

Slough Borough Council Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2014 – 2019

Summary

1 Introduction

Parks and open spaces can contribute positively to a range of the council's priorities, and they fulfil several distinct roles for residents. This strategy, informed by direct engagement with residents, sets out how the council will address the aspirations and needs of residents and how we will deliver the priorities set out by the council and its partners in the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy by:

- Creating a positive image for the town
- Improving the health and wellbeing of the population through outdoor activity and sport
- Promoting community cohesion by providing places to share experiences
- Building safer communities through making parks safe and welcoming places
- Mitigating the impact of climate change and protecting bio-diversity.

2 As a very visible council service, and one used by around three quarters of the town's residents on a regular basis, provision of good quality parks and open spaces is a priority for residents. Slough has 87 parks and open spaces and numerous green corridors and natural features which are accessible to the public. Parks usage as well as physical activity levels in Slough are however lower than national and regional averages. Parks offer opportunities for formal and informal activity dispersed generously across the town within neighbourhoods and closer to people's homes. While some parks have become destinations, containing a range of facilities, others lack facilities sufficient to attract users.

3 Increasing the number of parks with a diverse range of facilities, which are welcoming, safe, and easily accessible are therefore the primary outcomes of this strategy, which sets out a number of priorities and actions to deliver this. Competition for resources between all council provided services necessarily requires prioritisation of funding, and this strategy sets out a framework for how this will be done.

4 Purpose of the strategy

Public parks are an essential part of the social life and fabric of our communities. They are well used and valued by local people. They encourage health and well being, provide safe places for children to play, promote civic pride and support biodiversity.

5 This strategy defines Slough Borough Council's vision and priorities over the next five years, up to 2019. It aims to influence, guide and support the work of the council and other key stakeholders in their future development, taking account of future reductions to funding.

6 The strategy incorporates the views of more than 900 residents collected by 4global on behalf of Slough Borough Council between October and December 2013.

7 There are a large number of parks and open spaces in the town and a diverse range of facilities to be found in them. The strategy identifies where the council's limited resources will be focused to make the greatest difference and opportunities to address local people's priorities and needs.

8 Scope of the Strategy

The strategy supports the council's leisure strategy 'Get Active Slough' along with the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy. It links with other areas of the council's work which can support the delivery of parks provision, and residents' access to them, including transport, neighbourhood enforcement, planning, environmental quality, community safety, public health and sports and leisure.

9 Most areas of open space are managed by Slough Borough Council, but there are pockets of land managed by other organisations. There will be a requirement to work with partners in the delivery of this strategy, which seeks to deliver provision that meets the needs of all of our communities.

10 Customer research and community feedback

The most recent residents Attitude Survey was carried out in 2010, and demonstrated that public satisfaction with parks had increased.

Satisfaction in service area	2007	2010
Parks and Open Spaces	71%	81%

11 A specific parks consultation in 2013 collected the views of more than 900 residents and visitors to Slough, and the main findings included:

- Respondents were **more satisfied than dissatisfied** with 30 features of parks. Respondents were more dissatisfied than satisfied with toilet provision.
- The top three features where there is not enough provision were toilets, dog fouling bins and secure bike storage.
- 25% of respondents use parks outside the borough, but 50% of these may return if some features were improved
- Safety was raised as a concern by young people; however 46% felt safe in all parks; 17% felt unsafe in all parks, all of the time; while around 25% felt unsafe either in some places, or some of the time.

12 This shows that residents are generally very satisfied with parks provision in the town, but there are some specific facilities which would encourage more people to use parks, or which would improve their experience of using parks. The safety of parks remains a concern for some. There are a range of measures the council and its partners could take, but the passive supervision of other parks users naturally makes parks safer, as well as reassuring other users.

13 Increasing usage of parks therefore not only has a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the new users, but could encourage others who have been discouraged from using parks to use them more.

14 Vision

Using the evidence and resident research, the council has developed a vision for parks over the lifetime of this strategy.

“Parks and open spaces will be safe and welcoming places easily accessible as a destination of choice for all residents, providing opportunities for activity which contribute to the wellbeing of Slough residents”

15 Priorities

There are six high level priorities for parks, informed by the evidence and resident research, which will deliver the vision.

Priority 1: Deliver a range of new facilities across a network of destination parks which appeal to local residents

Key Actions

(a) Actions focused on the following parks:

- Upton Court Park & Lascelles Park
- Kennedy Park & Monksfield Recreation Ground
- Kedermister Park,
- Baylis Park & Godolphin Recreation Ground
- Mercian Recreation Ground

- Bloom Park
 - Bowyer Recreation Ground
- (b) Deliver new facilities most likely to lead to an improvement in the health and wellbeing of local residents and improve physical activity and deliver them in the best location to attract users and enhance the neighbourhood
 - (c) Parks buildings will support visitors' enjoyment of parks and derelict buildings will be brought back into use. Where toilets are present in buildings but not available, where possible we will trial opening them up for public use
 - (d) Ensure that open space delivered as part of development contributes appropriately to the needs of the neighbourhood and adds value
 - (e) Ensure existing courts are maintained to a useable standard and available for sport; make existing facilities such as changing rooms and toilets available more often to encourage sport activities
 - (f) Use all powers at our disposal to ensure that new and existing sports facilities have community access, e.g. school facilities and playing fields, ensuring that this is included within the planning process where possible

Priority 2: Increase the number of people using parks and open spaces for leisure and recreation, especially physical activity

Key actions

- (a) Provide more organised activities, including a range of formal and informal coaching and instruction and pilot the provision of facilities which promote physical activity and sport
- (b) Seek resources from partners to deliver key initiatives e.g. new BMX track, skate parks, outdoor gyms
- (c) Investigate activities for the elderly and disabled to deliver health benefits related to parks usage
- (d) Provide facilities which would allow schools to make greater use of parks and open spaces, such as nature walks, wildlife observation and conservation activities, as well as promoting parks facilities for sports activities which schools may not be able to provide on-site.

Priority 3: Promote the borough's parks and open spaces to all, ensuring they are accessible, welcoming and safe

Key actions

- (a) Improve the gateways to parks to make them more visible, welcoming and accessible
- (b) Include parks and routes through parks, as destinations on the council's way finding boards
- (c) Utilise and enhance existing 'green corridors' to provide a green network between parks and open spaces inside and outside of the borough
- (d) Green up more of the town's streets to create a more pleasant street scene and encourage walking around the borough
- (e) Develop access corridors to larger parks and open spaces outside of the borough, publicising the full range of nearby sites available
- (f) Any new facilities will have an integrated transport plan as part of their approval, and any transport scheme which is implemented will endeavour to enhance access to parks
- (g) Improve safety in parks by increasing the presence and visibility of staff (contractors and community wardens) for longer each day, through organised activities and events, supervised facilities and publicise this to parks users
- (h) Designate sports pitches and play areas as dog free areas and enforce this through community wardens, in conjunction with a high level campaign on responsible dog ownership
- (i) Build safety into every project delivered in and around parks, including the provision of lighting, sight lines and suitably qualified staff

Priority 4: Take opportunities to improve landscaping in parks to provide pleasant natural environments

Key actions

- (a) Introduce more trees and landscaping in parks to add interest and break up large areas
- (b) Explore opportunities to green up major transport corridors, especially where these act as gateways to parks
- (c) Any development which encroaches on parks and open space must improve the quality of that space

Priority 5: Residents will play a meaningful role in shaping the facilities and environment of local parks

Key actions

- (a) Encourage residents to take a more active hands on role in parks, contributing to the delivery of projects
- (b) Guarantee that we will always listen to any suggestions from residents or community groups, and offer support to new and existing groups who wish to get more involved
- (c) Give residents a greater say in the future of their parks and open spaces by facilitating three parks and open spaces steering groups, for east, west and central Slough, to shape master planning for development in these sectors

Priority 6: Support changes in park management and maintenance systems and look to different sources of funding and delivery

Key actions

- (a) Support changes in park management and maintenance systems through the new grounds maintenance contract from 2016
- (b) Explore new uses, facilities and events in parks which generate income
- (c) Identify more diverse sources of funding and resources
- (d) Encourage and develop new partnerships
- (e) Look at opportunities to generate income through commercial developments

16 Outcomes, targets and measures

By delivering the priorities within this strategy:

- Residents of all ages are more active
- Residents have fewer chronic health conditions, obesity levels are lower, and life expectancy is longer
- Local people are more involved in the planning and management of local parks
- Parks users feel safe using parks
- The number of car journeys will be reduced
- Park and neighbourhood satisfaction levels will be increased
- A higher proportion of parks investment will come from external sources

17 Progress will be measured against the following targets:

- 10% increase in resident satisfaction in our parks and open spaces
- 5% reduction in inactive adults
- 1% reduction in children who are reported as overweight or obese in reception year and year 6
- 5% reduction in residents who report their day to day activities are limited by a life long illness or disability.
- Increase parks usage for exercise from the current Slough rate of 8.9% to the national average of 14%.