area 2 is to the north of the Town Centre, mainly in Nascot Ward. The third area of deprivation is around the Caxton Business Park in the Holywell area.

There is less priority to provide provision in the Caxton Way and Greycain Industrial areas as these areas have a relatively low population density and are designated employment areas. However the area of deficiency identified to the north of the Town Centre (area 2) is a key priority area as the population density is relatively high in this area.

It is likely that the larger (Green Flag designated) parks of Cassiobury (75 hectares) and Woodside Playing Fields (25 hectares) serve a greater catchment area than the 15 minute walk time mapped. In reality residents do travel further to access these facilities, therefore it can be expected that residents out of the buffer zone in area two will certainly travel to Cassiobury Park.



Cheslyn House and Gardens



Parks, Gardens and Recreation Grounds distance thresholds

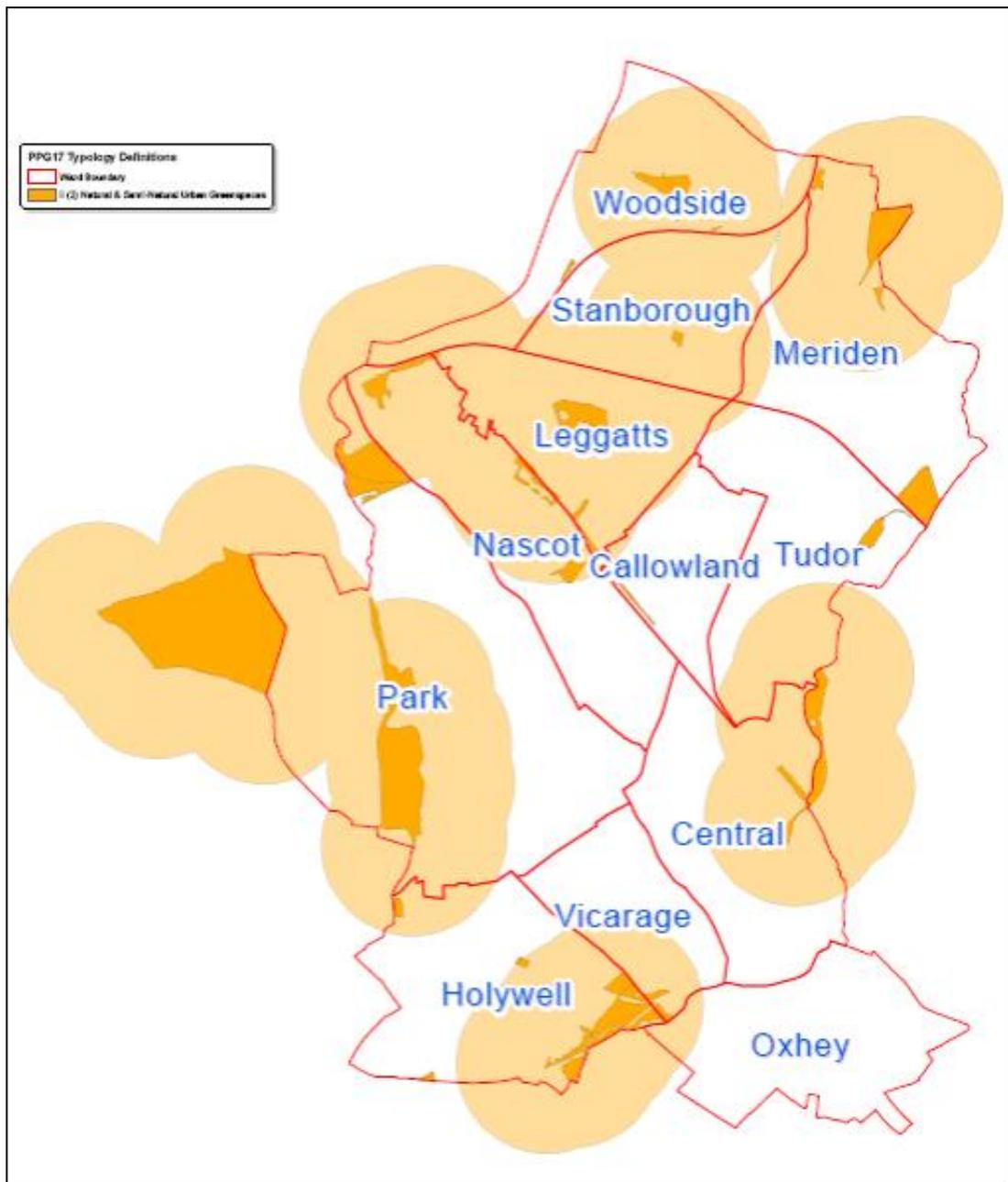
4.6.2 Natural and Semi Natural Green Spaces

The typology of natural and semi-natural green spaces, as set out in the previous PPG17: A Companion Guide includes woodland (coniferous, deciduous, mixed) and scrub, grassland (e.g. downland, meadow), heath or moor, wetlands (e.g. marsh, fen), open running water, wastelands (including disturbed ground), and bare rock habitats (e.g. cliffs, quarries, pits). These provide wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.

There are 34 sites classified as natural and semi-natural green spaces in Watford covering 174 hectares, this is equal to 1.79ha per 1,000 population. 5 of these sites are identified as Local Nature Reserves. Watford is compact and dense urban area so it is to be expected that there will be gaps in the provision of natural green spaces.

The distribution of natural and semi-natural green spaces is generally around the edge of the borough with a large area in the centre, and down towards Oxhey, out of the 600m buffer zone.

Natural and Semi Natural Green Spaces Distance Thresholds



4.6.3 Outdoor Sports Facilities

There are 57 outdoor sports facilities in Watford totalling 219.61 hectares. This equates to 2.26 hectares per 1,000 population. The provision is fairly well spread throughout the borough and it is reasonable to expect residents to travel to pitches and other specific facilities such as Woodside Playing Fields and Stadium. A detailed Sports Facilities Study was carried out in 2012 and assessed the following:-

- Usage – present and future;
- Quality of provision;
- Quantity of provision;
- Accessibility; and
- Capacity – present and future.

A detailed and comprehensive Sports Facilities Strategy has been developed and adopted. This Strategy has an emphasis on creating and developing multi-activity sports activity hubs based on 4 no Strategic Sports Sites. A further survey of playing pitches is underway in 2019 to re-assess any changing needs and requirements.

4.6.4 Allotments and Community Gardens

The typology of allotments, community gardens and city farms, set out in PPG17: A Companion Guide includes sites which provide ‘opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of a long term promotion of sustainability, health and social interaction’.

There are 12 sites in Watford managed by the Council totalling just over 26 hectares. This is equal to 0.27ha per 1,000 people. There is good access to allotments in the north and south of the borough but little access from the central strip. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) suggests a national standard of 20 allotments per 1,000 households (i.e. 20 allotments per 2,000 people based on two people per house) or 1 allotment per 200 people. This equates to 0.125 hectares per 1,000 population based on an average plot size of 250m². Based on the current provision Watford is well over the NSALG standard, however, the majority of allotments are in the north and south of the borough with less provision in the central area of the town. There is an ongoing demand for allotments in Watford. Watford Community Housing Trust and Railtrack also have a small number of allotments available to residents, but these have not been included in this assessment as the standard is more than achieved.

4.6.5 Children’s and Young People’s / Teenage Facilities

There are 55 sites classified as provision for children and young people, totalling just under 5 hectares – 0.05ha per 1,000 population.

Although there are gaps within each analysis area, the focus is on improving access to the various sites as well as upgrading provision. It is considered that people will be willing to travel slightly further (especially along green corridors) to reach play areas of better quality.

To support this, a qualitative analysis on the play areas was performed in 2012 with analysis of such aspects as level and scope of play equipment, variety, signage, appropriate age segregation, proximity to dwellings, accessibility, drainage, and type of safety surfacing. The split between high quality and low quality sites was 70:30 indicating the impact of the ongoing improvements to many sites in the town, but identified that considerable work was still required to improve remaining areas. Since 2013, significant investment has been carried out in all our play areas with further investment planned from 2019 – 2022. In 2017, a review was also carried out of accessibility in relation to disabilities and based on Play Inclusive Play Areas (PiPA) principles. This highlighted that the majority of play areas in the borough were able to meet at least 64% of the PiPA criteria but with opportunities to address some issues.

4.6.6 Amenity Green space

The amenity green space typology, as set out in PPG17: A Companion Guide defines sites as offering 'opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas'. These include informal recreation spaces, housing green spaces, 'village greens' and other incidental space.

49 sites classified as amenity green space are identified in Watford, totalling 29 hectares – 0.30ha per 1,000 population.

There are gaps within the densely populated area to the east of the Town Centre around Queens Road, improved access to existing provision will be sought in the medium term. Most of these sites fall within the management regime and ownership of Watford Community Housing and are out of the Council's control. Whilst these sites may offer opportunities for local recreation, they offer little in the way of play value, biodiversity, heritage and many are low quality and low value. These sites should be re-assessed in light of wider planning policies on the basis that accessibility to other higher quality and higher value open spaces are available.

4.6.7 Green Corridors

The green corridors typology, as set out in PPG17: A Companion Guide includes sites that offer opportunities for 'walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure or travel purposes and opportunities for wildlife migration'. This includes river and canal banks, road and rail corridors, cycle routes and pedestrian paths within towns, rights of way and permissive paths.

There are fairly extensive green corridors around the borough boundary, covering 22 hectares – 0.23ha per 1,000 population. It is not appropriate to apply accessibility standards to public rights of way and green corridors due to their linear nature and usage (often via many access points).

Green infrastructure principles will be applied to all aspects of green corridors. All green infrastructure assets identified through the Open Space audit and the Green Infrastructure Study will be protected for their recreational, environmental, visual, and wildlife value. Development which results in a net loss of provision will not normally be acceptable.

Priorities for Green Infrastructure will focus on conserving and enhancing the following key assets and the linkages between them:

- Cassiobury Park;
- Whippendell Wood (outside the borough but owned and managed by Watford Borough Council);
- Colne and Gade Valleys and Grand Union Canal;
- Chalk landscape valleys;
- The borough's sites of Special Scientific Interest; Local Nature Reserves, wildlife sites, key biodiversity areas and priority habitats and species identified by the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

4.6.8 Cemeteries and Churchyards

The typology of cemeteries, churchyards and burial grounds, as set out in PPG17: A Companion Guide includes areas for 'quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity'.

There are four sites in Watford totalling 19.2 hectares. This equates to 0.20 hectares per 1,000 population. It must be noted that two of these sites are no longer used for burials. However they still have amenity value as places of quiet contemplation.

Two cemeteries are currently in service within the borough. Both are owned and maintained by the council. Vicarage Road Cemetery is at capacity. North Watford Cemetery has approximately 7-9 years capacity remaining.

New sites for cemeteries have been examined through the site allocations development plan document and an adopted 10 year cemetery strategy 2016-2026. Whilst 7-9 years may seem a considerable life span for the cemetery it is essential to be aware that establishing a new burial ground can take a considerable amount of time (3-4 years) due to the needs associated to satisfying the Environment Agency and gaining planning consent. Therefore, work needs to commence as soon as possible in looking to identify new ground and ensure it is reserved for future use or alternatively/additionally to examine ways to increase the capacity of the land to lengthen the period of availability such as grave re-use or policy restrictions on who can be accepted for burial, and charging policies to deter non-residents.

4.7 Setting, Developing and Applying Local Provision Standards

Standards for the green space typologies (as classified in Section 1 of this Strategy and applied throughout the Strategy) consider surpluses and deficiencies in provision on the basis of quantitative, qualitative analysis and any consultation undertaken. National recommended guidance has been used to inform the appropriate distance thresholds, which have been applied using GIS mapping to demonstrate potential surplus/deficiencies in provision. In order to set provision by standards it is important to consider any standards previously applied by the Council and through the planning framework.

The standard for green space previously applied reflected the National Playing Fields Association standard of 2.4 hectares per 1,000 population (The former Six Acre Standard which equates to 2.4m² per person)

The location, accessibility and quality of green space is also important in ensuring that the areas are well used and appropriate to the needs of the Watford community.

Setting distance thresholds for each type of open space for all areas is not easy to achieve, as many factors will influence travel times. The figures are based on generic average travel times. However the standards provided, provide guidance that help to identify gaps in provision and meet local needs as identified through detailed analysis and benchmarking.

In developing and applying standards of provision, it is important to be clear that:

- National standards of recommended provision have been used for comparative purposes only along with benchmarking with similar authorities;
- Existing standards of provision relate to the current level of provision of a specific typology; and
- Recommended standards of provision are based on local assessment and analysis, but may be the same as a national recommended standard if appropriate, and specifically where current levels of provision do not meet a nationally recommended standard as a minimum. Equally, the future recommended standard may be the existing provision, if it is particularly high, and to lose it would significantly change the natural character of the area as would be the case in Watford.

It is not appropriate to set local standards in the same way for each typology; this is because the majority of people access different types of provision in different ways, for example, walking to a park or children's play area, driving to an outdoor sports facility. In addition, the way in which people choose to access different types of provision may be influenced by locational factors, for example, a high quality park may be within cycling or driving, but not walking distance. It is also important to take into consideration the extreme urban nature of Watford and its compact nature.

With this in mind, we have developed a set of standards below for each typology. For each typology, we have identified a benchmark based on authorities who have carried out similar work and studies. The Middlesbrough example is especially appropriate due to its compact and dense urban nature with lack of access to open countryside and pressures on existing spaces.



North Watford Cemetery

4.7.1 Parks, Gardens and Recreation Grounds

- **Existing Local Plan Quantity Standard:** None
- **Existing Provision:**
 - **Watford** 2.1ha per 1,000 population which equates to 21m² per person
- **Proposed Quantity Standard:** 20m² per person

Quantity: The total quantity of provision should at least match the amount of provision required by the application of the quantity standard. **Benchmark:** (Blyth 3.6m² per person; Mid Sussex 2.0m² per person; Middlesbrough 13m² per person)

- **Accessibility Standard**
 - **Straight Line Walking Distance Threshold:** 600 m
 - **Straight Line Driving Distance Threshold:** Not applicable

Benchmark: (Blyth 900 m; Mid Sussex 900 m; Horsham 1000 m; Middlesbrough 600m)

Accessibility: All dwellings should be within the walking distance threshold of at least one park, garden, recreation ground or a sports pitch site providing opportunities for informal recreation.

Justification: All residents should have easy access to a park, garden or recreation ground. This means that accessibility is more important than quantity. Suitable designed and managed sports pitches can also fulfil some of the functions of parks and recreation grounds, but there will be a need for additional space over and above that required for the pitches and support accommodation alone. Where particular forms of green space can be multifunctional – and recreation grounds generally contain a mix of several recreation opportunities – this makes the most effective use of land. This is especially relevant within a dense urban where recreation grounds, sports fields are often multi-functional.

Deficiencies: None, apart from small areas identified in North Watford, Nascot and north of Holywell.

Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy Policy: The Council will seek contributions from all developments which will increase the use made of parks, such as residential and office developments as well as improving access to and quality of existing parks such as Cassiobury Park.

Opportunities: Continue to upgrade the quality parks, gardens and recreation grounds to improve qualitative deficiencies. Reduction of existing parks and gardens would significantly change the natural character of the town.

4.7.2 Amenity Green Space

- **Existing Local Plan Quantity Standard:** None
- **Existing Provision:**
 - **Watford** 0.30ha per 1,000 population which equates to 3.0m² per person
- **Proposed Quantity Standard:** Not Appropriate

Quantity It is not desirable for amenity green space to be a discrete category of provision. Instead, the Council and its partners will adopt a policy of supporting its integration into other forms of green space wherever possible. Where there is under provision of parks, local amenity green space could be upgraded to meet any identified deficiency. Where there is over provision of parks, local amenity green space, where of low quality and low value, alternative uses or disposal should be considered. **Benchmark:** (Blyth 6.0m² per person; Horsham 4.0m² per person; Middlesbrough 6.5m² per person)

- **Accessibility Standard:**
 - **Straight Line Walking Distance Threshold:** 450 m

Benchmark: (Blyth 300 m; Mid Sussex 300 m; Horsham 350 m; Middlesbrough 350m)

Accessibility: Every dwelling within all settlements should be within the walking distance threshold of at least one local amenity green space or public access pitch.

Justification: Accessibility is more important than quantity because accessible, high quality green spaces meet local needs better than larger, more distant sites. Most forms of green space are multi-functional and therefore serve a number of purposes, the most important of which is to “soften” and enhance the appearance of an area & provide an attractive setting for buildings and for pathways and other transport routes. When assessing whether there is adequate amenity space in an area, it is important to consider the whole of the green network. Therefore, distance thresholds for amenity green spaces can be applied to other forms of green space where they serve an amenity function.

Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy Policy: The Council will seek contributions from residential developments to the enhancement of Local Amenity green space only if there are deficiencies in parks, gardens and recreation grounds, sports pitch provision, play areas and natural/semi-natural green space and to the agreed provision standards for those typologies if deemed appropriate. Where disposals are recommended, S106 / CIL contributions should be considered to improve the quality of nearby open spaces such as Parks & Gardens.

Opportunities: Upgrading of Local Amenity green space to enhanced facilities where current deficiencies are identified. There are gaps within the densely populated area to the east of the Town Centre around Queens Road, improved access to existing provision will be sought in the medium term.

4.7.3 Natural and Semi-Natural Green space

- **Existing Local Plan Quantity Standard:** None
- **Existing Provision:**
 - **Watford** 1.79ha per 1,000 population which equates to 1.8m² per person
- **Proposed Quantity Standard:** Not Appropriate

Quantity: It is not desirable for accessible natural green space to be a discrete category of provision. Instead, the Council and its partners will adopt a policy of supporting its integration into other forms of green space wherever possible. **Benchmark:** (Blyth 20m² pp; Horsham 20m² pp; Middlesbrough 0.5m² pp)

- **Accessibility Standard:**
 - **Straight Line Walking Distance Threshold:** 600 m

Benchmark: (Blyth 900 m; Mid Sussex 600 m; Horsham 1000 m; Middlesbrough 950m)

Accessibility: Every dwelling should be within 600 m of at least one accessible natural green space.

Site Size and Accessibility: Many dwellings in Watford have less than average accessibility to open countryside but reasonable access to natural/semi-natural green space. Well located accessible natural green space will be given a high degree of protection by Watford Borough Council and will be protected by policies relating to nature conservation or specific nature conservation designations.

Justification: Natural green spaces offer local residents and visitors the opportunity to experience the great outdoors and to be close to nature. Sites such as woodlands, local nature reserves and potential wetland habitat networks should be easily accessible to all residents. When coupled with high quality, accessibility is more important than quantity because many smaller but higher quality sites should have a greater capacity to accommodate users than fewer larger and often lower quality ones. They should also provide a better experience for visitors.

Deficiencies: Across most of the central areas of the town.

Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy Policy: The Council will **not** ask developers to provide new on-site natural green spaces but seek contributions towards the enhancement of either existing natural green spaces and to increase the biodiversity of other existing green space typologies such as parks and gardens, sports pitches sites, education land and local amenity green space, particularly in the central area.

Opportunities: Improve access to Green Infrastructure based on Policy GI 1 - Green Infrastructure.

All green infrastructure assets identified through the Open Space audit and the Green Infrastructure Study will be protected for their recreational, environmental, visual, and wildlife value. Development which results in a net loss of provision will not normally be acceptable.

Priorities for Green Infrastructure will focus on conserving and enhancing the key assets and the linkages between them.

4.7.4 Equipped Play Areas

■ **Existing Local Plan Quantity Standard:** Up to 8 m² per person based on the NPFA standard for **play space**

■ **Existing Provision:**

- **Watford** 0.05ha per 1,000 population which equates to 0.5m² per person

■ **Proposed Quantity Standard:** 0.6m² per person – (based on fixed equipped play areas)

Quantity: The total quantity of provision should at least match the amount of provision required by the application of the quantity standard.

Benchmark: (Blyth 0.8m² per person; Mid Sussex 0.65m² per person; Horsham 0.5m² per person; Middlesbrough 0.5 m² per person)

■ **Accessibility Standard:**

- **Straight Line Walking Distance Threshold:** 500m

Benchmark: (Blyth 300 m; Mid Sussex 300 m; Horsham 350 m; Middlesbrough 500m)

Accessibility: All dwellings with more than one bedroom should be within the walking distance threshold of at least one fixed equipment play area.

Justification: All children should be able to use play areas. These spaces also meet a valuable social need for parents and carers. Accessibility is more important than quantity because many young children will not be able to walk far to a play area.

Deficiencies: There are no significant deficiencies across the town.

Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy Policy:

In the short term, developer contributions to be utilised in improving existing play areas.

Opportunities: The town is well served by a large number of play areas but there are opportunities to improve play sites in key locations, in particular in regional and community park sites where destination play facilities with youth activity areas should be developed further.

4.7.5 Youth Activity Areas

■ **Existing Local Plan Quantity Standard:** None

■ **Existing Provision:** Not Known

■ **Proposed Quantity Standard:** 0.3m² per person

Quantity: The total quantity of provision should at least match the amount of provision required by the quantity standard.

Benchmark: (Blyth 0.1m² per person; Mid Sussex 0.3m² per person; Horsham 0.2-0.4m² per person; Middlesbrough 0.3m² per person)

■ **Accessibility Standard:**

- **Straight Line Walking Distance Threshold:** 600 m

- **Straight Line Driving Distance Threshold:** Not applicable

Benchmark: (Blyth 600 m; Mid Sussex 600 m; Horsham 1000 m; Middlesbrough 500m)

Accessibility: All dwellings with more than one bedroom should be within walking distance of at least one neighbourhood youth area such as a MUGA or Youth Shelter.

Justification: Young people tend to be a neglected group in terms of access to community infrastructure, partly because their needs can be difficult to define. Indeed, many young people are unable to give a clear answer when asked to identify the facilities they would like in their area.

However, young people have every right to “hang about” and indulge in largely harmless but sometimes noisy activities close to home, so there is a clear need to provide for them. Given the nature of youth culture and the difficulties of territorialism, it is important that young people should have a degree of choice, through access to more than one youth area within their neighbourhood.

Deficiencies: There are considerable deficiencies across the whole town.

Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy Policy: In the short term, developer contributions to be utilised in improving existing youth activity areas if within the appropriate distance threshold.

Opportunities: Longer term development of youth sites and activity areas in regional and community parks.

4.7.6 Allotments and Community Gardens

■ **Existing Local Plan Quantity Standard:** None

■ **Existing Provision:**

- **Watford** 0.27ha per 1,000 population which equates to 2.7m² per person

■ **Proposed Quantity Standard:** 3m² per person

Quantity: The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) suggests a national standard of 20 allotments per 1,000 households (i.e. 20 allotments per 2,000 people based on two people per house) or 1 allotment per 200 people. This equates to 0.125 hectares per 1,000 population based on an average plot size of 250m².

Benchmark: (Blyth 4.4m² per person; Mid Sussex 1.75m² per person; Horsham 1.25m² per person)

■ **Accessibility Standard:**

- **Straight Line Walking Distance Threshold:** 1000 m
- **Straight Line Driving Distance Threshold:** 4.5 km

Benchmark: (Blyth 900 m; Mid Sussex 900 m; Horsham 1000 m; Middlesbrough 700m)

Accessibility: All dwellings should be within walking distance threshold of at least one allotment site within the settlement hierarchy or within driving distance as the 2011 allotment survey highlighted that well over 50% of tenants drive to their sites. .

Justification: There is a reasonable demand for allotments in Watford where gardens linked to dwellings can often be very small, or almost non-existent.

Deficiencies: Based on the current provision Watford is well over the NSALG standard, however, the majority of allotments are in the north and south of the borough with limited provision in the middle of the town. There is a continued demand for allotments in Watford despite limited promotion.

Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy Policy: In the short term, developer contributions to be utilised in improving existing allotment areas across the town.

Opportunities: Improve access to allotments to allow them to become a viable option for people living in the centre of Watford. It is accepted that residents may have to drive to allotments, particularly if they are carrying equipment.

4.7.7 Outdoor Sports Facilities

- **Existing Local Plan Quantity Standard:** NPFA six acre standard
- **Existing Provision:** (does not include School Playing Fields, as most are inaccessible)
 - **Watford** 2.26ha per 1,000 population which equates to 23m² per person
- **Proposed Quantity Standard:** 20m² per person

Quantity: The total quantity of grass and artificial pitches available to community based clubs and teams should at least match the amount of provision required by the application of the quantity standards. **Benchmark:** (Blyth 10m² per person; Mid Sussex 12.25m² per person; Horsham 14m² per person; Middlesbrough 11m² per person)

- **Accessibility Standard:**
 - **Straight Line Walking Distance Threshold:** 1000 m
 - **Straight Line Driving Distance Threshold:** Not applicable

Benchmark: (Blyth 900 m; Mid Sussex 900 m; Horsham 1000 m; Middlesbrough 850m)

Accessibility: All dwellings should be within walking distance of at least one playing pitch.

Justification: All residents should have the opportunity to take part in the pitch sport of their choice. In the first instance this requires enough pitches with accessibility being secondary as the competitive nature of sports pitches means that participants will not always use the pitch nearest to their home. In addition, roughly half of all matches are played "away". Cricket and rugby teams tend to draw their membership from a wider area than football teams and many football pitches are also used by young people for mini-soccer or casually for "kickabouts". There is especially a need for football pitches to be more accessible than cricket or rugby pitches.

Deficiencies: None

Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy Policy: The Council will seek contributions from all developments which will increase the use made of sports pitches, such as residential and office developments.

Opportunities: Enhancement of facilities across the town due to qualitative issues, especially in relation to changing facilities. Emphasis on strategic multi activity hubs including Woodside Playing Fields and King George V Playing Fields. Sports Facilities Strategy developed.

5 The Strategic & Local Green Space Network - Policies and Aspirations

The overall quality, accessibility and quantity of green space in Watford is largely very good, well maintained and valued by our local communities. However, previous consultation also raised a number of concerns and issues such as perceived deficiencies in some typologies of open space and the need for continuous improvement and longer term investment. The policies we have derived in Section 6 for the Council and our partners to aim for, leading to a more detailed action plan will assist the Council in this task. However, we need to be more specific as to what our priorities are and what specifically we need to concentrate on. With the limited and often declining resources we have, as well as externally and from developers, we need to continue to prioritise accordingly. We proposed a “**Strategic Green Space Network**”, the sites which are most important to us, which need to be **protected** as well as continually **enhanced** through capital **investment** as well as enhanced management and maintenance where appropriate and realistic. Many of these sites were already high quality through continued high standards of maintenance, but as prescribed, many required long term management plans and long term investment to improve their long term futures and development. We have therefore significantly invested in our “Strategic Green Space Network” and quality standards have improved but much is still required to be done. This updated strategy will allow us and our partners to continue to deliver our Green Space Vision and aspirations.

5.1 Our Vision

“Watford will have a network of accessible, high quality and highly valued green spaces to be proud of, promoting sustainability, supporting bio-diversity and extensively contributing to the economic, social and environmental aspirations of the town”.

5.2 Delivering Change

The Council has been managing within existing resources in many areas but has also been improving open spaces and facilities proactively as a result of Section 106 Developer contributions. However, in the continued economic climate, these resources are likely to decline and available funding will need to be delivered and allocated where it is really needed most. This Green Spaces Strategy emphasises the need to continue to improve proactively. However, community involvement in developing a strategic network of green spaces and in improving sites is critical. Although involving the community can require increased resources, these efforts should result in lower maintenance costs through an increase in local pride and less vandalism/abuse through peer pressure. The Strategic Green Space Network as outlined below is the continued priority for the Council with Developer Contributions / Community Infrastructure Levy and other funding to be targeted towards these sites. The open spaces audit has confirmed that there is generally sufficient open space provision across the town and that the overall priority should be to continue to enhance sites, based on this agreed strategic network.

Delivering this change will be through delivering the Councils revised Corporate Policies which are summarised below and through a number of policy development areas and ultimately through a series of Action Plans detailed in Section 8, with short, medium and long term targets, working with strategic partners, local communities and key stakeholders. Not all may be achievable, but a vision has now been created and targets and opportunities identified.

Corporate Policies

- Identify ways to manage the borough’s housing needs
- Champion smart growth and economic prosperity
- **Provide for our vulnerable and disadvantaged communities**
- Deliver a digital Watford to empower our community
- **Secure our own financial future**
- **Effective two-way engagement and communication**

- **Sound management and high performance**
- **Improving the town's environment.**

Policy Development Areas

We have therefore adopted a number of key policy development areas which embrace the above issues and are developed in detail in Section 7 - Action Plan and provide the necessary guidance in taking the strategy forward.

1. The Council recognises the importance and value of all its green spaces to Watford and its diverse communities and will seek to protect and enhance them through the planning system;
2. The Council through partnership working with private and public organisations, as well as Friends and resident groups, will seek funding opportunities to sustainably manage and enhance publicly accessible green spaces in the interests of the whole Watford community;
3. The Council will work in conjunction with partners, users, and stakeholders and involve them in the "decision making" process relating to the use, development and management of the towns' green spaces;
4. The Council will work in partnership with local people and other agencies in order to provide cleaner, safer and greener environments. These will be publicly accessible and socially inclusive, catering for a wide range of people, ages and backgrounds for their enjoyment and safe use without the fear of crime;
5. The Council will encourage the use of Watford's green spaces as important centres of education as well as places to celebrate our cultural diversity;
6. The Council will encourage multifunctional use of green spaces to provide a balanced provision for play, sports, recreation and biodiversity, which will promote the health, enjoyment and well-being of Watford's local communities; and
7. The Council will protect and enhance Watford's biodiversity within its open spaces.

Objectives

- To provide and enhance a strategic network of accessible, high quality green space throughout Watford based on Green Infrastructure principles;
- To provide guidance for the effective planning and protection of open space, sport and recreational facilities which meet local needs by;
 - providing appropriate green space planning policies and standards which provide clarity and reasonable certainty for developers and landowners, which will be taken forward as part of the Development Plan;
 - ensuring the continued provision of green spaces is distributed and located appropriately throughout Watford;
 - promoting good green space design and management principles in all new and existing developments.
- To strengthen local community involvement and interest in Watford's green spaces by;
 - encouraging community participation in the design, management and care of their local green spaces;
 - promoting the value of green space as a major contributor to health and social well-being, via its use for recreational, educational and sporting activities;

- ❑ ensuring green spaces are locally valued and well used community assets.
- To improve Green Space by;
 - ❑ ensuring green spaces are locally accessible, clean, attractive, well maintained, fit for purpose and safe;
 - ❑ improving the existing green space contribution to the landscape, biodiversity and cultural value of Watford;
 - ❑ providing a sustainable approach to green space management and maintenance.



Harwood's Adventure playground

5.3 The Strategic Borough-Wide Network (based on the following)

Regional Parks & Open Spaces			
Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Wood (and LNR/SSSI)		Woodside Playing Fields (with Albans Wood LNR)	
Cheslyn House and Gardens		St Mary's Churchyard	
North Watford and Vicarage Road Cemeteries		River Colne Corridor	
Community Parks and Recreation Grounds			
Callowland Rec	Oxhey Park	King George V Playing Fields	Watford Fields
Garston Park (and LNR)	Oxhey Green	Knutsford Playing Fields	Watford Heath
Goodwood Rec	Radlett Road Playing Fields	Leaveden Green Rec	North Watford Playing Fields (Orchard Park)
Harebreaks Rec (and LNR)	Waterfields Rec	Meriden Park	Colne River Park (with Lairage Land LNR)
Local Parks & Open Spaces			
All Saints Churchyard		Munden Woods Open Space	
Cassio Common		Lingfield Way Open Space	
Buryfield Nature Garden		Oxhey Grange	
Canterbury Road Pocket Park		Russell Lane Wood	
East Drive Rec		Riverside Rec	
Glen Way Open Space		Riverside Park	
Harwoods Rec		Berry Avenue Open Space	
Lea Farm Rec			
Strategic Sports Sites (as identified in the Sports Facilities Strategy)			
RIVER COLNE EAST		CASSIOBURY SITE WEST	
HOLYWELL SOUTH		WOODSIDE NORTH	
Green links and corridors			
River Colne Corridor	River Gade Corridor	Grand Union Canal	Cassiobury Park

Table 5.3 Strategic Green Space Network - List of Sites



Oxhey Park Green Flag success in 2014/15

5.4 The Strategic Borough-Wide Network

The quality of all the strategic green space network sites should meet the quality standards requirements in all respects:

- ❑ The priorities are to enhance the quality of the regional, community and local sites in the strategic green space network;
- ❑ The priorities are to improve the accessibility of the sites in the strategic green space network;
- ❑ The priorities are to protect through the planning system all the sites in the strategic green space network;
- ❑ The priorities are to increase community and stakeholder involvement across Watford in all aspects of green space management, maintenance and development.

5.5 The Watford Provision Level

The spaces that the Council will seek to upgrade, enhance and maintain to ensure they are High Quality/High Value are included in the proposed strategic green space network in Table 5.3.

5.6 Opportunities and Sites for Review

Just over 30 sites across Watford are still currently classed as low quality and of low value. The Council will further review those spaces that have been classed as being genuinely low quality and low value, in the light of wider planning policies.

The policy on low quality low value sites is as follows:

- Enhance the quality of the green space provided it is possible also to enhance the value;
- Consider the space surplus to requirements in terms of its current use if value cannot be improved. Consider alternative uses.

Along with the above criteria, we will also include the following:

- Determine any other typology deficiencies in the area within distance thresholds;
- Determine how poor the quality and value is and whether enhancement is realistic;
- Determine future long term investment opportunities of each site;
- Determine local community “value” by localised consultation; and
- Opportunities for enhancement of nearby green space facilities within the green space network.



6 Key Green Space Issues - Our Vision and Strategy

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the main issues facing the Council, its partners and stakeholders if it is to achieve the proposed vision for green spaces for Watford. We also describe some of the options facing us in achieving this goal. The development of a “fit for purpose” and updated Green Spaces Strategy for Watford is based around three key issues:

1. **Developing a Green Space Strategy Action Plan** – creating an agreed framework for the implementation of the strategy that will guide all future green spaces and public places improvements based on a defined action plan;
2. **Improving the Green Spaces Consultative Network** – identifying a way in which we could effectively involve more local people in decisions about the management and development of our green spaces and public places;
3. **Measuring Progress** – suggesting how we can measure what has been done and how much there is still to do.

6.2 The Vision for Watford’s Green Spaces

Watford will have a network of accessible, high quality and highly valued green spaces to be proud of, promoting sustainability, supporting bio-diversity and extensively contributing to the economic, social and environmental aspirations of the town.

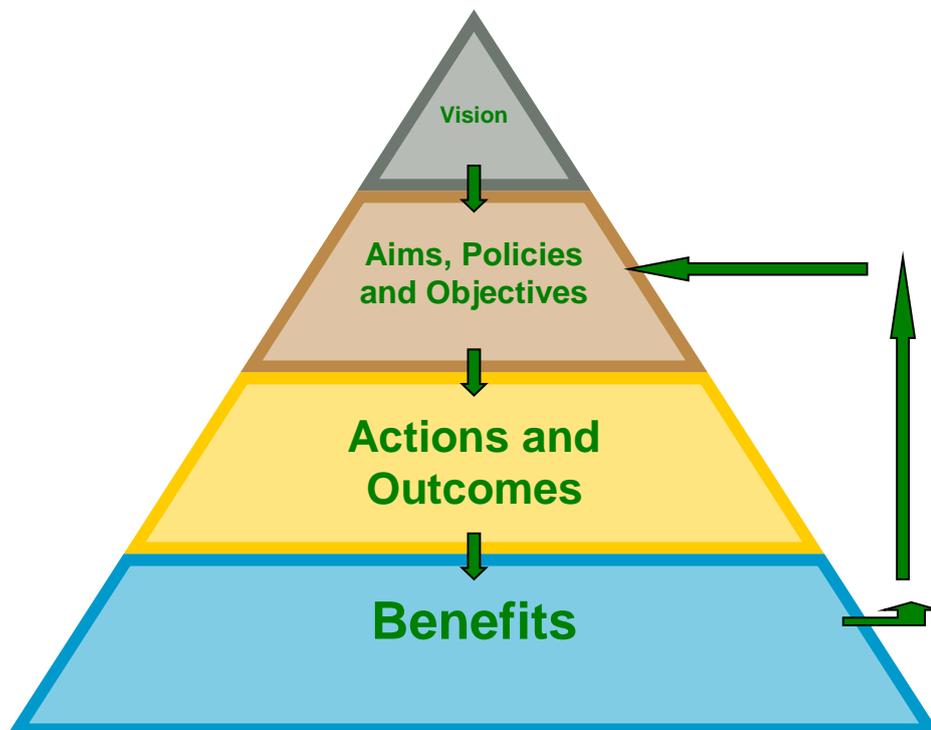


Figure 6.2 Delivering the Vision

This vision will guide and support Watford Borough Council’s actions on green spaces. This must be considered when designing and improving green spaces and management and maintenance regimes for them.

The vision has five key components:

1. A strong connected network and infrastructure of green spaces will be protected through the planning system, enhanced and managed to provide multi-functional benefits;
2. Green spaces will be socially inclusive, catering for a wide range of people, ages and backgrounds;
3. Green spaces will be enhanced and managed to maximise their biodiversity value;
4. Green spaces will make a substantial contribution to the visual amenity, identity, character and local distinctiveness of the town; and
5. Green spaces will be managed and maintained in a flexible, creative and sustainable manner seeking to minimise energy and chemical inputs, increasing re-cycling and through use of local materials.

Ten overarching strategy guidelines are proposed to expand the vision into real deliverable statements with a clear deliverable Action Plan.

STEWARDSHIP

1. The Council's Stewardship Role

As the representative of the residents of Watford, the Council will manage green spaces in the interests of the whole community.

The Council is the steward of many of Watford's most valuable green spaces and owns them in trust, now and for future generations.

2. Green Space History and Heritage

The Council will protect and preserve the historic and architectural heritage found within the Watford's green spaces. The Council will ensure that this heritage is protected, now and for the future.

MANAGEMENT

3. Green Spaces as Community Assets

Watford's green space is an essential and permanent community resource. The Council will work in conjunction with partners, users, and stakeholders and involve them in the "decision making" process relating to the use, development and management of the region's green spaces.

4. Investing in Community Green Spaces

The Council recognises that green spaces require investment. The Council will continue to actively seek resources for the regeneration of many green spaces, in partnership with the local community and external agencies based on a developed "strategic green space network". The Council will ensure any investment is sustainable, maintenance regimes are developed and where new developments and initiatives are introduced, maintenance issues are taken into account in the design, management and ongoing sustainability of the facility.

USE

5. Universal Access to Green Spaces

Watford's green spaces are available for use by all sections of the local community, including the business community. The Council will support and promote fully inclusive access and use of Watford's green spaces for all lawful purposes.

6. The Right to Safety

All sections of the local community have the right to use Watford's green spaces in safety and without fear of crime. The Council will work in partnership with local people and other agencies in order to provide cleaner, safer and greener environments.

7. Education for Citizenship

The Council recognises that green spaces are a rich resource for learning, not only about the living environment, but the town's history and culture. The Council will encourage the use of the town's green spaces as important centres of education as well as places to celebrate our cultural diversity.

8. Spaces for Play, Sport and Recreation

Watford's green spaces are an essential community resource in providing quality spaces for play, sport and recreation. The Council will ensure that these uses are provided for in health, enjoyment and well-being of the town's local communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

9. Community Living Spaces

The Council will continue to develop green spaces to ensure that they remain "living spaces". The Council will protect and enhance the town's biodiversity, maximise resource efficiency by increasing recycling opportunities, establish a better use of essential energy sources and minimise the use of pesticides and chemicals.

10. Aiming High and Ensuring Quality

The Council will make best use of resources available to ensure the highest quality for all the town's green spaces. The Council will continue to adopt the principles of the Green Flag standard across all green spaces.

The Council's aim is to build on its success in the annual Green Flag awards and build on the early and ongoing awards for Cassiobury Park, Cheslyn House and Gardens and Woodside Playing Fields.



Oxhey Park sculptures

6.3 Key Issues

The Council identified a number of key issues for the future of green space provision in Watford and these have been updated to reflect the review of 2017.

- Involving local communities;
- Parks, Gardens & Recreation Grounds;
- Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space Areas;
- Green Infrastructure, connectivity and corridors;
- Equipped Play Areas and Youth Provision;
- Sports Facilities;
- Allotments;
- Green Space Opportunities;
- Partnership Working with local stakeholders;
- Green Space Management, Maintenance and Development; and
- Resources and Income Generation in Parks

We discuss these issues below in further detail.

6.3.1 Involving Local Communities

Needs

As identified throughout the work in developing the Green Spaces Strategy, there was a need to develop better ways of involving local communities in green space management, maintenance and development. A number of groups exist in relation to parks and open spaces in Watford and there are clear benefits to developing groups to work with green space management. These include a number of Friend's Groups and Resident's Associations. A key dimension of successful green space management is a willingness to engage local communities in the task, and to think creatively about means to make this happen. Community participation often needs to happen within a framework which gives weight to different voices within the community, and that is not unduly influenced by sectional interests. Involving the voluntary sector in any green space management can tap an under-utilised resource.

There is also a need to work with or continue to develop relationships with other partners with an interest in the management of green space, e.g. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Canal and River Trust, Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Green Gym as well as local sports clubs.

Opportunities

With the development of this Green Spaces Strategy there were clear opportunities to further involve communities in green spaces in Watford. Some excellent work has already been undertaken with Friends and Community Groups such as the Friends of Cassiobury Park, Friends of Oxhey Park and Green Gyms but there is still enormous potential to involve further local communities, particularly in relation to the development of parks management plans for the community parks, improvements to play facilities as well as encouraging the number of Friends Groups. A Parks Forum and Allotments Forum also was formed in 2016 and were successful and these will continue.

The high quality but low value of some of the town's green spaces however means that the involvement of local communities is essential in delivering a better quality and connected green space network in relation to management, and in particular, development and assisting in attracting funding to allow much of this to happen.



Knutsford Playing Fields Green Gym which has now expanded into Cassiobury Park

6.3.2 Parks, Gardens and Recreation Grounds

Needs

The overall quality of parks, gardens and recreation grounds in Watford was excellent and they scored high due to the quality of maintenance. Also in most cases they continue to be highly valued by local communities. The strategy originally identified that parks and gardens should be a strategic priority and should continue to be maintained to a high standard to ensure all are high quality and high value. The successful management of Watford's green spaces depends upon a correct understanding of the nature and needs of different types of green spaces. Locally derived green space typologies are valuable to differentiate between green space types and their appropriate aspirations and management regimes. A clear distinction between ownership and management responsibilities for green space can help to establish a unified and integrated management regime.

Opportunities

A parks hierarchy was adopted in 2010 in relation to standards of maintenance based on regional, community and local parks and this seemed a sensible approach to adopt as well as adapt. Despite the fact that Watford is a small but compact town, it has a wide range of parks and gardens, so a three-tier hierarchy was developed:

Regional parks and open spaces: the major parks and open spaces with a good range of high quality facilities, intended to serve the whole town and a district-wide catchment. The Council will continue to seek to make these parks different and complementary. These parks should all be Green Flag standard parks and open spaces.

Community parks and recreation grounds: These should be within walking distance of each of the main neighbourhoods in the town, with a lesser range of facilities, but designed to complement the regional parks and open spaces, with an emphasis on providing local play opportunities as well as formal / informal sports facilities. The Council will continue to actively seek to maximise pedestrian and cycling access to these spaces and ensure they are invested in and maintained to a high standard. These should also be mostly Green Flag standard parks and open spaces.

Local parks and open spaces: these should be within walking distance of all neighbourhoods but with an emphasis on informal play and sports activity and may have fewer if any facilities.

6.3.3 Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space

Needs

There is a considerable amount of natural and semi-natural green space within Watford despite its compact and urban nature and with some significant and strategic sites within the town such as Whippendell Wood and the river corridors of the River Colne and River Gade. These are all important in relation to green infrastructure, local biodiversity as well as accessibility. However, a number of areas are deficient, and accessibility is an issue.

Opportunities

Natural green spaces offer local residents and visitors the opportunity to experience the great outdoors and to be close to nature. Such sites should be easily accessible to all residents and visitors but managed in a balanced way to ensure local biodiversity is not compromised. Significant opportunities also exist through the Hertfordshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) whose purpose is to ensure the natural environment is fully valued in local decision making and delivers benefits for wildlife, people, landscapes and the local economy as well as the Colne Catchment Action Network, one of whose aims is to reconnect local communities with the heritage, raising awareness of the Colne Valley to more and a wider range of people through learning activities, information and interpretation resources, cultural events and volunteering.

6.3.4 Green Infrastructure, connectivity and corridors

Needs

Green infrastructure (GI) is an important part of the green spaces network providing visual, wildlife and sustainable transport links between the many urban green spaces and the outer countryside and green belt. In the face of competition for resources and environmental change, now more than ever we must look to our landscape and to sites to perform the widest range of functions for people, communities and quality of life, wildlife and ecosystems. In some cases, existing GI assets are delivering the necessary functionality, in others not. This pattern of demand and supply forms the basis for the analyses undertaken and proposals made in this plan. For example, issues relate to access and links, and the variable ability to reach assets as part of a green travel network. The Green Infrastructure Plan seeks to address links and connections, alternative green space provision and low cost, maximum benefit interventions such as improved landscape management to deliver a wider array of functions. It also looks at ways to influence sustainable living modes and transport choices through non spatial and educational projects to support spatial proposals.

Opportunities

The Council has identified with key professionals and community stakeholders, a series of potential projects to take forward the GI network and to deliver the functions identified in the GI Plan. The GI projects identified were as follows:

- Cassiobury Park Enhancement – completed in 2017;
- Whippendell Woods Enhancement – commenced in 2017;
- Grand Union Canal Enhancement;
- Colne River Park Enhancement – commenced in 2018;
- Colne Valley Wetland Enhancement; and
- Urban Greening and Legibility for Watford.

An essential part of effective GI delivery is a strategic, co-ordinated approach, to ensure that projects are resourced appropriately in terms of capital works and ongoing revenue activity. The Green Infrastructure Plan now forms part of the evidence base for Development Plan Documents (DPDs) in the Local Development Framework and green infrastructure issues are now included and addressed in the Development Plan Documents. The Council from 2017/18 has identified a major opportunity to improve the River Colne corridor linked to Watford Riverwell (the former Health Campus) and commenced a project in October 2017 as part of a 10-year plan to restore this important corridor. There are also opportunities in relation to improving the connectivity between existing parks, recreation grounds and other open spaces across Watford by urban greening, improving pedestrian links and wider accessibility.

6.3.5 Equipped Play Areas and Youth Provision - updated 2017

Needs

As a result of the lack of youth provision, teenagers can tend to colonise play facilities intended for younger children and their quality suffers as a result. There are some play areas across the town which are generally maintained to a high standard and therefore are classed as high quality but play value is low.

Opportunities

As part of the continued initiative to improve green space quality across the town, opportunities exist to continue to improve the quality, accessibility and play value of play areas and increase the number of youth facilities across the whole town. The development of youth and play facilities is an excellent way in which to empower a local

community to get involved whether through development of Multi Use Games Areas, shelters or provision of wheeled sports such as BMX or skateboarding.

6.3.6 Sports Pitches, Multi-Courts and Artificial Turf Pitches - updated 2017

Needs

The spread of outdoor sports pitches across Watford is very good. There are issues related to the quality of provision of changing facilities and some facilities such as football, tennis and lack of all-weather facilities, including 3G artificial turf pitches.

Opportunities

At the time of adoption of the Green Spaces Strategy, there was no Sports Facilities or Playing Pitch Strategy for Watford. However, the Council commissioned a detailed audit of sports facilities across the town in 2012, in particular relating to provision of rugby, football, cricket, tennis and hockey which led to a 10-year *'Sports Facilities Strategy'* which identified in particular the need for improved changing facilities to serve existing pitches and now provides an approach which prioritises this work in areas where maximum benefit can be gained by giving higher priority to those sites with most pitches, which could then be served by one building – the creation of multi-functional sports activity hubs – a Strategic Sports Sites. The Council identified four Strategic Sports Sites:-

RIVER COLNE EAST	CASSIOBURY SITE WEST
HOLYWELL SOUTH	WOODSIDE NORTH

The Council has commenced work on two of these sites with significant work on the River Colne East, incorporating Knutsford Playing Fields and Radlett Road Playing Fields and a Woodside North.



Knutsford Playing Fields

6.3.7 Allotments - updated 2017

Needs

The overall provision of allotments across Watford is well provided for, with demand steady but with waiting lists on some sites.

Opportunities

A strategy was developed after localised community consultation and local needs assessments. The “Watford Allotments Strategy 2013 – 2018” is now the overarching strategy for the provision of allotments in the Borough and includes all the background information, national, regional and local policies which are relevant to allotments as well as details of the consultation carried out. Significant investment was identified as being required on most of our sites and the need for more focussed promotion and availability of allotments was central to the delivery of the Action Plan contained within the Allotments Strategy. As a result, funding was allocated from the Council’s Capital Programme to invest £800,000 into all sites that were in need and included new fencing, toilets, footways and signage. This was completed in 2016 and with the closure of Farm Terrace allotments, with new provision made available at Lower Paddock Road. Allotments are an important leisure facility, especially for younger generations who are now taking up allotment gardening alongside more established users. (Note a new allotments strategy will be adopted in early 2020).

6.3.8 Green Space Opportunities

Needs

Watford overall still has sufficient quantity of green spaces but there is a conflict between the strongly expressed desire for better management and maintenance and what the Council can realistically afford especially with regards to the financial restraints the Council continues to face. Despite these pressures, there is also the view that local residents wish to have improved maintenance despite many sites scoring highly in the quality audit. Local expectations are always high!

Opportunities

There may be opportunities to rationalise some provision and possibly convert some spaces to other uses, for example cemetery space, or potentially, as a last resort, dispose of some sites which currently offer little value to local communities. The audit information already identifies those spaces that are of least value to the community or wildlife.

6.3.9 Partnership Working with Local Stakeholders

Issue

The delivery of a range of Action Plans, investments and enhancements in difficult economic times is simply not achievable without partnership working, whether with a local community group, residents association or organisations such as Green Gym, the Wildlife Trust or others.

Needs

Local community groups are often active in their locality and Watford has a number who are keen to see continued improvements in their community green spaces. There have been many successes, but there may well be many who do not have the confidence, the skills or capacity to work with the Council in delivering continued improvements to their green spaces.

Opportunities

Building on the successes to date (Goodwood Rec, Orchard Park, Cassiobury Park, Oxhey Park, Woodside Playing Fields, Harebreaks Wood), further opportunities exist to develop projects within other communities, whether a community tidy up or developing a masterplan for a green space and subsequent attraction of funding to deliver. The Council will continue to work with its partner Veolia as part of its ambition to see local communities more engaged within their open spaces.

6.3.10 Green Space Management, Maintenance and Development

Issue

Local people have indicated that they would like to see their green spaces continued to be managed and maintained to a high standard. There is also the concern that green space, whilst mainly of a high quality in relation to maintenance, as indicated by the quality audits, future long term development plans need to be considered in relation to infrastructure condition, long term use, and longer term investment plans. In 2013, the Council outsourced its Environmental Services functions to Veolia as part of a 7 year contract with a possible 8 year extension. This included the management, maintenance and development of all green spaces. They are and continue to be a key partner in the delivery of this Green Spaces Strategy.

Needs

Improving management, maintenance and development is not simply a matter of doing things differently, but generally also requires additional resources.

Opportunities

Some sites such as the several of the parks would benefit from involvement by teams of volunteers or *Park Champions*. However, there are obvious limits to the extent to which volunteers can deliver long term management and maintenance. The development of long term Management Plans or Development Plans for the Regional and Community Parks, with cost implications are an opportunity which would assist the Council and Veolia in gaining external funding for longer term investment. Twelve of the Council's parks have now benefitted from 5-year Management Plans as part of the wider Green Flag successes.

6.3.11 Staffing, Funding and Income Generation in Parks

Issues

In recent years, maintenance resources nationwide and locally have declined considerably in real terms and the Council is now faced with a significant reduction in its core funding due to the current economic climate and government austerity measures. Staffing in parks was reduced in 2011 and further reductions occurred in 2012/13. The outsourcing of the service to Veolia allowed a number of efficiencies to be made and increased to opportunity for retaining and improving quality but also to increase opportunities for income generation in parks.

Seven key areas have been identified where changes could be implemented:

1. Increasing the funding/resources available through alternative sources eg grant applications;
2. Partnering with commercial organisations through alternative delivery mechanisms eg catering;
3. Increasing income generation opportunities in parks eg car parking charges, events, lease agreements;
4. Developing self- management options;
5. Full cost recovery for some services provided;

6. Altering the management and maintenance regimes; and
7. Prioritising fewer sites.

Opportunities

Developer contributions from any future development proposals in the town may support further green space or facility enhancement or development but with the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), this is likely to be much more competitive and challenging with other infrastructure improvements seeking contributions. Income generation in parks and open spaces was very poor within Watford and there are considerable opportunities for franchises, improved leasing terms as well as charging for certain services. Many opportunities have been identified and many of these are progressing and include:-

- Car parking charges to Cassiobury Park;
- Improved lease agreements in Cassiobury Park;
- Increased income from events;
- Increases in charges for cemetery services; and
- Options for new services including a pet cemetery service.

6.4 Contributions to the Enhancement of Existing Provision

The need for the enhancement of existing provision arises when there will be a sufficient quantity of provision within the distance threshold of the development site after the development, but some elements of this provision may fail to meet the required quality standards.

The Council will seek developer contributions based on a Development Control Model using information available from the audit, provision and quality standards for off- site contributions based on the model below.

Whilst minimum quantitative, accessibility and qualitative standards need to be met in the provision of new green spaces or enhancement of existing ones, the design **quality** of a green space can make a major difference to whether or not a green space is successful and well used.

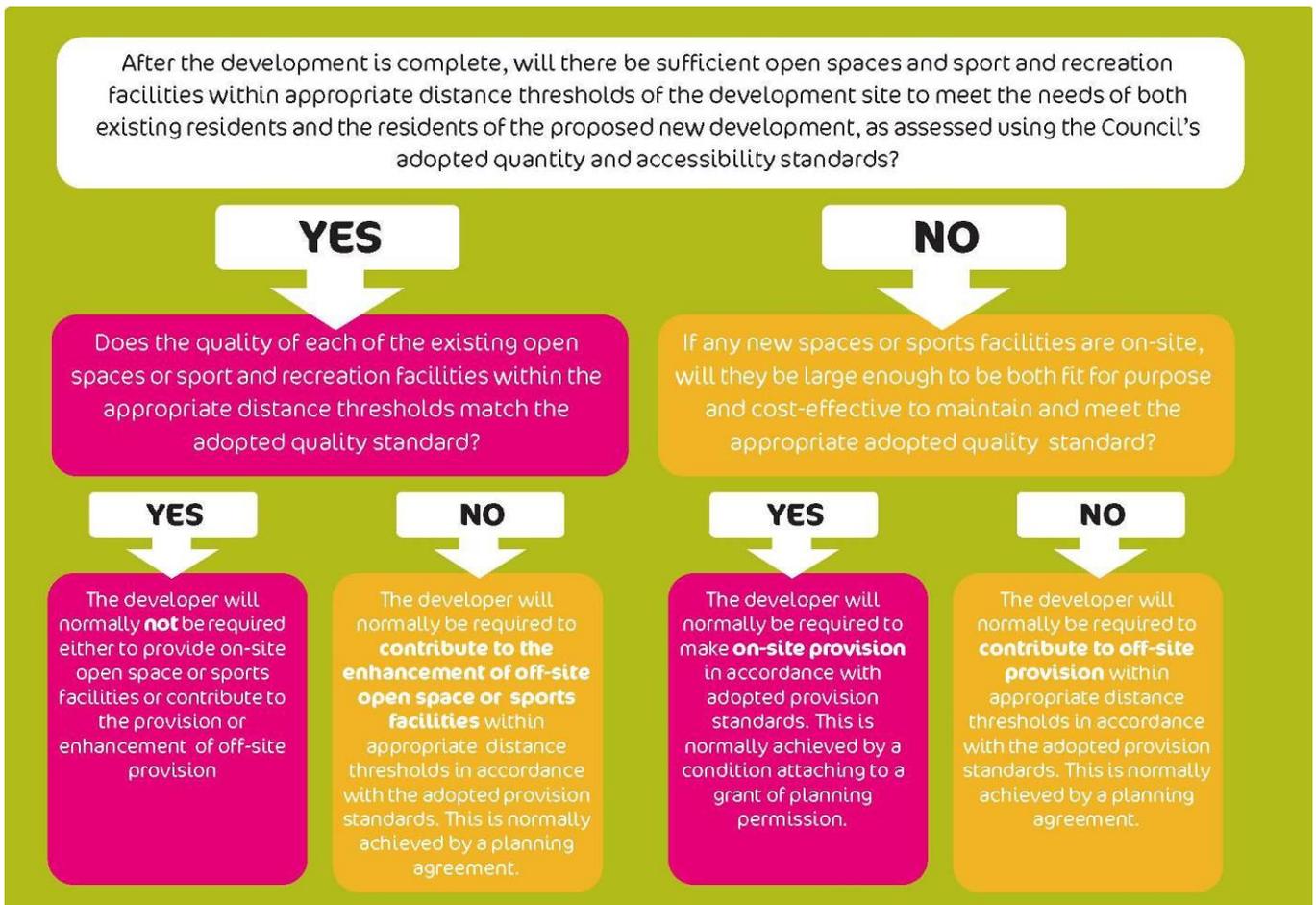


Figure 6.5 - Development Control Model

6.5 Performance Indicators - Measuring Progress

There have been a range of nationally recognised performance measurements provided by the previous Audit Commission that were applied to green spaces.

CABE Space had been advocating and promoting the outcomes and values of parks and open spaces (e.g. promoting satisfaction in place, providing a place for young people to participate in active recreations and empowering communities) rather than focusing on inputs (i.e. service delivery). However, Watford is keen to continue to use Green Flag as the key performance indicator for its parks and to build on current and continued successes.

6.5.1 Green Flag Awards

The Green Flag Award scheme was launched in 1996. It was designed to encourage good standards in parks and green spaces, recognise the diversity and what makes those sites special and recognise the value of the green spaces to the people who use them. The award is the benchmark by which the quality of green spaces is judged. The Tidy Britain Group use a steering group of national, public and voluntary sector organisations and informed individuals, to independently run the Green Flag Scheme. Two fairly later additions were the Green Pennant for sites managed by voluntary and community groups and the Green Heritage Site Award which is for sites of heritage value.

Watford at the adoption of this Green Spaces Strategy had 3 Green Flag parks. By 2019, we have 12 open spaces which are now at Green Flag standards. These are:-

- Cassiobury Park
- Woodside Playing Fields
- Cheslyn House and Gardens
- Oxhey Park
- North Watford Cemetery
- Goodwood Recreation Ground
- Harwoods Recreation Ground
- St Mary's Churchyard
- Waterfields Recreation Ground
- Callowland Recreation Ground
- Paddock Road Allotments
- North Watford Playing Fields (Orchard Park)

It is intended to further increase the number of Green Flag Parks in Watford and these could include:-

- Garston Park;
- River Colne Corridor;
- Watford Heath with Oxhey Grange Playing Fields;
- Harebreaks Recreation Ground;
- King George V Playing Fields; and
- Green Heritage for Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Wood.

6.6 Site Classification by Use - Grounds Maintenance Implications

6.6.1 Maintenance Standards

The current grounds maintenance regimes have different regimes in relation to different areas. Not all sites are treated equally e.g. Green Flag parks and gardens are generally maintained to a much higher standard in comparison to a local park. At the same time there are many similarities, for example, grass cutting has the same standard of maintenance regime in a Green Flag Park as it does in a local park. As highlighted, the standard of maintenance in Watford is generally high particularly within parks and gardens. There are, however significant pressures in relation to on-going budgetary issues and acceptable levels of maintenance standards need to be further investigated.

Research on maintenance standards will be carried out as an Action Plan of this strategy looking specifically at:

- Existing standards;
- Level of specification;

- Typology of open space;
- Development of Management Plans for all Regional and Community Parks and nature conservation sites;
- Service delivery;
- Alternative methods of service delivery; and
- Volunteer labour and use of reparation “labour” initiatives

This will enable the following:

- Improved management regimes, specific to the typology of use and local expectations. Links to management plans;
- Improved maintenance regimes, specific to the typology and local expectations;
- Clarification of standards of provision, for client, contractor and customers;
- Priorities for development, based on quality audits; and
- Community needs and aspirations.

6.7 Sustainable Design and Development

In order to support Watford’s vision to be a successful town in which people are proud to live, work, study and visit, it is important that the authority is able to maintain and sustain its physical infrastructure. For many years, new investments, due to a lack of consideration for its maintenance and sustainability requirements, have declined into a poor condition to be subsequently replaced again in later years. During the intervening years of decline, the image and liveability of the area becomes reduced, causing poor public perceptions of the area. The Council should move towards a “Sustain and Maintain Policy” and develop mechanisms where this is taken into account in all capital projects and planning decisions. This is a key role that should be developed by the Council whereby it will not take on any other management or maintenance “obligations” unless sustainability and maintenance have been approved and agreed.

6.8 Anti-Social Behaviour

CABE Space, November 2004, published an important Policy Note on ‘*Preventing Anti-Social Behaviour in Public Spaces*’. Research commissioned by CABE Space reveals that community groups estimate that 31% of parks suffer from unacceptably high levels of vandalism and behaviour related problems. Around 60% of local authorities are seen by these groups to have achieved very limited or practically no success in tackling the problem.

Solutions – CABE Space has seen two approaches emerge to the problem of anti-social behaviour in public spaces:

1. **“Target hardening”** – the redesign of facilities and equipment to make them near indestructible, and less susceptible to theft, vandalism and abuse;
2. **“Place making”** – investing in good design, attractive new facilities and good maintenance to create public spaces that the community will want to use and enjoy.

The evidence for place making – The CABE Space study showed that well designed, well maintained public spaces can contribute to reducing the incidence of vandalism and anti- social behaviour, and result in long term cost savings.

Approaches that work:

- Responding rapidly to problems such as vandalism by sending a clear message that abuse will not be tolerated;
- Supporting the Park Rangers and Environmental Crime Officers to reassure visitors while discouraging anti-social behaviour;
- Reasserting the clarity of design with open vistas and clear sight lines; and
- Fully engaging the community (including groups creating problems) in the process of reclaiming the park or open space.

So the benefits of investing in public space can be three-fold:

1. Successfully tackling problems of anti-social behaviour;
2. Achieving long term cost savings; and
3. Creating the neighbourhoods in which we want to live.

CABE Space recommended that:

- We should invest in the good design, staffing and maintenance of public spaces to tackle problems of anti-social behaviour, or to prevent the start of a downward spiral; and
- Security measures and target hardening should not be used as the only response to problems of anti-social behaviour in public space, but should be employed selectively where they will be effective, and as part of a co-ordinated approach.

The Council will develop Action Plans related to the issues of anti- social behaviour in parks and green spaces in accordance with CABE Space guidance.



Vicarage Road Cemetery

7 Action Plan and Progress - updated 2018

This Action Plan will enable Watford Borough Council and its partners through open space stewardship, to meet green space needs and provide a fair distribution of safe, accessible, clean, attractive green spaces, and achieve the strategic green space network. They are based on the 10 overarching policies, detailed in Section 6. Action Plans are however meant to be clear and concise and if possible, define outcomes and benefits, as well as being broadly achievable. There is an increased emphasis on partnership working. The Council is not able to deliver this without community support and stakeholder involvement. We have therefore developed an Action Plan that will need to be reviewed regularly. Watford Borough Council as the principal landowner and custodian of much of the open space will be a key player but we have identified “key partners” who will have important roles to play. This includes local communities who have already indicated support for the green space we currently have. The development of any Action Plan may also be seen as over ambitious and restrictive, when taking into account existing issues such as budget pressures, staffing, skills requirement and changing national priorities.

With this in mind, the Action Plan will need reviewing annually and at the “halfway point” as well as being flexible and with “stretched” targets, but with organisations who could be involved as well as strong leadership from the Council. As we have already stated, this Green Spaces Strategy is a document and delivery mechanism for many current service areas within the council (planning services, environmental services, legal and property services, buildings and projects) as well as a number of key stakeholders within the town. We propose to develop more detailed Project Plans for each defined action with more details highlighting requirements, funding issues, staffing resources, and timescales.

Key to Action Plans 8.1–8.4:

*Partners, stakeholders and community representatives (Who):

HMWT	- Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
WBC	– Watford Borough Council
Ve	- Veolia
HE	– Historic England
SE	– Sport England
FG	– Friends Groups and Residents Associations
NHS	– NHS Trust
SC	– Sports Clubs
CRT	- Canal and River Trust
SLM	- SLM Leisure
HLNP	- Herts Local Nature Partnership
TCV	- The Conservation Volunteers

**Timescales:

Short Term (S)	– 5 years (up to 2018)	- Medium Term (M) 5-10 years (up to 2023)
Long Term (L)	– 10 years onwards	

7.1 Progress - Stewardship

ACTION	7.1.1 The Council and Partners will continue to enhance its green spaces based on an agreed investment strategy linked to the qualitative and value assessments, taking into account accessibility and local needs and further develop the strategic and local green space network
PROGRESS	<p>Parks Improvement Programme – completed 2013 (Oxhey Park, KGV Playing Fields, Callowland Rec, Waterfields Rec)</p> <p>Riverside Rec –completed 2015</p> <p>Watford Heath – completed 2015</p> <p>Play Area improvements Phase 3 – completed 2016</p> <p>St Mary’s Churchyard – completed 2016</p> <p>North Watford Playing Fields (Orchard Park) – completed 2016</p> <p>Q/V Audits – updated July 2018</p> <p>Allotment Investment Programme – completed 2016</p> <p>Garston Park – commences September 2019</p> <p>Oxhey Activity Park – commences July 2019</p> <p>Woodside Playing Fields – programmed 2020-23</p> <p>Tennis Court improvements – completed 2017</p> <p>15 Adult Gyms installed – completed 2017</p>
ACTION	7.1.2 The Council and partners will continue to enhance green spaces for the benefit of local biodiversity and enhancement of its green infrastructure and support the Hertfordshire Local Nature Partnership
PROGRESS	<p>Oxhey Park – capital improvements to the park with wildflower planting and improvements to the Dell;</p> <p>Callowland Rec – capital improvements to the park with wildflower planting;</p> <p>NWPF – significant improvements to the Dell with management of this area undertaken after capital improvements;</p> <p>Colne River Park – landscape improvements to the landscape corridor including riverside viewing area, accessibility improvements, conservation areas created;</p> <p>Waterfields Rec – football pitch removed and large area of wildlife conservation meadow area created with tree planting.</p> <p>Cassiobury Park – continued enhancements to the LNR and Cassiobury Park - New areas created as part of the HLF funded Parks for People project – eg Orchard Garden;</p> <p>Meriden Park – new wildlife conservation meadow created with tree planting as part of wider improvements;</p> <p>Lairage LNR – translocation of invertebrates to Lairage LNR as part of WHC project mitigation;</p> <p>River Colne Restoration – commenced 2019;</p> <p>Whippendell Wood – Grant applications submitted in 2018 for enhanced woodland management</p> <p>Wetland area enhancement in Cassiobury Park – commenced in 2019</p>

ACTION	7.1.3 The Council and partners will seek to tackle issues related to anti-social behaviour in green spaces in accordance with CABE Space guidance.
PROGRESS	Regular attendance at ASBAG by the Park Rangers; Continued liaison with WBC ASB Officer; Monitoring of ASB hotspots and passed to Veolia to react to; Safer Parks Project launched in 2018; Proactive works in relation to rough sleepers; Park Ranger enforcement powers being investigated in partnership with EH Byelaws to be updated in 2020
ACTION	7.1.4 The Council will review maintenance regimes, looking at standards, levels of specification in relation to typology of space and need for development of Management Plans for Community Parks.
PROGRESS	Management plans produced for:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cassiobury Park (Regional) – updated as part of HLF restoration and revised in 2018/19 with a new 10 year management plan • Woodside PF (Regional) –updated in 2017 • Cheslyn Gardens (Regional) –updated in 2017 • Oxhey Park (Community) – updated in 2017. • St Mary’s Churchyard (Community) – updated in 2017 • Callowland Rec (Community) – updated in 2017 • NWPF (Local) – updated in 2017 • Waterfields Rec (Local) – updated in 2017 • Goodwood Rec (Local) – updated in 2017 • Harwoods Rec (Local) – produced in 2017 • Paddock Road Allotments – updated in 2017 • North Watford Cemetery – updated in 2017 All the above are now Green Flag open spaces

7.2 Progress - Management

ACTION	7.2.1 The Council and partners will develop Management Plans for all existing Regional and Community parks based on a new three tier parks hierarchy and will involve local people, stakeholders as part of the process.
PROGRESS	Management plans produced for:-

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cassiobury Park (Regional) – updated as part of HLF restoration and revised in 2018 • Woodside PF (Regional) –updated in 2017 • Cheslyn Gardens (Regional) –updated in 2017 • Oxhey Park (Community) – updated in 2017. • St Mary’s Churchyard (Community) – updated in 2017 • Callowland Rec (Community) – updated in 2017 • NWPF (Local) – updated in 2017 • Waterfields Rec (Local) – updated in 2017 • Goodwood Rec (Local) – updated in 2017 • Harwoods Rec (Local) – produced in 2017 • Paddock Road Allotments – updated in 2017 • North Watford Cemetery – updated in 2017 <p>All the above are now Green Flag open spaces</p> <p>New management plans proposed for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harebreaks Rec • Watford Heath & Oxhey Grange Playing Fields • KGV Playing Fields • River Colne Corridor • 5 Local Nature Reserves
ACTION	<p>7.2.2 The Council and partners will apply the principles of Green Flag for all Regional and Community parks and gardens/green spaces and apply for Green Flag for the spaces listed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Garston Park – (programmed for 2019/20) ❑ River Colne Park ❑ Watford Heath & Oxhey Grange Playing Fields – (programmed for 2019/20) ❑ Harebreaks Rec ❑ KGV Playing Fields <p>and Green Heritage for:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Wood – (programmed for 2020/21)
PROGRESS	<p>Continued applications for:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ 12 Green Flags now awarded

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ 4 more planned (subject to funding)
ACTION	7.2.3 The Council and partners will encourage more positive use and more activity in parks and gardens by encouraging local people to use them through programmes of activity, in particular in Cassiobury Park linked to the recently completed HLF restoration project.
PROGRESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Education & Community Officer appointed in 2015 in Cassiobury Park ❑ Events and Education Programme in Cassiobury Park ❑ Green Gym groups active in Cassiobury Park, Knutsford Playing Fields, Waterfields Rec and Garston Park ❑ Veolia managing Friends in Green Spaces ❑ Fun days to be programmed in community parks as an annual event – Garston Park 2018 and 2019
ACTION	7.2.4 Complete and update the spatial GIS mapping of parks and open spaces and highway verges across Watford, capturing all grounds maintenance activities accurately and update regularly
PROGRESS	<p>All parks and open spaces were captured onto GIS in 2012/13 including all categories including trees, shrubs, mowing regimes, structures etc. This is fully up to date.</p> <p>Capturing of trees and highway verges completed as per the agreement with HCC. Mapped on EzyTreev</p>
ACTION	7.2.5 The Council with partners will seek to develop and update sustainable management plans for all strategic natural and semi-natural green space sites, seeking to enhance their biodiversity value in terms of site size, links, habitats and management.
PROGRESS	Local Nature Reserve Management Plans to be updated in 2020-21
ACTION	7.2.6 The Council with its partners will develop a policy and strategy for trees in parks and streets as well as woodlands, linked to programmed management and mapping of trees in the town, mapped on an approved GIS / Tree management software.
PROGRESS	A Tree and Woodland Strategy completed by Veolia / WBC but yet to be adopted. Planned early 2020. Trees mapped with EzyTreev purchased by WBC and being managed by Veolia.
ACTION	7.2.7 The Council and partners will support the integration of natural and semi-natural green spaces into other forms of green space wherever possible.
PROGRESS	<p>Improvements already made in some green spaces:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Garston Park – woodland planting to the LNR ❑ Waterfields Rec – woodland planting with conservation cut area incorporated ❑ Radlett Road Playing Fields – tree planting ❑ Meriden Park – woodland planting with conservation cut area incorporated

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Oxhey Park - wildflower areas developed <p>Further improvements planned across a number of our parks and open spaces as part of a potential National Lottery Heritage Fund Project – “Wildspace! Watford”</p>
ACTION	7.2.8 The Council and local communities will continue to manage and maintain closed churchyards and cemeteries under its ownership / management for the benefit of local people and wildlife.
PROGRESS	Ongoing maintenance of St Mary’s Churchyard Recent adoption of All Saints Churchyard at Woodside. Our Heritage HLF application being developed in 2018 for delivery in 2019
ACTION	7.2.9 The Council will establish an annual capital programme for improvements to its Regional, Community and local parks and gardens as well as major semi-natural green space sites, to include play facilities, reviewed on a five yearly basis, based on the new strategic network.
PROGRESS	<p>The capital investment programme for improving parks has seen significant improvements since 2013 and is ongoing. Major improvements have included:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Oxhey Park ❑ Callowland Rec ❑ Waterfields Rec ❑ KGV Playing Fields ❑ Colne River Park ❑ 20+ Play Areas ❑ Derby Road Skate park ❑ North Watford Cemetery ❑ Vicarage Road Cemetery Chapel surrounds ❑ Leavesden Green MUGA ❑ 15 Outdoor gyms ❑ Harwoods Adventurous Playground ❑ Harebreaks Adventurous Playground <p>Further capital investment is planned in 2018 – 23 at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Woodside Playing Fields ❑ Oxhey Activity Park

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Garston Park ❑ North Watford Cemetery ❑ Vicarage Road Cemetery
ACTION	<p>7.2.10 The Council with partners, will maximise every opportunity in relation to grant funding to include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ National Lottery Heritage Fund; ❑ Landfill Tax Credit Scheme; ❑ BIG Lottery; ❑ Sport England; ❑ Arts Council; ❑ Watford Community Housing ❑ Locality budgets
PROGRESS	<p>Successful application to the HLF / BIG for Cassiobury Park Restoration - £4.95 million; Grants awarded from WCHT for outdoor gyms - £75,000 and £40,000 for Meriden play area; Grants of £50,000 for Waterfields Rec from HCC and £100,000 towards Callowland MUGA. £10,000 from Lafarge for Callowland MUGA £5,000 from Groundwork towards NWPF £250,000 from Veolia Environmental Trust towards Oxhey Activity Park £40,000 from Forestry Commission for Whippendell Wood</p> <p>Applications submitted to: Water Environment Grant (500K) – River Colne improvements - unsuccessful Natural England (£50K) – Whippendell Wood improvements All Saints Churchyard - possible £100,000 grant application</p>
ACTION	<p>7.2.11 The Council will seek developer contributions (S106/CIL) based on a Development Control Model based on information available from the 'PPG17' audit, provision and quality standards for off-site contributions for all types of green space.</p>
PROGRESS	<p>Ongoing and S106/CIL awards managed by Development Control</p>

7.3 Progress - Use

ACTION	<p>7.3.1 The Council and other green space stakeholders will develop a 'Community Involvement Action Plan' to engage and</p>
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	involve local communities through development of Friend's Groups in particular.
PROGRESS	Parks and Allotments Forums established and have been held in 2016, 2017, 2018
ACTION	7.3.2 The Council will develop, in partnership a system to develop volunteering opportunities on council managed green space, particularly in Cassiobury Park and natural green space corridors.
PROGRESS	Now delivered as part of the Activity Plan for the Parks for People Project for Cassiobury Park. 5 year delivery programme in Cassiobury including the extension of the Green Gym Project into Cassiobury which was initially established at Knutsford Playing Fields and now extended to Garston Park. Forest Schools established in Cassiobury Park and Alban Wood.
ACTION	7.3.3 The Council will work with health partners to investigate, assess and promote new ways of using green spaces to improve health and wellbeing, particularly Cassiobury Park. This will include investigating any possible funding opportunities.
PROGRESS	Green Gym operates in a number of our parks – further progress to be made. Park Run established in Cassiobury Park with nearly 500 runners weekly. Cycle schemes established
ACTION	7.3.4 The Council will develop publicity material to publicise both strategic green space sites to all sectors of the community who need improved access to information on their local green spaces.
PROGRESS	Watford – A Guide to its Parks and Open Spaces published in 2017 and available widely. Website updated regularly. Cassiobury Park has its own FB page and further social media opportunities being developed. All Watford parks now on www.parksherts.co.uk
ACTION	7.3.5 The Council will consult and involve local communities on green space issues and developments to include the following in line with the Council's Strategy for Community Engagement and Consultation. These will include : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Children; <input type="checkbox"/> Older People; <input type="checkbox"/> People with Disabilities; <input type="checkbox"/> Carers; <input type="checkbox"/> People with Learning Difficulties; <input type="checkbox"/> Black and Minority Ethnic groups; and <input type="checkbox"/> Other excluded groups.
PROGRESS	Consultation is ongoing with all development projects and is included as part of the process. This included significant projects such as Cassiobury Park restoration, the Sports Facilities Strategy development to the relocation of the Gaelic Football Club – to the re-design of small play areas. Wider consultation will be carried out with all allotment tenants in 2019.
ACTION	7.3.6 The Council will make “access for all” an integral part of all policy, strategy and activity in the planning development and management of Watford's green spaces in line with the 'BT Countryside for All' standards and their accompanying approach as

	an integral part of any physical access policy.
PROGRESS	<p>Recent improvements to parks have ensured “access for all” is integrated into the re-design of open spaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Oxhey Park – new footpaths, steps, seating ❑ Waterfield Rec – new footpaths, steps, seating ❑ Cemetery works – improvements to chapel surrounds ❑ Meriden Play Area – play equipment dedicated to children with more severe disabilities ❑ Play area improvements – improved access, surfacing, seating, in particular Cassiobury Park ❑ Adult gyms – older users catered for. <p>In 2018, a play audit was carried out in relation to accessibility of all WBC play areas. Improvements are planned from 2019 onwards where opportunities exist.</p>
ACTION	7.3.7 The Council with partners will improve the network of green corridors within Watford based on Green Infrastructure principles and continue to improve the links and access to other green spaces in developing the strategic network through working in partnership.
PROGRESS	<p>Progress has been considerable with ongoing improvements to a number of green corridors highlighted in the GI Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Colne River Park improvements – access / open space improvements to Knutsford Playing Fields / Radlett Road Playing Fields and Waterfield Rec – ongoing ❑ Cassiobury Park / Whippendell Wood – as part of the Parks for People Project funded by HLF / BIG <p>The River Colne Restoration project will provide further opportunities to improve green infrastructure in the town. A River Colne Strategy will identify a number of projects along here.</p>
ACTION	7.3.8 The Council will seek to ensure that all regional and community parks will have at least a destination play facility and, if appropriate, a youth facility, all retained as high quality and of high value to the local community.
PROGRESS	<p>From 2019, a further round of play area improvements are planned which will seek to enhance the value to the local community through enhancements to play experiences as well as for older children.</p> <p>Harwoods and Harebreaks Recreation Grounds have significant destination play facilities and opened in 2017.</p>
ACTION	7.3.9 The Council, with key partners will improve its network of play areas and play spaces in particular developing a more strategic overview of sites, with less emphasis on smaller equipped Local Areas of Play (LAP) and a greater focus on neighbourhood facilities offering greater play value.
PROGRESS	20 play areas improved over last 5 years – ongoing. 6 play areas were improved in 2014.

	Audit of play areas carried out in 2018 which reviewed play value and accessibility. New play investment programme from 2019 onwards.
ACTION	7.3.10 The Council will seek funding and support the long term plans for the development of sports provision and facilities throughout the town based on a new Sports Facilities Strategy to be based on recommendations from the Sports Facilities Study carried out in 2012. This will include recommendations for developing strategic multi activity sports hubs.
PROGRESS	Draft Sports Facilities Strategy presented to Cabinet (1/9/14) seeking approval to consult widely with local and wider community. Strategy adopted and progress has included the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Oxhey Activity Park with new skate park and BMX track linked to new café – proposed delivery 2020 : £4 million ❑ Relocation of the Gaelic Football Club to Radlett Road : £1.4 million ❑ Development of Masterplan and Feasibility Study for Woodside Playing Fields : £9.2 million project proposed ❑ Funding of new sports facilities at Meriden Community Centre ❑ Funding of new clubhouse facilities at Fullerians RFC ❑ Funding of 2nd pitch at Watford RFC ❑ Improvements to Herons FC
ACTION	7.3.11 The Council will implement a system of sampling user numbers in key locations and times, in particular at Cassiobury Park, Woodside Playing Fields and Cheslyn House and Gardens.
PROGRESS	People counters were installed in Cassiobury Park in May 2013 as part of the requirement to assess numbers entering and using the park. The outcome was an accurate picture of numbers to the park per year – 2.15 million visits per year. Further works to be progressed.
ACTION	7.3.12 The Council will continue to measure and report customer satisfaction levels in parks and open spaces.
PROGRESS	Carried out every year – satisfaction rates remain very high
ACTION	7.3.13 The Council will identify further partnerships to assist in delivery of parks management, maintenance and development including frameworks for landscape contractors, play providers and landscape / green space consultants.
PROGRESS	Excellent relationships built up and established with a number of consultants and contractors
ACTION	7.3.14 The Council will work with allotment tenants in developing and improving allotment sites across the town, seeking external funding if possible and seeking to develop self-management opportunities as well as to establish models of best practice used elsewhere as outlined in the Action Plans in the 2013 - 2018 Allotment Strategy.

PROGRESS	<p>Significant progress has been made. The Allotment investment programme commenced in July 2014 and was completed in November 2014. The £810,000 investment has ensured 10 sites were improved with new fences, water provision, toilets, signboards etc.</p> <p>Self-management was attempted at Callowland allotments but did not succeed due to internal differences among the management committee. Further attempts were made at Oxhey Grange and Paddock Road but no desire from tenants to move to self-management.</p> <p>No further progress will be made on self-management. Paddock Road allotments is now Green Flag. A new allotments strategy has been developed in 2019 after a new survey was carried out of tenants in 2019</p>
ACTION	7.3.15 The Council will work in partnership with allotment tenants to promote allotment gardening across Watford as outlined in the Action Plans in the 2013 - 2018 Allotment Strategy.
PROGRESS	No progress
ACTION	7.3.16 The Council with local stakeholders, will aim to work with local schools and colleges more closely to achieve shared community goals and maximise the community use of school facilities where appropriate.
PROGRESS	No progress
ACTION	7.3.17 The Council will form a project team and commission a feasibility study for the long term development of Woodside Playing Fields, including Watford Town Cricket Club and Stadium, based on the outcome of the Sports Facilities Study carried out in 2012.
PROGRESS	<p>A Masterplan and Feasibility Study commissioned in 2018 and progress will be made in 2019 in delivering a significant project including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ New Cricket Club Pavilion ❑ Restored stable block ❑ Adventure play ❑ High ropes facility ❑ Adventurous golf ❑ Café facilities ❑ Increased parking

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Options developed for the Indoor Bowls Facility <p>Project now has a working budget of £9.2 million</p>
ACTION	7.3.18 The Council will deliver a Round 2 HLF Parks for People application for Cassiobury Park and on success, deliver and implement the £6.5 million restoration project.
PROGRESS	Completed in July 2017 Multi - Award winning restoration project
ACTION	7.3.19 The Council will continue its promotion of parks and open spaces through signage improvement programme, noticeboards, leaflets, way-marked walks and interpretation boards. Update existing website for parks and open spaces.
PROGRESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ New signage to all parks completed; ❑ Parks and Open Spaces booklet completed ❑ Parks Herts website implemented ❑ Website updated <p>Walks and routes to be developed further</p>
ACTION	7.3.20 The Council develop fitness trails and outdoor gyms at specific sites throughout Watford.
PROGRESS	<p>Outdoor gyms successfully installed at the following locations:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Woodside Playing Fields ❑ Lea Farm Rec ❑ Leavesden Green Rec ❑ Garston Park ❑ Harebreaks Rec ❑ Harwoods Rec ❑ Callowland Rec ❑ Oxhey Park ❑ Knutsford Playing Fields ❑ KGV Playing Fields ❑ Cassiobury Park x2 ❑ Riverside Rec
ACTION	7.3.21 The Council will continue to develop the Colne River Project and to extend the boundaries to the upper areas of the

	River Colne and seek funding to deliver further improvements
PROGRESS	<p>Significant progress to date including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Landscape improvements to Knutsford Playing Fields ❑ Landscape improvements to Waterfield Rec ❑ Landscape improvements to Radlett Road Playing Fields <p>A further project is being developed to enhance the River Corridor from 2019 and will form a 10 year project. Water Environment Grant applied for in 2018. Unsuccessful. Groundwork and ColneCan appointed to develop river restoration plans from 2019 - 2023</p>
ACTION	7.3.22 The Council will develop a consistent and agreed policy on fees and charges for events and commercial ventures in parks and open spaces
PROGRESS	<p>Linked to Watford 2020 and emerging commercial strategy, with proposals on:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Car Parking charges in Cassiobury Park ❑ Events in parks ❑ Cemetery project eg Pet Cemetery
ACTION	7.3.23 The Council will update and amend all parks and open spaces bylaws to ensure they are suitable for current and existing park usage.
PROGRESS	This will be progressed in 2020
ACTION	7.3.24 The Council will consider and explore opportunities for extreme sports facilities in Watford, in particular introduce a BMX facility in an agreed location.
PROGRESS	A new BMX Track and skate park is being developed in 2019-2020 in Oxhey Park

7.4 Progress - Environmental Protection

ACTION	7.4.1 The Council will continue to seek developer contributions through Section 106 / CIL agreements to improve green spaces within Watford
PROGRESS	Ongoing

ACTION	7.4.3 The Council will review those spaces classed as being of genuinely low quality and low value in the light of wider planning policies, but taking account of accessibility, quality and value of alternative provision in the area and the resources available to the Council.
PROGRESS	All sites were re-scored in 2018
ACTION	7.4.4 The Council will adopt more sustainable planting and maintenance practices, to inc. minimising inputs of non-renewable resources, pesticides and herbicides and to develop a programme for controlling invasive species.
PROGRESS	To progress





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