



Bromsgrove District Parks & Open Space Strategy 2022



people spaces places

Bromsgrove District

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

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Bromsgrove District

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

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1 About Bromsgrove District

Bromsgrove District is located in north Worcestershire. It is a predominantly rural district, with approximately 90% of the land covering 20,000 hectares is designated as Green Belt, although the north of the district is part of the major urban conurbation linked to south Birmingham. The main centre of population is in Bromsgrove Town, with other large centres in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Catshill, Hagley, Rubery and Wythall. Around 61% of the district population live in 'urban' areas. Smaller settlements tend to be limited to providing local services and as car ownership has increased, service provision in the smaller villages has tended to decline.

The district has rich biodiversity, geodiversity and attractive landscape. The district contains 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 90 local sites (85 ecological and 5 geological). These sites are varied in their nature ranging from whole valleys and hills to canals, ponds and rock exposures.

The 2011 Census shows that Bromsgrove District had a resident population of 93,637 and Mid-Year Populations estimates suggest that the district population has increased to 102,393 in 2022. The population is forecast to reach 117,014 by 2043.

The population of the district is ethnically less diverse than the national picture and residents are typically older than the average for England. The district tends to be relatively affluent compared to the national and local context, although there are pockets of deprivation. Overall, Bromsgrove has levels of deprivation significantly below average, with just four LSOAs within the most deprived 30% in England. These are located in Sidemoor, Bromsgrove Central, Charford and Rock Hill Wards.

Whilst health outcomes are generally above the national average, there are an estimated 24,400 people undertaking significantly less than the recommended level of physical activity, at an estimated cost of £7.4 million.

The Figure below provides an overview of Bromsgrove District's demographics.

2 Vision & Aims

2.1 *Our Vision for Leisure, Heritage, Culture and Greenspace*

We recognise what our communities have told us about leisure and culture provision: it is important to our places, it shapes identity and creativity, reduces health inequalities, and improves well-being and quality of life for our communities. Provision of good quality, sustainable and green leisure and culture services will also contribute positively to our net carbon reduction targets and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Our communities have also told us they want to be more involved in our leisure and culture provision - as participants, volunteers and deliverers. They want to see greater partnership working with the community and have more involvement in what is provided.

Bromsgrove District Council wants to ensure provision of good quality leisure and culture services, which are sustainable, contribute to community health, are affordable, and meet local need

Reflecting the above, our Vision for leisure and culture provision in Bromsgrove is set out in the table below.

Vision
Healthy bodies and minds through active, engaged and creative communities
Aim
To inspire everyone to celebrate our historic past and participate in building a brighter future through access to parks, open spaces, sport, physical activity, arts, heritage, culture and everyday creativity. This way we will inspire our communities to lead longer, happier, healthier and more successful lives.
Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">To inspire residents and build their confidence to be more active and creative;

- To work with partners to identify and remove the barriers to being safely involved with parks and open spaces, sport, physical activity, arts, culture, heritage, and events to improve health and wellbeing;
- To facilitate better connectivity between historic places, vibrant open spaces, culture and leisure facilities;
- To build the confidence and pride of individuals and communities through active participation and volunteering;
- To create improved collaborative and resident-engaged projects which focus on celebrating the relationship communities have with their landscape, culture and heritage;
- To build a healthy community that enables success in education, training and the workplace;
- To reduce the long-term financial pressures on our public services by getting communities more active, creative, and better connected to our natural environment;
- To manage, develop and maintain a biodiverse, and environmentally sustainable network of spaces and places contributing positively to reducing the impact of climate change;
- To generate a high profile, safe, inclusive, well-connected and managed network of active travel networks, green and blue corridors, heritage trails, leisure and culture facilities;
- To connect home grown talent with local employment and volunteering opportunities;
- To facilitate a vibrant, commercially viable and growing visitor and tourism economy;
- To better connect business with the leisure and culture sector; and
- To adopt creative placemaking and active travel strategies.

2.2 *Parks and Open Spaces Aims*

Within the overall vision for leisure, culture, and open space this parks and open space strategy sets out the following aims:

- We will protect, enhance and promote our parks and open spaces;
- We will work to reduce inequalities in open space provision in terms of quality, accessibility and quantity;
- We will protect and enhance biodiversity and deliver Biodiversity Net Gain through the planning system and processes;
- We will work with partners to deliver a plan for nature recovery;
- We will manage our parks and open spaces as green infrastructure that contributes to the goals of climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- We will contribute to improving health and wellbeing of our communities through the management and provision of our parks and open spaces;
- We will provide a greater range of opportunities for all communities across the district to participate and help activate our parks and green spaces;
- We will play a key role in developing and supporting partnerships that protect and enhance the green environment across the district and the wider region.

3 Key drivers

3.1 *Why Parks and Open Spaces are Important*

High quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value. They are also highly valued by local people. Research¹ carried out by CABE Space suggested that 85% of people believed that the quality of public space and the built environment has a direct impact on their lives and the way they feel.

The State of UK Parks research published by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2014 and in 2016 found:

- Parks are used regularly by 37 million people in UK;
- With 57% of adults use parks at least once per month;
- Rising to 83% of households with children under 5 visit their park at least once a month;
- 2.6 billion visits made to UKs parks each year;
- £50 million raised annually by friends / user groups;
- £70 million annual value of volunteering.

As a result of the pandemic, there has been increased recognition of the value of parks and open spaces, which provided one of the few safe spaces where people could exercise and leave their own homes during lockdowns.

The health benefits of green spaces have been intuitively known by communities for a long period of time. In recent years there a substantial body of evidence has been produced which demonstrates the idea that parks and open spaces are integral for both our physical and mental health. Good access to open spaces can help support increased levels of physical activity leading to beneficial health outcomes (including reduced prevalence of dementia, cardiovascular disease,

¹ CABE Space (2004) The Value of Public Space

type two diabetes, breast cancer and hip fractures). Public Health England recently published “Improving access to greenspace - A new review for 2020” which provides an excellent overview.

Access to open spaces can also bring significant benefits in terms of mental health with evidence suggesting higher levels of life satisfaction; lower levels of self-reported stress; and lower levels of anxiety and depression. Contact with nature, or ‘natural connectedness’ improves mental health and provides us with a happier life, a worthwhile life, and a life without illbeing.

Well managed and accessible parks and green spaces, with programmes of activity to engage residents can be an effective part of a Whole System Approach to improved health outcomes. Indeed, public parks owe their existence to the recognition to improve the health of urban communities. In 1833 a report to parliament highlighted the benefits parks could bring to urban society. In 1848 the Public Health Act recognised that money spent on improving public health would save money in the long term.

3.2 External Factors Driving Change

3.2.1 Climate Crisis

The United Nations has declared that climate change is the defining crisis of our time, and it is happening even more quickly than we feared. Global temperatures are rising because of human activity releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This is already producing weather extremes and disasters that are becoming more intense and more frequent. This threatens food and water security globally and climate change is a major threat to international peace and security. Biodiversity across the globe is also threatened and this is exacerbated by climate change.

A report about the climate of the UK published in 2020 reveals that the most recent decade (2010 – 2019) has been on average 0.9 degrees Celsius warmer across the UK than the period 1961 – 1990. This warming has been predicted to increase, with the Met Office predicting that by 2070, winters will be between 1 and 4.5 degrees Celsius warmer and up to 30% wetter and summers will be between 1 and 6 degrees warmer and up to 60% drier.

The Independent Assessment of UK Climate Change Risk has just published its conclusions that continued change in the UK’s climate should be expected and that “very long-lasting policy and investment decisions being made today need to consider a wide range of changes in climate for the second half of the century”.

Urban areas are already 4 degrees warmer than surrounding areas a phenomenon known as the urban heat island effect. Climate change is likely to lead to more extreme weather events that will make towns and cities harder places to live.

3.2.2 Air Pollution

Air pollution is the biggest environmental threat to health in the UK, with between 28,000 and 36,000 deaths a year attributed to long-term exposure². There is strong evidence that air pollution causes the development of coronary heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and lung cancer, and exacerbates asthma. Children in high pollution areas are 4 times more likely to have reduced lung function when they become an adult.

Trees, parks and open spaces play an important role in helping to reduce air pollution by providing shade and reducing air temperatures in urban areas, directly removing pollutants and storing carbon.

3.2.3 Ecological Crisis

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in Europe because of industry, building and farming. It is estimated that over half of all biodiversity has been lost. While the UK has made some gains, natural landscapes have been so heavily degraded over decades and centuries that we are simply not doing enough to turn back the tide.

A recent UK Government report found that against 24 key biodiversity indicators, 14 are in long-term decline, including UK habitats of European importance, the abundance and distribution of priority species, along with farmland and woodland birds.

² Public Health England (2019) - Review of interventions to improve outdoor air quality and public health

3.2.4 Covid-19

The National Lottery Heritage Fund³ recognise that *“free-to-enter urban public parks and green spaces have been a lifeline for many during the pandemic and continue to be so during the current cost of living crisis”*.

Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns has had an impact with nearly half of people (46%) stating that that they were spending more time outside than they had previously. But some 60% of children were found to have spent less time outdoors.

The 2021 Bromsgrove Community Survey found that older residents within the district had tended to use parks and open spaces less frequently than in previous years.

National research indicated that Covid-19 has demonstrated the inequitable provision of green spaces and that urban populations often have less access to nature.

3.3 National Policy Context

3.3.1 The UK Government 25 Year Environment Strategy

“Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together.

“In the most deprived areas of England, people tend to have the poorest health and significantly less green space than wealthier areas. . . . Our aim is for more people, from all backgrounds, to engage with and spend time in green and blue spaces in their everyday lives.”

The UK Environment Bill was adopted in 2022 and this introduces:

³ National Lottery Heritage Fund (2022) – Evidence submitted to The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

- A mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain in the planning system, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and create new green spaces for local communities to enjoy. The requirements will supplement, but not replace or undermine, existing protections for protected sites or irreplaceable habitats.
- A requirement for the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies across England. Local Nature Recovery Strategies will help local authorities and other public bodies identify priorities and opportunities for conserving and enhancing nature. Whilst government will provide data, guidance and support for the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, each one will be produced locally ensuring local ownership and knowledge is embraced, and strategies are consistent and link together across England.

3.3.2 Public Health England Strategy (2020 – 2025)

Published by Public Health England in September 2019, the strategy sets out Public Health England's priorities for the next 5 years to deliver its key aims of keeping people safe, preventing poor health, narrowing the health gap and supporting a strong economy. The strategy sets out three key themes:

- Healthier diets, healthier weight;
- Better mental health;
- Best start in life.

3.3.3 Levelling Up the United Kingdom (2022)

The Levelling Up Agenda is a key national policy that recognises that there are significant geographical inequalities in economic, social and environmental outcomes. To genuinely 'level up' the country and tackle inequalities, there needs to be a recognition of the contribution of parks to supporting key national and local objectives, such as improving public health, carbon capture, increasing biodiversity, and enabling every child to be active.

In the Levelling Up White Paper the government promises to 'radically expand investment in parks'; however, just £30m has been provided to fund initiatives in thirty parks nationwide. This funding is relatively small scale and what has been provided is capital, rather than revenue funding which is needed to deliver and sustain long-term change.

3.4 Internal Factors

3.4.1 Bromsgrove District Council

Our vision is to enrich the lives and aspirations of all our residents, businesses, and visitors through the provision of high-quality services, ensuring that all in need receive appropriate help and support.

Purposes

- Run & grow a successful business;
- Work & financial independence;
- Living independent, active & healthy lives;
- Affordable & sustainable homes;
- Communities which are safe, well-maintained & green.

Priorities

- Economic development & regeneration;
- Skills for the future Improving health & wellbeing;
- A balanced housing market;
- Reducing crime & disorder;
- Financial stability;
- High quality services;
- Sustainability.

Working to these purposes will help us to understand the needs of the district & how, together with our partners, we can improve the lives of our residents & the prospects for Bromsgrove District as a whole.

3.4.2 Bromsgrove District Plan 2011-2030

The Bromsgrove District Plan includes policies that impact parks and open spaces. This includes:

- BDP4 Green Belt – where approximately 90% of land in the district is designated as Green Belt

- BDP20 Managing the Historic Environment – recognises the significance of historic buildings, structures and landscapes and sets out policies for proactive management;
- BDP21 Natural Environment - recognises that sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the natural environment including achieving net gains for nature;
- BDP24 Green Infrastructure – highlights the importance of green infrastructure and commits the Council to delivering a high quality multi-functional Green Infrastructure network;
- BDP25 Health and Wellbeing – the Council will support proposals and activities that protect, retain or enhance existing sport, recreational and amenity assets, lead to the provision of additional assets, or improve access to facilities, particularly by non-car modes of transport. This will include maintaining greater access to and enjoyment of the countryside.

3.4.3 Political Drivers

As part of the development of the strategy several engagement sessions were delivered with elected members to gain their views and establish some sense of direction for open spaces and their relationship to overarching council policy.

Some key quotes that relate directly to the key themes and drivers of this strategy are:

"We need a programme around exercise and mental health targeted at deprived areas"

"Health concerns are our priority, it's about quality of life"

"We need more voluntary groups involved"

"Need more amateur groups putting on events on parks"

There were also other comments about the need:

- to secure external funding for parks
- for more collaboration and partnership working

- for improved publicity about activities and events

3.4.4 Financial Drivers

Revenue

In recent years most local authorities have seen very significant reductions in revenue budgets for parks and greenspaces

The 2021 State of UK Parks report by APSE and CFP showed that around £190m had been lost from parks revenue budgets between 2016/17 and 2021/22

Others have also been hit hard by commercial losses due to the impacts of Covid-19.

The 2020 work by the Local Government Association and the National Lottery Heritage Fund showed that as much as 87% of external income had been lost due to Covid-19

Bromsgrove Council's Park service has experienced a reduction in the size of the team as a result of sharing services with Redditch Borough Council. However, it has largely escaped the impacts of both austerity and Covid-19 when it comes to their annual revenue budget(s). There have been some losses of income around cancelled events during the pandemic, but these have been more than offset by savings in not running the events programme in 2020 and reduced delivery in 2021. Likewise, the future financial pressure that most council's parks services are facing.

The 2021 State of UK Parks report showed that 61% of councils were expecting their parks revenue budget to decrease with around 39% expecting cuts of greater than 10%.

This has not translated to Bromsgrove District Council's parks services which has had a relatively stable budget over the past three years is expected to remain so for the foreseeable future.

To balance the books most local authorities are looking at commercial income from cafés or events and activities. In Bromsgrove District this is limited to around £26k of events income plus income from the café lease at Sanders Park.

Capital

Capital funding is sourced through central capital programmes and through section 106 monies from housing developments and the authorities have significant sums to deploy here for green space improvements.

The other sources of income that are used by local authority parks services are grant aid e.g. lottery funding, which is largely for specific projects. In Bromsgrove District the only external funding has been at Sanders Park where just under £2m has been spent on works to the brook course and access improvements

3.4.5 Community Drivers

Recent consultation in Bromsgrove District has shown that about half of the respondents think that parks and open spaces are good / very good.

Across the district, there was a more or less even split between those who considered there to be too little (47.5%) and about the right amount (52.0%) of parks and open spaces. At least 50.0% of respondents from 16 of the 29 responding wards considered there was too little supply of park and open spaces in their ward, with all respondents from Marlborough and Wythall West Wards feeling there was too little supply.

The community places a high value on green space provision – the top values are:

- somewhere to improve my mental and physical wellbeing (96.1%);
- providing contact with nature, wildlife, and seasonal change (96.2%);
- providing green lungs for the district (95.1%);
- A safe place for children and young people to develop independence (95.4%);
- a safe walking or cycling route (95.1%).

Residents have expressed concern about pressure on existing green space from housing development – both in terms of increasing numbers of users and from direct loss by being built upon.

4 Analysis & Recommendations

This section brings together the findings of the various reviews, assessments, conversations and consultation that has taken place over the past year in the development of the strategy. The evidence based used has included:

- Open space mapping including analyses of quantity and accessibility – and highlights that some settlements lack access to particular types of open space provision;
- Green Flag Assessments - As part of the development of the management plans detailed site assessments were carried out by experienced Green Flag Award judges. Individual site recommendations are picked up in each plan and this strategy seeks to identify generic or council wide issues where the authorities need to make improvements to service delivery to raise the standards;
- Community consultation – in 2021 a community survey was undertaken, and results have been compared with 2018 and 2019 surveys;
- Elected member consultation events – consultants ran member workshops in 2022 and held specific meetings with senior politicians;
- Events analysis – looking at budgets, attendance, satisfaction and community views;
- Financial analysis – external funding secured, recent budgetary changes;
- Ongoing dialogue through the project steering group and individual officer and group consultation sessions;
- The Allotment Research Project (2019) found that the level of provision of allotments was marginally below the recommended national standard. There appears to be unmet demand for allotments in the district.

4.1 *The Big Issues*

4.1.1 *Biodiversity and Nature Recovery*

Worcestershire, like much of the UK, has suffered huge losses of natural habitats and species. The Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (2018-2027) identifies 17 habitats and 26 species which are of conservation priority in the county. Bromsgrove District Council is committed to working with partners at a local and country-wide level to deliver the priorities set out in the Worcestershire BAP. At a national level there is increased recognition that nature recovery is a priority and Biodiversity Net Gain is now a requirement following the adoption of the Environment Bill in 2022.

Bromsgrove district contains some key sites that are important for priority habitats and species, notably water voles. Whilst there has been some positive action in the past, and new initiatives such as reducing grass cutting in specific areas to support pollinators have been introduced, there is currently a lack of up-to-date survey information and no overall plan to drive habitat and species recovery. Nature recovery requires action at a landscape scale and Bromsgrove District Council will positively engage in partnership working at a local and county level to deliver greater biodiversity.

This will include enhancing sites designated for nature conservation and other wildlife-rich places, newly created and restored wildlife-rich habitats, corridors and stepping-stones which will help wildlife populations to grow and move. The Council will also seek to improve the landscape's resilience to climate change, providing natural solutions to reduce carbon and manage flood risk, and sustaining vital ecosystems such as improved soil, clean water and clean air. The Council will also reinforce the natural, geological and cultural diversity of our landscapes, and protect our historic natural environment to allow people to enjoy and connect with nature where they live, work and play, in turn bringing health and wellbeing benefits.

The requirement to delivery Biodiversity Net Gain through the planning process, also represents a significant opportunity not only to enhance the habitats within green space but also to potentially secure significant investment.

Recommendation(s)

1. Develop a better understanding of the biodiversity value of the district's green assets.
2. Positively engage in partnership working at a local and county level to improve biodiversity, nature recovery and deliver wildlife-rich landscapes.
3. Develop a clear approach to Biodiversity Net Gain and Green Infrastructure.

4.1.2 Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

Bromsgrove District Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and is committed to reducing our carbon emissions and influencing the reduction of carbon emissions in our area. The Council has developed a plan, called the Action to Reduce Carbon (ARC) Plan as route map to 'net zero' for our internal activities, contributing to the 'net zero by 2050' target set by the UK Government.

Parks and Open Spaces can make a positive contribution to carbon reduction, particularly contributing to the ARC plan themes of Transport and Travel, Community and Biodiversity. Initial

works has already started to provide electric vehicle charging points in key parks, starting with Sanders Park.

Parks and open spaces also provide key eco-system services that can help mitigate the impact of climate change. Parks and green infrastructure are significant carbon sinks, help mitigate against the urban heat island effect, slow and hold back excessive rainfall and flooding, and can help reduce air pollution. However, the scale of the contribution of the districts 1400 hectares of open space is not currently known. Further work to explore the opportunities for changes in landscape management and maintenance to deliver additional gains should also be explored. This should feed into to the development of climate change strategy in the near future.

Recommendation(s)

4. Carry out a natural capital assessment of the value of the district's parks and open spaces.
5. Develop a plan to identify priorities for delivering further carbon capture and natural capitals gains.

4.1.3 Health and Wellbeing

Overall, residents of Bromsgrove district enjoy health outcomes broadly in line with the national average. Whilst nearly half the population of children and young people are active, data shows that there are 24,400 people that are undertaking significantly less than the recommended level of physical activity. Parks and open spaces provide accessible, free to use facilities for walking, jogging and informal sports.

Networks of parks and open spaces can provide accessible and safe active travel routes that reduce car use and bring health and wellbeing benefits. The Council will work to deliver an increased network of active travel routes and to promote their use.

Recommendation(s)

6. Increase the network of active travel routes that use parks and open spaces.
7. Develop targeted programmes of activity in parks and open spaces that contribute to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.

4.1.4 Planning and Development

The population of the district is predicted to grow with the BDP anticipating that there will be 4097 new housing units (approximately another 9,423 people) over the plan period to 2030. This will result in increased pressure on existing parks and open spaces and in some circumstances, such as at Perryfields, contribute to the creation of new open space.

Development within the district also provides the opportunity to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain, introduced as a statutory requirement through the Environment Act 2022. Bromsgrove District Council as a major landowner, can provide land for Biodiversity Net Gain where this cannot be delivered onsite as part of the development. This is a new process and it is recommended that a pilot project is developed to apply the principles of Biodiversity Net Gain and to test and refine the approaches in practice.

The Open Space Study for Bromsgrove District, carried out in parallel with the development of this strategy considers the supply of open space by ward and identifies deficiencies in the accessibility and quantity of particular types of open space.

Overall, there is a good level of access to some form of open space at a local level. Within Bromsgrove Town most wards have access to some open space within 400 metres, approximately 10 minutes walking time. There are some areas of deficiency most notable in the northern part of Bromsgrove Central ward and also the southern part of Charford ward. Similarly, the large settlements of Alvechurch, Barnt Green (including Lickey), Catshill, Hagley, Rubery and Wythall (including Drakes Cross, Grimes Hill and Hollywood) have access to some form of open space within 10 minutes' walk. Many of the smaller settlements enjoy some form of open space provision.

There are, however, some deficiencies in access to some forms of open space. Much of Bromsgrove town has limited access to natural and semi-natural spaces, or spaces that are managed primarily for biodiversity. This indicates that managing other forms of open space for wildlife and biodiversity within urban areas is important if residents are to be able to experience nature on their doorstep. Overall access to (some form of) outdoor sports facilities within Bromsgrove Town is typically good, although Hill top ward is less well served. Many large settlements and some smaller settlements enjoy reasonable access. More granular level analysis on a sport-by-sport basis is contained in the Playing Pitch Strategy (2022).

Bromsgrove has 102 open spaces with some form of Provision for Children and Young People. This includes equipped play and natural play areas at:

- 58 toddler play spaces
- 55 junior play spaces
- 52 teen / adult fitness facilities

In terms of accessibility, Bromsgrove town and large settlements have good access within a reasonable walking time. Many smaller settlements also have some level of provision. Consideration will be given to creating new areas of Provision for Children and Young People only where there is a demonstrated need. Investment should otherwise be directed to upgrading and enhancing existing facilities. A more detailed is recommended to consider the play value, quality and accessibility of equipped play spaces across the Borough.

The Playing Pitch Strategy sets out the supply and demand for a range of pitch and court sports. This has identified that there is a surplus of provision relating to Bowls which has seen a decline in demand over recent years, mirroring the wider national picture. The bowling green at Sanders Park is currently unused and alternative uses will be considered as set out in the Sanders Park Management and Maintenance Plan.

Recommendation(s)

8. Apply robust approaches to the Local Standards in relation to planning development to address deficiencies in the accessibility and quantity of open spaces across the borough.
9. Carry out a detailed assessment of the play value, quality and accessibility of equipped play spaces across the Borough.
10. Deliver a pilot project to test how Council managed land can deliver offsite Biodiversity Net Gain through the development process.

4.1.5 Quality of Parks and Open Spaces

There is limited data available about the quality of parks and open spaces. In developing Management and Maintenance Plans for Sanders Park, Lickey End Recreation Ground, King George's Park and St Chad's Park quality assessments have been carried out and the findings used

to inform the recommendations set out within the management plans. To better develop a future plan for preventative maintenance and investment it is recommended that a larger scale programme of quality assessments is carried out (using the Green Flag Award criteria) with a focus on district and neighbourhood spaces (86 spaces). Other quality assessments will be required on an ad hoc basis in response to development in the district to provide evidence for securing offsite planning gain.

4.2 Future Service Delivery

4.2.1 Developing a Capital Investment Plan

This strategy highlights opportunities for investing in parks and open spaces to deliver benefits for the environment, society and people and places. Addressing service wide issues and delivering the recommendations for the priority parks will require planned investment. This capital investment will come through existing resources, planning gain (s106, CIL and Biodiversity Net Gain), external funding and through the development of new partnerships. New sources of funding are also currently being announced from central government in the form of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other funding associated with Levelling Up. These funding sources often have competitive bidding processes with relatively short timescales. The Council should develop a Capital investment plan that identifies how the key priorities set out in this strategy and the recommendations contained within the Management and Maintenance Plans can be delivered and how it might respond to new opportunities for capital investment.

Recommendation(s)

11. Develop an overall capital investment plan for enhancing parks and open spaces to provide a more strategic approach to the use of s106 funding.

4.2.2 Environmental Management

The management planning assessment work found that the relevant services involved in managing and maintaining the council's green space do not have a clear strategy to address environmental management. Whilst some good work has been progressed around reducing the use of peat, reducing pesticide use and around green waste there is no overall plan, no baseline assessment and no targets to improve performance in this area.

Recommendation(s)

12. Develop an environmental management strategy for parks and environmental services.

4.2.3 Marketing and Promotion

Currently marketing of green spaces is sporadic and inconsistent and would benefit from a thorough review and the development of a new approach to promote the biodiversity and health benefits of the green spaces across the local authority area.

There are good examples of websites that promote parks and open spaces at a county wide scale in [Hertfordshire](#) and [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#).

Recommendation(s)

13. Develop a clear marketing plan for green spaces that includes new web pages, social media and targeted work with key audiences.
14. Promote active travel routes within parks and open spaces.

4.2.4 Community involvement

The engagement of local communities in their local green spaces is a key area of improvement for Bromsgrove District Council. The council previously worked with a small number of Friend of Parks groups, but these have all now folded, in part due to a lack of resource to proactively support volunteer activity. There is some mid-week volunteering activity in Bromsgrove but is typically limited to Sanders Park.

The Council should begin to develop a meaningful dialogue and engagement with its communities and a plan is needed along which clearly sets out roles and responsibilities, levels and sources of support. It is also recommended that dialogue with other organisations who could help the authority commences to develop a stronger partnership approach to improving parks and open spaces across the district. Being able to demonstrate sound approaches to community involvement is also a requirement of the Green Flag Award.

There are a range of useful resources including 'How to' guides available through the National Lottery Heritage Fund "Parks Community UK" (<https://parkscommunity.org.uk>).

Recommendation(s)

15. Develop a volunteer plan and a clear approach to working with Friends groups tied to its aspirations for Green Flag Award across its priority parks.

4.2.5 Management of Allotments

Allotments and Community Gardens provide opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion. There are 17 allotment sites across the district and whilst there may be some gaps in terms of accessibility to allotments in some wards, the level of provision is near national standards.

The allotments sites are currently managed by Bromsgrove District Council who manage lettings, non-cultivation, and shared infrastructure. There are local allotment associations at most sites which bring together ploholders. Nationally, there has been a significant shift towards giving allotment associations a greater role and supporting the self-management of allotment sites. This can deliver significant benefits for ploholders, with a greater sense of ownership, quicker response times for addressing issues on site, and reduced levels of vacant plots and non-cultivation. It is recommended that the District Council starts a process of investigating the feasibility of transferring allotment sites to local management organisations and starts this process through the delivery of one or more pilot projects. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/>) can provide advice and support to newly established allotment associations and further resources are available online.

Recommendation(s)

16. Carry out a feasibility study to establish a roadmap for the self-management of allotment sites across the district.
17. Start a pilot project to explore the process of transfer to self-management and share this learning across the district.

4.2.6 Signage and Interpretation

Across the key parks and open spaces in the district there is no consistent approach to signage and interpretation. Even a simple approach based on key visitor arrival and orientation information at primary entrances would be a positive start. Some sites have significant biodiversity and heritage interest which could either be summarised in the welcoming signage or interpreted at the location of interest on site.

Recommendation(s)

18. Develop a consistent approach to signage across all priority parks.
19. Develop engaging interpretation on those sites of significant biodiversity or heritage interest.

4.2.7 Events and activities

The council has for some time been running a programme of subsidised events and activities in parks and in 2021/22 it spent £70k (excluding officer time) on this and generated £25k of income. Officer time has been estimated to be in the region of a further £60k. A typical year of events would be around 24 events the majority of which take place in Sanders Park. Data suggests the average annual attendance is in the region of 19,000 to 24,700, but no accurate figures exist. Community surveys show that satisfaction with events is low, with around 45% of those surveyed rating events as good or very good. However, there is very limited participant survey data to build an accurate picture.

Directly delivering events within parks and open spaces is a resource intensive process. Participant feedback and qualitative evidence suggests that the events offer is not particularly engaging or innovative and does not necessarily meet the needs of the districts' communities.

There is a strong case for the community, voluntary sector and commercial sectors playing a greater role in event planning, management and delivery in the future with the council adopting a more enabling role. Tell Me What You Want (2020) showed that the way forward ought to be a more community led approach. Providing funding through a grants programme would support local organisations to develop innovative programmes of activity and help leverage in additional resources through grant and crowdfunding. The Council would need to develop support

mechanisms to ensure that adequate planning was in place for events and that health and safety requirements were met, but this has been achieved in other areas. This would mark a key change from the current model of delivery and this strategy recommends that the new model is piloted in 2023/24.

Recommendation(s)

20. Pilot an approach to establish a new model for event delivery that allows local organisations to deliver programmes of events and activities.
21. Develop programmes of support to increase skills and capacity amongst local organisations and to ensure the successful delivery of new programmes of events and activities.
22. Evaluate the success of the pilot projects and implement any required changes to the new delivery model.

4.2.8 Partnership working

The parks and events service needs to develop more partnership working to be more effective in delivering large scale change for green spaces. There are a range of organisations within the county that are potential partners including the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and North Worcestershire Water Management and the Environment Agency. Worcestershire Country Council are also a significant local authority partner that works at a county wide scale to develop policy and strategy particularly around Green Infrastructure and biodiversity. In addition, environmental projects are now being developed at a landscape scale and sub-regionally through the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The National Trust's 8 Hills concept presents a significant opportunity for biodiversity, climate change and the health and well-being residents of the surrounding area and the authority needs to engage more with its development. There is a need to separate out 'designation' and 'collaboration', the advantages and disadvantages of designation are not part of the scope of the strategy but the idea of the district council proactively collaborating with the National Trust and its partners is a principle that should be adopted.

The authority should start collaborating with the National Trust including establishing a Memorandum of Understanding between both organisations which includes provision for:

- Sharing green space mapping data;
- Sharing community consultation results;
- Contributing officer time;
- Planning joint consultation and project related activities.

Recommendation(s)

- 23. Engage more regularly with potential partners at a county wide level.
- 24. Develop a partnership with the National Trust to deliver the 8 Hills project.

4.2.9 Measuring Success

There is a lack of management and performance data relating to the delivery of services around parks and open spaces. The development of a toolkit with a concise set of meaningful key performance indicators would be beneficial and allow progress to be demonstrated.

Recommendation(s)

- 25. Develop service wide Key Performance Indicators.

4.3 Priority Parks

- As part of the preparatory work to develop the Leisure and Culture Strategy the Council identified four key sites as 'priority parks'. These sites are:
 - Sanders Park
 - Lickey End Recreation Ground
 - King George's Park
 - St Chads Park

These priority parks each have a Management and Maintenance Plan and a masterplan in place. These have been developed based on site assessments, discussions with key officers and stakeholders and the results from the wider community consultation.

The Management and Maintenance Plans have a five-year action plan for the council to take forward with a view to improving the management, maintenance and development of each space and securing the national quality standard, the Green Flag Award for each space as part of a rolling programme.

The four priority parks provide accessible green space to local people including those that experience some of the highest levels of deprivation within the district, tend to be less physically active and experience some of the lowest health outcomes. This includes parts of Sidemoor, Bromsgrove Central, Charford and Rock Hill wards. Enhancing the range of provision, activity programmes, developing community involvement and volunteer participation and delivering the recommendations set out in the Management and Maintenance Plans will contribute to delivering positive outcomes for some of the communities experiencing disadvantage and would be consistent with the national policy of targeted intervention through 'Levelling Up'.

Recommendation(s)

26. Develop a rolling programme of applications to the Green Flag Award:

- Sanders Park (2023)
- Lickey End Recreation Ground (2024)
- St Chads Park (2025)
- King George's Park (2026)

5 Action Plan





Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
1. Develop a better understanding of the biodiversity value of the district's green assets.	✓	✓				Parks Development Officer	Planning / WCC	Staff time
2. Positively engage in partnership working at a local and county level to improve biodiversity, nature recovery and deliver wildlife-rich landscapes.	✓	✓				Parks and Events Manager / Parks Development Officer	WCC / Worcestershire Wildlife Trust	Staff time
3. Develop a clear approach to Biodiversity Net Gain and Green Infrastructure to provide a measurable approach to develop and manage land.		✓	✓			Parks Development Officer	Planning / WCC	Staff time
4. Carry out a natural capital assessment of the value of the district's parks and open spaces.				✓		Parks and Events Manager	External Specialist	Revenue

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
5. Develop a plan to identify priorities for delivering further carbon capture and natural capitals gains.				✓		Parks and Events Manager	External Specialist	Revenue
6. Increase the network of active travel routes that use parks and open spaces.		✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Highways	Staff time
7. Develop targeted programmes of activity in parks and open spaces that contribute to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.		✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Public Health	Staff time
8. Apply robust approaches to the Local Standards in relation to planning development to address deficiencies in the accessibility and quantity of open spaces across the borough.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Planning	Staff time
9. Carry out a detailed assessment of the play value, quality and accessibility of equipped play spaces across the Borough.	✓					Parks and Events Manager	External Specialist	Revenue

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
10. Deliver a pilot project to test how Council managed land can deliver offsite Biodiversity Net Gain through the development process.		✓				Parks Development Officer	Planning	Staff time
11. Develop an overall capital investment plan for enhancing parks and open spaces to provide a more strategic approach to the use of s106 funding.		✓				Parks and Events Manager	-	Staff time
12. Develop an environmental management strategy for parks and environmental services.	✓					Operations Team Leader	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
13. Develop a clear marketing plan for green spaces that includes new web pages, social media and targeted work with key audiences.	✓					Parks and Events Manager	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
14. Promote active travel routes within parks and open spaces.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Comms Team	Staff time

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
15. Develop a volunteer plan and a clear approach to working with Friends groups tied to its aspirations for Green Flag Award across its priority parks.	✓	✓				Parks and Events Manager	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
16. Carry out a feasibility study to establish a roadmap for the self-management of allotment sites across the district.	✓	✓				Parks Development Officer	-	Staff time
17. Start a pilot project to explore the process of transfer to self-management and share this learning across the district.		✓				Parks Development Officer	-	Staff time
18. Develop a consistent approach to signage across all priority parks.		✓				Operations Team Leader	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
19. Develop engaging interpretation on those sites of significant biodiversity or heritage interest.			✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Operations Team Leader	Revenue
20. Pilot an approach to establish a new model for event delivery that allows	✓	✓				Events Team	Parks Development Officer	Staff Time / Existing Revenue Budgets

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
local organisations to deliver programmes of events and activities.								
21. Develop programmes of support to increase skills and capacity amongst local organisations and to ensure the successful delivery of new programmes of events and activities.		✓	✓	✓	✓	Events Team	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
22. Evaluate the success of the pilot projects and implement any required changes to the new delivery model		✓				Events Team	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
23. Engage more regularly with potential partners at a county wide level.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks and Events Manager	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
24. Develop a partnership with the National Trust to deliver the 8 Hills project.	✓	✓				Parks and Events Manager	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
25. Develop service wide Key Performance Indicators	✓					Parks and Events Manager	-	Staff time

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
26. Develop a rolling programme of applications to the Green Flag Award						Operations Team Leader	Parks Development Officer	Revenue