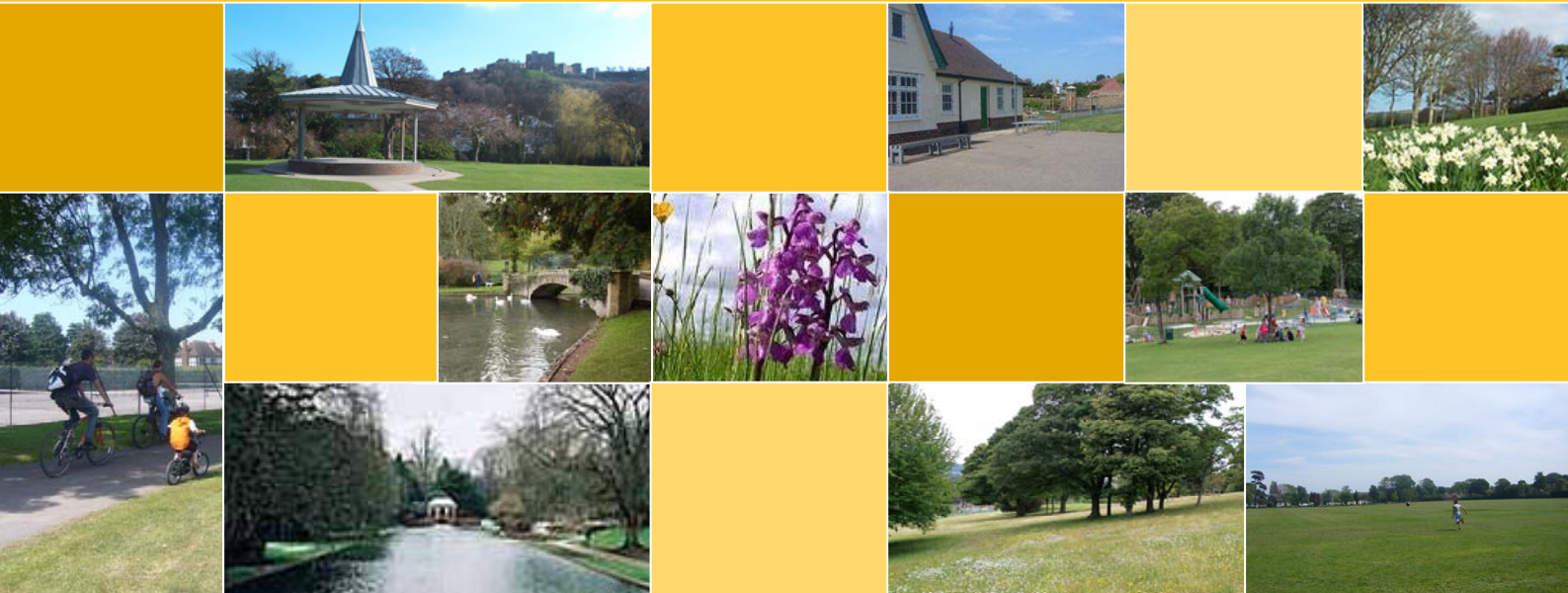


Parks and Amenity Open Space Strategy

October 2013



Executive Summary

Accessible open space is essential to urban areas, providing significant quality of life and health benefits for the local community. As part of the wider green infrastructure network it can also contribute towards improving the appearance of the built environment; managing flood risk; attracting new business and investment and promoting a sense of place and community identity. Dover District is well provided with parks and amenity open space, including traditional civic parks, urban green spaces, green corridors, village greens, informal kick-about areas, informal playable space and closed churchyards. However, there are gaps in provision and in some cases the quality falls below expected standards.

The district contains several large parks, alongside numerous smaller amenity green spaces. These sites form a very valuable resource, some of the most popular being historic parks in urban areas, a legacy from the industrial wealth of the Victorian era. Although the day-to-day maintenance of these urban parks appears to be sufficient, they are in urgent need of capital investment to increase capacity, raise standards and secure them for the long term. Currently Dover District boasts only one Green Flag award and no Blue flags, a lower tally than in neighbouring authorities. Increasing the number of awards is a major objective and a project is proposed to raise standards at Kearsney Abbey, which attracts large numbers of regular visitors from both within the district and beyond.

The Dover District Local Plan, including the Core Strategy, is based on a high growth approach. Demand arising from this expected growth will increase the pressure on existing facilities and may give rise to a need for increased provision of open space, either in terms of quantity or quality, or both. To help assess any additional need, the Council proposes quantity and quality standards for provision of open space in its Land Allocations Local Plan. Parks and amenity open space are covered by the accessible green space standard. Separate strategies are being prepared for other types of open space that have a specialised function, such as children's play areas and formal sport pitches, while accessible natural and semi natural open space is considered in the Green Infrastructure strategy.

This strategy is based on a recently updated audit of open space. The audit findings for accessible green space are analysed, strategic sites are identified and action plans are presented. Assessing the current provision against the accessible green space standard shows that in general the quantity of provision is acceptable, therefore raising quality standards at existing sites is a higher priority than creating new spaces. Almost all towns and villages (as defined the Council's Core Strategy) contain accessible open spaces of some type. The main gap identified was lack of strategic level provision in Sandwich. Several high quality open spaces exist in the town and it is proposed that a project should be developed to deliver improvements, such as better linkages between the sites, that would transform them into a destination facility. Any projects undertaken to raise standards should be developed through consultation

with local residents. Information presented in the strategy will help to ensure existing funds are deployed as efficiently as possible and identify priorities for applications to secure external capital funding.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Strategic aims, vision, direction

The Council aims to raise standards at its major urban parks, achieving at least one new green flag award for the District within five years. In the first instance efforts will be focused on strategic sites in Dover, to support the corporate objective of regenerating the town. Gaps identified by this strategy, such as the need for a strategic facility in Sandwich, should also be addressed. Raising standards at urban parks will improve quality of life for residents of the towns and will help to attract more visitors from across the district and beyond.

While improvements at strategic parks will have a district-wide impact, it is important to remember that most residents make use of open spaces within fifteen minutes travel time of their home, and many prefer to access facilities on foot. Locally important green spaces are under a variety of ownerships; the District Council owns a high proportion of them in urban areas, but town and parish councils also provide a significant number, particularly in rural areas. The quality of these sites is variable, and partnership working will be essential to maximise access to the resources required to raise standards.

To help achieve these strategic aims, the following objectives have been identified:

- Ensure that existing expenditure is targeted effectively by identifying strategically important sites and priority projects
- Provide robust evidence to help secure external capital funding that will enable major projects to be undertaken
- Raise standards at the strategically important parks, evidenced by achieving and maintaining external accreditation, such as Green Flag, for at least one Dover District Council owned site
- Work with partners to increase community involvement at local sites
- Demonstrate delivery of the accessible green space standard as adopted by the Council in the Land Allocations Document
- Provide a policy framework that enables the Council to respond to planning applications in a systematic manner.

1.2 Approach

The first task was to survey existing sources of data and to determine whether any gaps existed in the evidence base. Accurate and up-to-date information regarding the quantity of accessible open space, distribution of sites, demand for these facilities and acceptable access distances are required to derive local standards for provision and to set priority actions. Prior to preparation of this strategy, the most recent audit of open spaces was contained in the 'Dover District Green Spaces Strategy, December 2004'. However, since that time numerous changes have occurred, such as the creation of Fowlmead Country Park. A desk-based review of the data was undertaken and GIS mapping of open space in the district was also revised.

Consultation will help to further refine the dataset. In contrast, several surveys of usage and satisfaction have been commissioned in the Dover District over recent years, so rather than repeat that work the existing information was compiled.

Audit findings and survey data were analysed to determine quantitative standards for the provision of accessible green space appropriate for Dover District. The quantitative standards are expressed as a number of hectares per 1,000 population and the distance people may expect to travel to access facilities. These standards may be used to assess the additional need for open space provision arising from proposed developments. In some cases new facilities will be required as part of the development, alternatively the accessibility and quality standards may be applied to determine whether existing nearby facilities may be upgraded to provide additional capacity.

To check that the locally derived quantitative standards were set at a reasonable level, they were compared with standards adopted by neighbouring authorities and considered against national aspirations put forward by Natural England in their Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards.

Usage information and audit data were examined to identify strategically important accessible green spaces within the district; projects that increase capacity or raise quality at these sites will be prioritised. Surveys of residents have indicated that parks in the Kearsney Abbey complex are particularly popular, therefore the management of these parks will be reviewed first. Mapping of the open spaces revealed clearly that although the town of Sandwich contains numerous green spaces there is no single site that may be regarded as being of strategic importance.

According to the proposed standards, settlements of village level or above in the Core Strategy settlement hierarchy (Policy CP1) should contain at least one accessible green space of 0.4 ha or above within 300m. In addition, settlements of rural service level or above are likely to have a green space of at least 2ha within a 15 minute walking time. Distribution mapping was undertaken to clarify where this target is and is not achieved.

The national Green Flag scheme is a suitable method for assessing qualitative standards at strategic sites. Currently, only Samphire Hoe holds the award in the Dover District, but the number of Green Flags should be increased during the lifetime of this strategy. Green Flag standards are not suitable for judging the quality of smaller, locally important accessible green spaces, although suitably selected aspects of the assessment criteria can be used to judge the quality of such sites. Quality improvements for smaller sites will be determined at an extremely local level; consequently they receive much less emphasis within this strategy.

Some quality improvements could be delivered by allocating existing funding sources in a more targeted manner. However, it is clear that external funding must be secured to achieve the strategic objectives. In addition, it will be necessary for all relevant departments within the Council to co-ordinate their actions relevant to accessible green space and to engage other open space providers in the process. Several

sections of the Council, including Corporate Property Services, Community Engagement, Community Safety and Housing have lead open space improvement projects, and all of them participated in preparing this strategy. The Planning section was involved in gathering evidence and determining standards. Other providers and users will be invited to participate through formal consultation. This holistic approach must continue if the strategy is to be delivered successfully.

The strategy comprises:

- Up-to-date audit of accessible open space in the Dover District
- Review of usage and public satisfaction data relating to parks/amenity spaces
- Analysis of the audit findings
- Locally determined standards for the provision of accessible green space
- An approach for assessing open space elements of planning applications
- Identification of strategically important parks
- A framework for raising the quality of strategic sites and improving the effective delivery of the Council's parks and open spaces service

1.3 Scope of the strategy

1.3.1 Typology

Open space comprises numerous assets with a wide variety of functions, from football pitches to closed churchyards. Various organisations have suggested slightly different ways of dividing open space into categories. Dover District Council is a member of the East Kent Green Infrastructure stakeholder group, which has agreed to use the following categories:

- Natural and semi-natural open space – including protected nature reserves, common land ⁽¹⁾ and habitats such as chalk grassland and woodlands;
- Accessible green space – parks and gardens, amenity open space, green corridors, village greens, informal kick-about areas, informal playable space and closed churchyards;
- Outdoor sports facilities – dedicated sport facilities that are suitable for competitive matches and formal training activity;
- Children's play space – equipped play space, multi-use games areas and skate parks; and
- Community gardens and allotments.

1 Common land is classified as semi-natural open space; according to natural England, 88% of common land is nationally or internationally designated for environmental reasons.

This strategy considers everything within the accessible green space category, incorporating many types of open space that have the common feature of multi-functionality. Any land that has the primary purpose of conservation rather than amenity should be regarded as semi-natural open space, and is covered by the Green Infrastructure Strategy. Several open spaces function primarily as sports pitches, but offer valuable amenity green space at other times particularly around the edges of the pitches at the margins of the sites. Elms Vale recreation ground falls into this category.

The District's strategically important parks are primarily composed of accessible green space, but all offer children's equipped play areas and almost all contain formal sports facilities (the only exception being Pencester Gardens, which does feature a skateboard park). These facilities should be acknowledged in the parks' action plans, however provision of play space and outdoor sports facilities are considered in detail by separate strategies. Similarly, operational cemeteries have a specialised function and are not included in the multifunctional category.

Definitions of the categories are, necessarily, imperfect and sometimes they overlap. For example, both Samphire Hoe and Fowlmead Country Park have exceptional beginnings, each being derived from deep subterranean spoil. Samphire Hoe is categorised as semi-natural open space because it was developed within an existing site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and contains nationally important Early Spider Orchid numbers. The site also holds a Green Flag for its inclusive approach to visitors and provision of activities. Fowlmead was a closed site for 70 years and developed its ecological interest in the absence of public access. A core location for biodiversity at Fowlmead is the 22ha area protected for ground-nesting birds. However, careful planning and design of resources at the rest of the site could increase its capacity to offer amenity benefits without jeopardising the wildlife interest.

1.3.2 Freely accessible

The strategy covers all amenity open spaces that may be accessed without charge by the general public. Therefore private gardens and parks that charge an entry fee are excluded. Several sites in the district, such as Fowlmead Country Park and the National Trust's White Cliffs, charge for car parking but may be accessed for free by pedestrians or cyclists.

Open space can benefit the local community even if it is not accessible by the general public, the most common example being school playing fields. Undeveloped land in private ownership may provide visual amenity, especially when it is the only remaining open space in an urban environment. The strategy does not consider these types of site, however non-accessible open space that contributes to the character or amenity of an area is protected by Policy DM25 in the Core Strategy. Protected sites, both accessible and non-accessible, are illustrated on the Dover District Council Local Plan Proposals Map.

1.3.3 Ownership

Publicly accessible parks and open spaces in the district are under a variety of ownerships. Most of the sites that do not charge for entry are owned or provided by statutory public bodies, although there are some exceptions such as Pines Gardens in St Margarets Bay, which is owned by the St Margaret's Bay Trust and Samphire Hoe, which is owned by Eurotunnel. The District Council owns the major urban parks including Connaught Park in Dover and Victoria Park in Deal, while local facilities such as Gun Park in Eastry are generally managed by Parish Councils. Fowlmead Country Park is the property of the Homes and Community Agency.

The audit lists all freely accessible open space regardless of ownership. Priority actions in the strategy focus on parks owned or managed by the District Council because the Council is capable of delivering projects at those sites. However, the information presented in this document will also be of interest to other open space providers who require evidence to support grant applications.

1.3.4 Minimum size

This audit of accessible green space is an update of the Dover District Green Spaces Strategy, December 2004. The minimum site size considered at that time was 0.05ha, because it was the smallest area that could be meaningfully depicted on printed proposals maps. Protected open space is now mapped electronically; therefore it is not necessary to set a minimum size. In addition, many records of accessible open space were obtained from the Council's horticultural maintenance records, which include numerous small sites.

1.4 National Regulatory and Policy Context

1.4.1 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced on 27 March 2012. It recognises that access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation makes an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies for open spaces should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of local needs (paragraph 73). This strategy adheres to NPPF guidance because the local standards for provision have been derived from a newly revised audit of open space combined with survey information. The evidence base and standards have also been used to identify specific local needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space.

Furthermore, local planning authorities should work with public health leads and health organisations to understand and take account of the health status and needs of the local population, including for recreation (paragraph 171). The NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities should plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments (paragraph 70). They are also required to help support a prosperous rural economy, through promoting the retention and development in villages of

community facilities (paragraph 28). Access to an accurate audit of open space facilities, adoption of a locally determined standard for provision and supporting strategy will help the Council to fulfil these requirements.

1.4.2 The Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act introduced new duties and rights that have a bearing on this strategy. The **Duty to Co-operate** fulfils the wider role of local authorities that was previously expressed through the Regional Spatial Strategies. Through earlier informal working with neighbouring authorities and other stakeholders, such as the Kent Wildlife Trust, an overarching Green Infrastructure (GI) strategy was prepared by the Council in 2011, which considers Dover GI in the context of a wider East Kent GI. That strategy considers the contribution made all types of open space to the green infrastructure network, but it is primarily focused on natural and semi-natural areas.

The Act also made provision for a **Community Right to Challenge**, which came into force on 27 June 2012. Voluntary and community groups may submit a written expression of interest to run local council services, such as local parks and gardens, differently and better. Authorities must consider and respond to expressions of interest that, if accepted, will trigger a procurement exercise for that service.

1.4.3 Localism Act - Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012

Under these new regulations communities may create spatial plans and policies that guide development, and in certain cases they will be able to grant planning permissions. Neighbourhood Plans may be put in place by town and parish councils, or locally elected forums. The range and complexity of such plans will be determined by the local community, but must be in conformity with relevant adopted development plans (such as the Dover District Core Strategy). Once open space standards for the district have been adopted within the Land Allocations Document, Neighbourhood Plans will not be able to set lower standards for the provision of open space in their area, but they could require higher levels. Alternatively, communities may wish to rely on the District Council's open space standards and strategies, in order to focus upon other issues in their Neighbourhood Plan.

1.4.4 Health and Social Care Act 2012

The National Health Service is being reformed through the Health and Social Care Act, which gained Royal Assent on 27 March 2012. Implementation of the Act will enable clinical leaders, patients' representatives and local government to take new roles in shaping services. In England Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities will be abolished, to be replaced by Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health and Wellbeing Boards. Each upper tier authority will be required to form a health and wellbeing board as a local authority committee. Kent County Council and Dover District Council made a successful bid to become early implementers of Health and Wellbeing Boards in 2011; the shadow board has met several times in advance of becoming fully operational in April 2013.

The South Kent Coast (Shadow) Health and Wellbeing Board is aware of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and possible interactions have been discussed. The NHS Health Walks Scheme already utilises several parks in the district and there are further opportunities to collaborate. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) public health guidance document PH8 'Physical Activity and the Environment' recommends that to help increase physical activity public open spaces should be maintained to a high standard so that they are safe, attractive and welcoming. A white paper issued by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) 'The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature' suggests that the new duties and powers for local authorities to improve the health and wellbeing of local people could include joining up activity on green space management to connect people with nature.

1.5 Local Drivers

1.5.1 Dover District Council Corporate Plan 2012-2016

Three of the four strategic priorities identified in the Corporate Plan are directly related to provision of accessible open space. Strategic Priority 1 is 'Enabling and supporting growth of the economy and opportunity for investment and jobs'. A key outcome being 'Encouraging investment and development in areas to support the continuing prosperity of the district and improve the quality of life for all.' The open space standards discussed in this strategy and adopted through the Land Allocations Local Plan will enable the Council to accurately assess additional need for accessible green space arising from expected new development, thus securing appropriate planning gains from the expected development that will make an important contribution to quality of life for residents. The strategy also provides evidence to support capital funding applications to invest at strategically important parks.

Strategic Priority 2 'Facilitating strong communities with a sense of place and identity'. A priority action under this heading is 'Involving and engaging with the voluntary and community sector to manage and deliver the transfer of identified assets.' The Council is already involved in community engagement policies that relate to open space. For example volunteers from the North Deal Community Partnership manage certain areas within the North Deal Playing Field and a Community organisation called Brighter Dover run by volunteers maintains the precinct planters in Dover with the support of Dover District Council and Dover Town Council. Many local businesses and members of the public have made financial donations and given up their time to assist with maintenance. There are opportunities for further initiative of this type.

Strategic Priority 3 'Serving our communities effectively' includes the priority action of 'supporting and identifying sport, leisure and recreation opportunities through the delivery of the Local Development Framework'. To meet this aspiration it is essential that the Council has access to an up-to-date evidence base, adopts robust local standards for the various types of open space and develops associated supporting strategies. Also, a key outcome for Strategic Priority 3 is 'Working with partners to promote the district as a visitor destination and maintaining a clean and green approach to the appearance of the district'. Several of the strategic parks, such as

Kearsney Abbey, already attract regular visitors to the district. Action plans proposed in this strategy will provide the Council with a framework to significantly improve the appearance of premier sites and support delivery of projects at open spaces of local importance.

1.5.2 Local Development Framework or Local Plan

One of the objectives within the Dover District **Core Strategy** (adopted 2010) is to 'Maintain and enhance the District's biodiversity, natural environment inheritance, open space and outdoor sport and recreational areas to create a coherent network of green infrastructure that can better support wildlife and human health.' The document recognised that action would be required to achieve this objective because there was insufficient open space in some parts of the district, areas where management could be improved and visitor pressure could increase with the development planned for the district. To address these issues the Council committed to developing a Green Infrastructure Framework covering all forms of recreational open spaces as well as areas of importance or potential for wildlife.

The Green Infrastructure Framework has been developed in conjunction with the **Land Allocations Local Plan**. It comprises an overarching Green Infrastructure strategy, a set of open space standards based on local evidence and supporting strategies for the various types of open space. This document details the way in which the accessible green space standard was calculated, and demonstrates how it may be implemented. These sources of information supersede previous Dover District Council publications such as the Development Contributions Supplementary Planning Document.

The standards for the various types of open space and their supporting strategies will help to implement Policy DM25 in the Core Strategy, which protects open space from alternative use. Alternative uses will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that there is no qualitative or quantitative deficiency in public open space, the development is ancillary to the enjoyment of the open space or a replacement area is made available (see the Core Strategy for full details). Proposed development of open space will be assessed through application of the local standards, including acceptable access distances.

1.5.3 Green Infrastructure Strategy

Green Infrastructure (GI) is concerned with optimising the use of green space, including waterbodies, as a multifunctional resource, for the benefit of people and biodiversity. At a landscape scale GI deals predominantly with the provision and maintenance of ecosystem services such as food, water supply, soil productivity, flood alleviation, pollination of crops and more, upon which human society is dependent and which are underpinned by biodiversity. The continuing decline in biodiversity is recognised both at the global (Nagoya, 2010) and European (European Commission, 2011) scale. Documents such as the Lawton Review – 'Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network' (2010)

indicate that the ongoing decline in biodiversity may be countered by improving habitat size, management and connectivity and this will, in turn, improve the protection of ecosystem services.

The District contains some very large tracts of semi-natural land, some of which form a continuous unit with open space over the border in neighbouring authorities, such as the Dover to Folkestone Cliffs. For this reason the Council collaborates with neighbouring authorities on semi-natural open space projects, such as the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership. The DDC GI Strategy document provides a focus for landscape scale GI including that which needs to be considered in partnership with neighbouring authorities.

As the scale at which GI is operating decreases in area, so a more directly human benefit may be created, primarily associated with personal health and well-being. This is dealt with in detail in 'Nature Nearby', (Natural England, 2010), and The Lawton Review recognises this in one of its recommendations:

'Responsible authorities should take greater steps to reconnect people to nature by enhancing ecological networks within urban environments, including wildlife-friendly management of green spaces, and by embedding biodiversity considerations in the need to adapt to climate change.'

Thus a green urban park may provide direct benefits such as recreation, play, and relaxation together with indirect benefits of surface water flood alleviation, temperature moderation and air quality improvement. By providing native vegetation in such circumstances, there is also a tangible connection to biodiversity that can further enhance the benefits of the park. Clearly, the smaller the area the more limited its contribution to GI, nonetheless it may still be highly valued locally. This could prove challenging when resources are limited. However, one of the Green Flag assessment criteria is that particular attention should be paid to the conservation and appropriate management of natural features, wildlife and flora, so this issue should be considered at least at the strategically important parks, and native vegetation might be selected as a priority by users of locally important amenity green spaces.

The first edition of the Green Infrastructure Strategy was published in October 2011. It is currently being revised to take account of the updated open space audit, revised open space standards and achievements in green infrastructure projects.

1.5.4 Health

The NHS Health Profile 2012 for Dover shows that the health of people in this district is mixed compared with the England average. Deprivation is lower than average, however about 4,200 children live in poverty. Overall life expectancy for both men and women is similar to the England average, but in the most deprived areas it is 7.5 years lower than average for men. About 21.1% of Year 6 children are classified as obese and estimated levels of adult obesity are worse than the England average. Priorities identified by the NHS for the district include smoking in pregnancy, breast feeding and male life expectancy.

Raising the quality of open space provision, and addressing any gaps in provision could contribute to addressing some of the health issues identified in this district. The Department of Health White Paper 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England' (November 2010) explicitly recognises the availability of green and open spaces as a determinant of health.

'Improving the environment in which people live can make healthy lifestyles easier. When the immediate environment is unattractive, it is difficult to make physical activity and contact with nature part of everyday life. Unsafe or hostile urban areas that lack green spaces and are dominated by traffic can discourage activity. Lower socioeconomic groups and those living in the more deprived areas experience the greatest environmental burdens.'

The white paper also emphasises the importance of green spaces when designing communities for active ageing and sustainability.

1.5.5 Review of Play Area Provision 2012-2026

Provision of children's play areas in the Dover District was reviewed recently; the quantity of provision was found to be acceptable in most areas, although some gaps exist. Twelve DDC owned play areas were identified as being of strategic importance, many of them located in strategic parks. The review also recognised the high quality achieved by other play providers, such as the outstanding facility at Fowlmead Country Park. All the strategic parks (as listed in 4.3 of this document) incorporate a play area of strategic importance.

Quality of play provision was found to be variable. Considerable investment has taken place at the strategic play areas sites over recent years; sites at Marke Wood, Pencester Gardens, Connaught Park, Kearsney Abbey, Bushy Ruff and Victoria Park were all refurbished or fully renovated between 2008 and 2011. Following adoption of the Review of Play Area revision in 2012, three further major projects have been delivered at strategic play areas. Community projects have also raised standards at local green spaces, such as the improvements at the play area situated in King George V playing field, St Margaret's-at-Cliffe. The action plan within the Review states that the Council will continue to develop projects to raise quality standards at its own sites and offer support in the form of advice to community initiatives.

Locally determined standards for the provision of equipped children's play space cover provision of Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs) and Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs), but do not include requirements for Local Areas for Play (LAPs). Previously, saved local policy OS2 specified that LAPs should be provided within new developments of fifteen or more family dwellings, however this was found to be unsustainable. Provision of playable space⁽²⁾ is now encouraged to meet the needs of children to access public space close to home. In contrast to

2 Play England defines playable space as 'Any public space or facility that children and young people might legitimately use for play and informal recreation'

formal NEAPs and LEAPs that are designated primarily for children's play, playable space may be multifunctional, therefore provision of this type is included within the accessible green space standard.

1.5.6 Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy

Most of the strategic parks incorporate competitive sports provision, although Kearsney Abbey is an exception. A variety of sports are represented, for example football pitches at Victoria Park and tennis courts at Connaught Park. Some of these facilities are in need of capital investment.

The Council with the help of Sport England audited the quantity and quality of formal outdoor sports facilities in the District recently and a revised Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy is being prepared. The strategy will identify any gaps in provision and surplus capacity. Priority projects will be identified to meet the needs of the community. Many accessible amenity open spaces contain informal kick-about areas, which will not be covered by the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Facilities Strategy.

1.5.7 Heritage Strategy 2012

The Dover Heritage Strategy considered a number of themes of key importance to the heritage of Dover District. Many of these contained open space heritage assets including parks and gardens, village greens and green spaces within Conservation Areas whose conservation and enhancement would be of significant benefit to the District. The Heritage Strategy identified the overall grouping of country houses and estates within Dover District as of considerable significance. The most important publicly accessible site with heritage interest is the Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens park complex, which contains listed structures such as the pavilions on the Canal Pond at Russell Gardens in grounds laid out by Thomas Mawson. Most of the sites listed by English Heritage are accessible to the public only on payment of a fee, and therefore are not considered within this strategy. An example of a garden in that category is The Salutation in Sandwich, which consists of a Grade I listed house built by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1912 with a garden designed by Gertrude Jekyll.

As the owner of Kearsney Abbey and Russell gardens the Council should aim to meet aspirations set out in the Heritage Strategy. The importance of the gardens in Kearsney, as summarised in the Heritage Strategy, are that they are public gardens and provide valuable green space close to the urban centre of Dover town. The gardens also provide attractive open areas and are valued by the local community. The Heritage Strategy concludes by recommending that there is an opportunity to continue to promote, interpret and develop the historic gardens as important local amenity spaces.

1.5.8 Equality Policy, March 2012

Parks offer a wide variety of amenity facilities, and as they are free to use, there is no restriction to the audience they accommodate; parks are a provision for all. Dover District Council is committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination, and actively

promotes equality. To help achieve this, due regard has been given to the potential impact of this strategy on protected groups throughout its development. Public consultation on a draft of the strategy was undertaken for twelve weeks between 2nd May and 25th July 2013. The consultation was advertised in local newspapers, in addition a total of 304 consultees were invited to comment including town and parish councils, local community groups, local clubs and people who have registered their interest via the Council's web site. No negative impacts have been identified.

If capital funding is secured to support projects that raise quality standards at amenity open spaces, works undertaken will contribute to meeting the Council's responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This requires DDC to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not, and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. For example, access audits have been undertaken for the strategic parks, which highlight features that could present barriers to participation for people with disabilities. Where possible, improvement projects will incorporate measures to overcome these barriers. During recent renovations of play areas at the strategic parks the Council has upgraded paths and gates, and ensured that accessible equipment is provided that meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

1.6 Existing Dover District Council Actions/Projects

1.6.1 Corporate Property Services

The Council maintains a large portfolio of open spaces, including land owned by external clients such as Kent Highways, East Kent Housing, the Highways Agency, Town Council and Parish Councils. The annual budget for these works is in excess of £1 million. All areas maintained by the Council are GIS mapped and works programmes are organised using the Confirm management system. A maintenance regime is assigned to each horticultural asset, appropriate to its particular characteristic and location. For example many grassed areas are cut on a ten-day rotation (shown in bright green in Figure 1.1), while high profile areas may be cut more frequently and some parks contain wildflower areas that are cut only once a year (shown as stippled areas in Figure 1.1). In addition a project is underway to digitise records of trees on council maintained land, beginning with trees in the main parks.

Figure 1.1 Sample of the Council's grounds maintenance GIS layer, showing Connaught Park



Maintenance of hard landscape features and the historic structures in the strategic parks is generally reactive at present, with priority being given to repairs that are required to ensure health and safety standards are met. However, many of the historic structures require considerable investment and capital investment projects are undertaken when possible. Recent examples include relining of the pond at Connaught Park this year and refurbishment of the pergolas in Russell Gardens during the previous two years. If funding could be secured for a planned programme of capital works this would help to target expenditure effectively, i.e. avoiding unnecessary repairs.

1.6.2 Planning

Preparation of Local Plan policy and associated strategy documents is lead by the planning section. Planning applications are assessed to identify the impact on existing open space and to quantify any additional demand arising from new development. Where appropriate provision of new open space is requested within a development, otherwise off-site development contributions may be secured to increase capacity to meet the extra demand.

1.6.3 Community Safety

The Dover District Community Safety Partnership is made up of a number of statutory agencies involved in promoting public safety, reducing anti-social behaviour and crime. The Partnerships were introduced through Section 5 Crime and Disorder Act

1998. As stated in the Dover District Community Safety Plan 2011-2014, the partnership aims to maintain a safer stronger community where it is safe to live, work and visit by responding to identified local community safety needs and issues and addressing the wider causes of crime and the fear of crime. A current focus is antisocial behaviour including environmental issues.

A report by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 'Natural Choice: securing the value of nature' (June 2011) explains that healthy natural environments can be used as a cost-effective way of regenerating and enhancing neighbourhoods in both rural and urban areas. Studies show that the presence of vegetation can halve incidences of violent and property crimes in otherwise identical social housing, and that crime is lower in inner-city areas with more areas of natural vegetation. Green spaces also encourage greater social activity and more visitors than barren areas.

Recognising the importance of environment, the Community Safety Partnership has participated in several projects in the Dover District. Communities are involved in achieving objectives such as reducing tensions, graffiti and rubbish. For example, the Community Safety Unit worked with London Road Community Forum, the Environment Agency, several local schools, Dover Town Council, Clean Kent, KCC, volunteers, district councillors and the DDC Community and Leisure section to deliver the Barton Path/River Dour project. Actions included a dog fouling campaign, while a wall that had previously been blighted with graffiti was decorated with a mural designed by local artist Anita Luckett and the schools. Funding was secured to purchase long-handled equipment to clean the river during fish mating season when it is prohibited to physically enter the river, as well as extra bins, repairs to the walkway and improved lighting

1.6.4 Community Engagement

The Community Engagement section works on a project/campaign basis to engage communities across the District; supporting them socially and economically and working to assist them in becoming more self-reliant. In line with the Localism Act this includes, but is not restricted to, Neighbourhood Planning, Community Assets, Service Delivery and Funding, Health and Well-being (including sport, leisure and recreation), and Partnerships.

Recent examples of open space projects facilitated by Community Engagement officers include assisting Capel-le-Ferne Parish Council and DDC members to obtain QEII status for Lancaster Playing Field, then supporting funding applications for outdoor gym, mini skatepark, petanque court and zip wire. This project was initiated by the local Community Warden following incidents of anti-social behaviour such as the use of inappropriate areas and objects for skateboard ramps. The team has also encouraged applications for Participatory Budgeting (KCC & DDC funds combined), resulting in grants to River Parish Council for public seating and Curzon Hall Memorial Area amongst others.

Community Engagement officers will continue work with communities, the voluntary sector, officers and members to identify needs and develop plans for community engagement. This could include projects to increase capacity or improve standards at amenity open spaces, when suitable opportunities arise.

1.6.5 Health and Wellbeing Board

A local Health and Wellbeing Board has been established (the South Kent Coast Health and Wellbeing Board - SKC HWBB) as a sub-committee of the Kent Board, covering Dover and Shepway districts and goes 'live' from the 1st April 2013. Initial discussions and actions include:

- Developing a local Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Health Inequalities Action Plan, with key drivers of, amongst others, equitable access to service provision and supporting the creation of safe, healthy and prosperous environments.
- Working on developing and delivering integrated services. The local district councils, the county council and the new NHS Clinical Commissioning Group have been working together to develop an Integrated Commissioning Strategy with the aims of improving health, social care and environmental services for the people of Dover and Shepway. Partnership working will be essential to co-ordinate the way services are provided for residents living in the area so that they can lead healthier and more active lives.
- The SKC HWBB recognises the importance of the linkages between health, social care and the wider determinants of health (including council services such as housing, environmental health, leisure, community safety etc.) and aims to improve health outcomes for all residents through joining up provision where appropriate and effective.
- Going forward the Clinical Commissioning Group's Annual Operating Plan has identified 3 key local outcome priorities; reduction in under 75 mortality rates from respiratory disease, reduction in unplanned hospitalisation for chronic ambulatory sensitive conditions in adults and increased proportion of people feeling supported to manage their condition.

When appropriate, projects developed to achieve these objectives will consider the contribution that may be made by accessible open space.



2 Updated audit of accessible green space in the Dover District

2.1 Existing data set

A comprehensive audit of open space was published within the Dover District Green Spaces Strategy, December 2004. That data set was compiled following advice given in the document 'Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation' (PPG17). All open space sites identified on the Proposals Map at the time were assessed and categorised using the PPG17 open space typology. This was combined with wide ranging surveys to locate open space sites that had previously been overlooked. The results were presented in a table arranged by wards.

Since 2004 there have been some significant alterations to the provision of open space in the district and the policy context has altered. It has been necessary to revise the 2004 audit to take account of these changes. In particular, this work will help to meet the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirement for open spaces policies to be based on up-to-date assessments of local needs.

2.2 Why an update was required

2.2.1 Changes in national policy context

PPG17 has been replaced by the NPPF and the South East Plan has been revoked. Current guidance states that planning policies for open spaces should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of local needs, but it is not prescriptive about the method. In alignment with current thinking on green infrastructure, a less complex set of categories have been used to define this data set compared to the previous audit. The typology was developed in collaboration with neighbouring districts that are members of the East Kent GI group. This has produced a system that is more appropriate to the wider scale and allows for constructive cooperation with neighbouring authorities.

2.2.2 Local policy and strategy development

In the Core Strategy the Council committed itself to developing a green infrastructure framework. This commitment is being fulfilled through preparation of an overarching green infrastructure strategy, and the development of local open space standards with supporting strategies for various categories of open space. The proposed standards were published in the Dover District Land Allocations Pre-Submission Local Plan, while the various linked strategies demonstrate how these standards may be implemented.

Preparation of supporting strategies for single function open space involved detailed examination of the existing evidence, resulting in numerous proposed amendments to the 2004 open space audit. Outdoor sport facilities were reviewed in collaboration

with Sport England, using their standard methodology of specialist site assessments and consultations with local sports clubs. Provision of children's equipped play space was also reviewed recently, and consulted upon via the Review of Play Area Provision 2012-2026. This strategy is focused on accessible open space that is multifunctional.

2.2.3 Changes in existing open space

Several publicly accessible open spaces have been created since the 2004 audit. Most notably, the former Betteshanger Colliery site was transformed into a publicly accessible 98ha facility and renamed as Fowlmead Country Park, which opened in 2007. In some cases, new provision has been created in conjunction with development, such as the accessible green space associated with permission for 85 dwellings off Sandwich Road in Ash.

There are also cases where open space has been built upon. For example, a new health centre was created recently in Aylesham, on land that had previously been designated as protected open space. The new centre provides improved primary health care facilities for the village and is part of the infrastructure required to support the planned expansion of Aylesham. An 'Open Space, Sport and Recreation Strategy' dated July 2008 is part of the official Aylesham Village Expansion Planning Documentation takes the construction of this health centre into account.

2.2.4 Capturing the data in a flexible format

As the revision was undertaken 'in house' attention was paid to capturing the data in a format that will help to facilitate Council functions. For example, results of the 2004 open space audit were presented in a tabular format, embedded into a document and divided into electoral wards and previously the Council did not have access to a GIS layer of amenity open space that could be viewed in conjunction with other local geographical information. This meant that the impact on open space from proposed developments close to a ward boundary was difficult to assess. The newly created maps and searchable spreadsheets will help to implement the accessibility element of the open space standards, because the distance along footpaths from any proposed development to the nearest existing open space facilities in surrounding wards can now be measured easily.

Visualisation of the data as maps will help to engage users in the consultation, as they are much easier to comment upon than lists of place names. Availability of the revised data set will also be useful when undertaking sustainability appraisals.

2.3 Method/Limitations

2.3.1 Audit and mapping

Information presented in the Dover District Green Spaces Strategy, December 2004 was compiled into a single spreadsheet. Recently created open space facilities were added to the list and other amendments were made to reflect recent changes. The categories of open space used by this strategy adheres to the approach adopted by

East Kent GI, which differs from the previous system. Therefore each area of open space was reviewed to ensure that it was correctly assigned. For example, closed churchyards are now included with amenity open space where previously operational and closed churchyards and cemeteries were listed together. The status of churchyards was checked against the London Gazette and Diocesan Registry information.

Sites listed in the spreadsheet were polygonised using MapInfo Professional 11.5 GIS mapping system. The maps were then reviewed to check for inaccuracies, for example by comparing them with the Council's horticultural maintenance records. All categories of open space have been mapped, but this strategy only considers the accessible green space elements. Consultation will help to further refine the dataset.

2.3.2 Accuracy

The audit reflects the situation on the ground as accurately as possible at the time of writing, but changes in provision may occur at any time. Therefore a brief check of the current situation should be undertaken when responding to planning applications or preparing a funding application.

Several sites within the district combine competitive sports pitches with amenity open space. It is challenging to map accurately the division between these different categories for several reasons, for example pitch layouts may change from year to year. Pitch sizes have generally been estimated according to recommendations of Sport England or the relevant national governing body, including run off areas. In some cases the area outside the pitch run-off is very small. Where there is a substantial area outside the pitches it has been mapped as amenity open space.

The mapping of any piece of land has inherent errors due to topography. These are exacerbated in hilly areas and where boundary features are unfixed or changeable, such as along Dover's extensive coastal cliffs, landslip areas and cliff top grassland, this is a greater issue for accessible semi-natural and natural green space than for amenity areas. Errors are less likely on land used primarily for human activities, as management costs demand accuracy.

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Comparison with previous findings

Revision of the 2004 audit appears to reveal some substantial changes in the provision of open space in the Dover District. These are summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Quantity of open space provision 2004 and 2013

Open Space Type	Quantity in Hectares 2004	Quantity in Hectares 2013	Difference in Hectares
Accessible Green Space	170 ⁽¹⁾	243	+73 (43% increase)
Outdoor Sport Facilities	227	104	-123 (54% decrease)
Children's Play Space	8.41	7.04	-1.37 (16% decrease)
Community Gardens	21.8	23.4	+1.6 (7.3% increase)
Operational Cemeteries	36.4	19.7	-16.7 (46% decrease)
Accessible Natural and Semi Natural Green Space	457	782	+325 (71% increase)
Totals	921	1,179	+258 (28% increase)

1. Figure obtained by summing the provision recorded in 2004 for parks and gardens, green corridors and amenity greenspace

Two thirds of open space recorded in 2013 is in the form of accessible natural and semi-natural green space; incorporating the chalk downland and coastal areas that Dover District is famous for and sites such as Samphire Hoe, but it is not a focus for this strategy. Accessible green space represents 21% of the recorded open space provision in the district. Provision of specialist function open space (i.e. dedicated sports facilities, children's equipped play space, community gardens and operational cemeteries) is lower than the multifunctional accessible green space.

A very large increase in the quantity of Accessible Natural and Semi Natural Green Space has occurred as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The number of hectares of accessible green space has increased considerably since 2004, this is mainly due to the creation of Fowlmead Country Park which added 76ha to the total. Most of the other changes are a result of the redefinition of categories, for example some sites previously placed within the category of green corridors are now counted as accessible semi-natural green space. Similarly, a large decrease is shown in the provision of outdoor sport facilities because Sport England currently recommends that school playing fields should be excluded from an assessment of

accessible open space, unless there is a secure community use agreement in place. A decrease is also shown in operational cemeteries partly because the 2004 audit placed all churchyards in this category whether open or closed.

2.4.2 Distribution of open space

Maps showing the amenity open spaces are available on the Council's website.

These maps depict a combination of the accessible amenity open spaces recognised by the audit and areas recorded on the Council's GIS horticultural maintenance records. Inaccessible areas, such as central reservations, and non-permanent features, such as planters were excluded. However, many very small sites are included in the maps, for example verges on residential streets.

Most settlements of village level or above, as listed in policy CP1 of the adopted Core Strategy contain at least one substantial accessible open space, and the towns support several such facilities. Exceptions to this rule are the villages of East Studdal, Staple, West Hougham and Worth. Three of these four contain recreation grounds that have been categorised as outdoor sports facilities, but are likely to also provide amenity value. Only West Hougham contains no accessible open space within its boundaries; however, the area is very rich in footpaths which link to open access land located around 600m from the village.

3 Review of usage data relating to accessible green space

3.1 National usage data

A great deal of data has been collected to measure usage of open space at the national level. Natural England's Monitoring of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey has interviewed 40,000 people per year since March 2009. MENE will be used to measure the Public Health Outcomes Framework indicator 1.16 Utilisation of green space for exercise/health reasons.

The 2011-2012 annual report states that an average of 42 per cent of the English adult population took a visit to the natural environment over the previous seven days, while the average number of visits taken per adult was 65. People living in the areas of greatest deprivation were least likely to have visited the natural environment in the previous seven days, whilst those in the least deprived areas were significantly more likely to have made such a visit. Around two thirds of visits (68 per cent) were taken within two miles of the respondent's home, highlighting the importance of accessible local green space. Just over half of visits to the natural environment were taken to the countryside (52 per cent), while 38 per cent were to green spaces within towns and cities. In total, 10 per cent of visits were taken in coastal locations. Volumes of visits to urban parks, paths, cycleways and bridleways, and playing fields increased significantly between 2010/11 and 2011/12. The increase in visits to urban parks made a considerable contribution to the overall increase in the volumes of visits.

3.2 Locally collected usage data

Several previous strategies prepared by the Council have used the results of public consultation to assess the demand and need for parks and open spaces. It is important to note that previous consultation has considered all the types of open space including natural and semi-natural, sport and recreational facilities, rather than the more narrow definition being applied in this document.

3.2.1 Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2008-2012

The Dover District Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2008-2012 (Scott Wilson et al) used the results of a 2005 door-to-door survey where 500 randomly selected households responded to a questionnaire on open space, sport and recreational facilities.

The survey found that 70% of the respondents use the district's parks and open spaces and that 57% of users visit parks and gardens on a daily or weekly basis⁽³⁾. 82% of respondents had access to an open space within 5 minutes from their home. A similar number (83%) felt that there was sufficient open space in the district.

3 The survey distinguishes between different types of open space for this statistic

The most commonly stated use of open space was for passive recreation (53%). The most common reasons preventing people from using the open spaces in the district were littering, dog-fouling, vandalism and anti-social behaviour – 15% of people cited ‘not feeling safe’ as a reason for not using open space.

Over three quarters of respondents would like to see improvements for young people. Control of dog-fouling, litter and informative signage and events were cited as other possible improvements.

3.2.2 Green Infrastructure Strategy 2011

To support the development of the Green Infrastructure Strategy 500 face to face interviews were carried out with residents at selected locations throughout the district in autumn 2010.

The survey found that 78% of those interviewed had visited Green Infrastructure sites in the previous year. Of those visiting, Parks and Gardens was the second most likely destination with 49%. Travel times to GI are short, with 75% of people taking no more than 15 minutes to reach their destination. More than half of visits are made on foot.

The most frequent use of GI spaces was for walking, closely followed by relaxation and ‘getting fresh air’. The most common reasons that detract from people’s visits are litter and dog-fouling. Satisfaction levels with the quantity and quality of GI were generally high across the district. The weakest area is perceived to be provision for teenagers and young people.

According to the GI survey, Deal Beach and Kearsney Abbey are the most popular locations in the district. However, the survey also usefully breaks down GI usage by resident origin. Below is a brief summary of these findings for the types of open spaces this document’s concerned with.

- **Dover**

Kearsney Abbey is the most popular GI location, visited by 30% of Dover Town residents. Connaught Park (15%) and Pencester Gardens (13%) are the third and fourth most popular locations respectively.

- **Whitfield**

Local green spaces – particularly Whitfield recreation ground – are used by 47% of Whitfield residents. Kearsney Abbey is the third most popular location (17%).

- **Deal & Sholden**

After the beach, Victoria Park is the second most popular location for Deal and Sholden residents, with 19% and 18% respectively having visited the site in the last year.

- **Sandwich**

GI use in Sandwich is localised, with 54% of residents using local parks, the Butts and Ropewalk, or the Gazen Salts Nature Reserve.

The GI strategy also considers the impact of future growth in the district. Dover Town and Whitfield will carry the burden of the majority of the district's future growth and, in this context, it is important that the most used open space assets are reinforced to cope with heightened usage levels.

3.2.3 The White Cliffs Landscape Partnership Scheme

In 2011, as part of its application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Landscape Partnership Scheme, the Council undertook both a face-to-face and an online survey to better understand how people use and value the local landscape and its heritage. Although not directly relevant to this strategy it does provide some useful information.

The proposed scheme area includes parts of Dover and Shepway Districts and the consultation referred only to sites within the scheme area.

There were 470 participants in the face-to-face survey, of which 60% were from Dover District and 39% from Shepway District. Kearsney Abbey was by far the most popular destination, with 59% of people across all districts having visited in the past year. It is still the most visited site even when the results are broken down by district.

There were a total of 131 respondents to the online survey; 71% of respondents were from Dover District, 18% from Shepway and 11% from other districts. Kearsney Abbey had been visited in the past year by 68% of all respondents and by 80% of respondents from Dover District when the result is broken down.

3.2.4 Dover District Green Spaces Strategy 2004

This strategy cited the 'Dover District community consultation' that was carried out in 1999. MORI conducted an interview survey of 1,016 people at 104 sampling points in Dover district. It found that parks and open spaces are the 'second most accessed of all Council services', after car parks. The strategy also incorporated the findings of a 'Survey of the users of green spaces in Dover District' carried out in August 2003. An interview questionnaire was administered to a representative cross-section of 244 green spaces users across the District. The survey found that:

- a. Local green spaces provide a wide variety of community needs, including relaxation, exercise and recreation

- b. Very regular use is made of local green spaces: 60% of respondents visited at least once a week, with 33% visiting almost every day
- c. The need for accessible local provision is underlined by the fact that 55% of respondents travel to green spaces on foot
- d. 64% of respondents travel for less than 10 minutes to reach their chosen site
- e. Green space provision has a positive influence on the quality of life of 75% of respondents.

3.3 Common Themes

- Parks and open spaces are a particularly well-used asset of the District.
- The majority of people have access to open space a short distance from where they live and journey times are typically no more than 15 minutes. Over 50% of visits are made on foot.
- Satisfaction levels with both the quality and quantity of open space are generally high across the district; however, litter, dog's mess and anti-social behaviour were common detractors from people's visits.
- There is overwhelming support for improving facilities for young people. As well as controlling dog's mess and litter, other suggested improvements were events and more informative signage.
- Kearsney Abbey is by far the most visited park/ open space across the District; it also attracts significant visits from neighbouring districts.
- Proposals for future growth need to be taken into account when devising action plans for the Council's parks and open spaces.

4 Analysis of the audit findings

4.1 The proposed standards for accessible green space

Standards for the provision of open space in the Dover District were initially developed as part of the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Action plan. Survey information revealed that most residents are content with the quantity of accessible green space in the district and therefore the proposed quantitative standard was calculated to reflect existing levels of provision.

Proposed standards were put forward for consultation in the 'Open Space and Policy Standards' document in October 2011. Representations received during the consultation were considered and the proposals were modified to take into account concerns raised. Revised proposals were included in the Land Allocations pre-Submission Local Plan, which was open for representations between December 2012 and 21 February 2013. The Council is currently considering these latest representations before proceeding to an Examination in Public on the Plan later this year.

Table 4.1 Proposed Standard for Accessible Green Space (extract from the Land Allocations Pre-Submission Local Plan)

Open Space Type	Quantitative Standard	Accessibility Standard ⁽¹⁾	Quality Standard	Notes
Accessible green space	2.22 ha per 1,000 population	At least one accessible green space of minimum size 0.4ha within 300m At least one green space 2ha within 15 minute walking time/1,000m	Green Flag guidance at strategic sites. Qualitative improvement priorities at non-strategic sites discussed in the forthcoming refreshed Parks & Open Spaces Strategy	Green Flag status is held by one site in the District: the semi-natural space at Samphire Hoe. The long-term aspiration is to gain Green Flags for strategic parks; the forthcoming refreshed Parks & Open Spaces Strategy will set out action plans to achieve this.

1. Accessibility standards set out in the Land Allocations pre-Submission Local Plan apply only to settlements of village level or above in the Core Strategy settlement hierarchy. This is because it is unlikely that hamlets will be able to sustain support for open space facilities such as equipped play areas, and in any case residents usually have ready access to public rights of way and the wider countryside. In addition, the requirement for a green space at least 2ha in size within 15 minute walking time/1,000m is only applicable to settlements of rural service centre level or above. A minimum of 0.4ha was selected because it is the average size of accessible green space facilities below 2 ha.

4.1.1 Commentary on the quantitative standard

Given that the proposed standards were derived from the local audit information and survey data, it is not surprising that in general the quantity of provision in the District meets the proposed standard; the maps show that most settlements of village level or above contain at least one substantial accessible open space. In order to check the proposals against some external information attempts were made to compare them with local standards in neighbouring authorities and national proposals.

It is difficult to make a direct comparison because published standards refer to slightly different categories of open space. For example, Canterbury City Council has adopted an amenity green space standard of 1.3 to 1.7 ha per thousand, which is lower than the proposals for Dover. However, Canterbury has a standard of 4.0 ha per thousand for natural and semi-natural greenspace and no quantitative standard has been set for this type of open space in Dover.

The most relevant national proposals are Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace standards (ANGSt), but the audit showed that provision at the level specified by ANGSt could never be achieved in Dover. As shown in Table 4.2, ANGSt is an aspirational framework because levels of provision in Dover compare well with regional averages, none of which come close to meeting the standards, except for the measure 'households within 5km of 100 ha+ site.

Table 4.2 Data from 'An analysis of accessible natural green space provision in the South East', South, South East AONBs Woodlands Programme, 2007

	Dover District	Kent	South East
Households within 300m of a 2ha+ site	30%	15%	20%
Households within 2km of a 20ha+ site	52%	57%	66%
Households within 5km of a 100ha+ site	74%	69%	77%
Households within 10km of a 500ha+ site	46%	44%	46%
Households meeting all ANGSt requirements	1%	3%	8%
Households meeting none of the ANGSt requirements	8%	8%	10%

The local standards were prepared with reference to ANGSt: a space of 2ha (either semi-natural or accessible green space) is required within 1km, not 300 m as specified by ANGSt. However, within the local standards there is a requirement for a smaller site of accessible green space of minimum size 0.4 ha within 300m. This approach is justified because standards should be based on local evidence and surveys have

shown that residents are content with existing levels of open space provision; they are more concerned with quality issues. The ANGSt model was devised by a nature conservation organisation. The Standard therefore refers to 'natural' greenspace, i.e. accessible areas that also provide potential wildlife habitat. The lower size limit of two hectares reflects that assumption that a site smaller than this would not be sufficiently large to accommodate both public access and wildlife-rich habitats

The multifunctional sites within 300m will, in part, serve to replace the previous requirement (under saved policy OS2) for provision of Local Areas for Play. That level of play provision was found to be unsustainably high. In order to meet this need the multifunctional sites should be designed as 'playable space' where possible .

The 2 ha green space may be a natural or semi natural site. The fulfilment of the 2 ha site accessibility criteria across the District is made possible because of the large areas of accessible semi natural green space it possesses, especially around Dover itself. These sites are locally and nationally important for biodiversity and landscape character and are key in the delivery of the Council's GI strategy. They are also important for public access and recreation, providing vital human contact with nature.

Accessible green space within 300m will have the primary function of amenity. Although it would be challenging to achieve meaningful levels of biodiversity on such a small scale, these smaller sites have an important function as 'stepping stones' to maintain connectivity between semi natural sites. It is also important that these sites are maintained and improved to help reduce the impact of over use on semi natural sites.

Some very small sites provide high value to the local area, for example the garden at the junction St Radigunds road and Beaufoy Road, in St Radigunds, which is only 0.03 ha in size. There is limited accessible amenity green space in this part of the town, with the majority of accessible green space being provided by two semi natural sites over 2 ha. These sites are being managed for their nature conservation interest as well as for public access, but there is a level where public access becomes deleterious on sensitive sites. Therefore, opportunities to improve, make more resilient and increase amenity green space in the area need to be taken to help reduce the impact on semi natural sites and provide an opportunity to engage people with nature on smaller, less sensitive, more local sites.

4.1.2 Commentary on the qualitative standard

Whilst there are no nationally recognised qualitative standards for Accessible Green Space the criteria for the Green Flag Award are used by 70 per cent of councils in England. The quality standard for the District's strategic sites is the standard sought for the Green Flag Award. It is not necessary for the Council to achieve Green Flags for each strategic site, but it should aim to maintain these key sites to standards commensurate with the award. The Green Flag Award judges open spaces against eight criteria:

1. A welcoming place
2. Healthy, safe and secure
3. Well maintained and clean
4. Sustainability
5. Conservation and heritage
6. Community involvement
7. Marketing
8. Management

Management planning for the strategic parks should seek to enhance quality in these areas. Further information on the Green Flag Award criteria can be found in Annex 1.

It is not feasible to judge smaller amenity sites by the same criteria as the strategic sites, as their importance, needs and function vary considerably across the District. Instead priorities should be set locally and appropriate standards introduced. For example, some very small sites provide high value to the local area, such as the 'Garden at the junction St Radigunds road and Beaufoy Road' in St Radigunds, which is only 0.03 ha in size; other small sites are capable of being improved in quality. On the other hand, there are sites with little potential, some of which may be prone to social problems such as repeated fly tipping due to their location. These sites absorb valuable resources that could be better deployed improving standards at priority sites. On these sites the Council should consider change of use or transferring ownership. The local setting of priorities will help to factor in other parameters, such as a lack of green space nearby. This approach will allow sites to be dealt with sympathetically on a site by site basis, driven by an assessment of need.

4.2 The strategic sites

Six strategic accessible open spaces are proposed. These were selected on the basis of size, historic character and level of usage (where known).

Proposed list:

- Kearsney Abbey/Russell Gardens/Bushy Ruff complex
- Victoria Park
- Connaught Park
- Marke Wood
- Pencester Gardens
- Fowlmead

Kearsney Abbey, Russell Gardens and Bushy Ruff are listed together even though they are distinct parks because they are situated adjacent to each other. The Danes and Elms Vale are excluded from this list because their primary purpose is provision of sports facilities; in contrast, although Marke Wood contains several football pitches it also has formal gardens.

The main gap in provision of strategic open spaces is that although several accessible open spaces exist in Sandwich, the town lacks a facility of this standard. Sandwich is the third largest settlement in the district and the Core Strategy makes provision for urban expansion. Dover District Council and Sandwich Town Council own several facilities that either follow the layout of the town walls or are adjacent to them. The need for a strategic site could be met through measures such as improving links between the existing sites and publicising the open spaces as a coherent unit. It is proposed that the two organisations work together to develop a project that creates a strategic facility.



5 Action plans and projects to raise the quality of strategic parks to meet the adopted standards

5.1 Actions

A1 Raise standards at strategic parks. In the first instance efforts will be focused at the Kearsney Abbey park complex, given that it is the most popular facility in the district. Kearsney itself is over used, therefore a priority it to improve linkages and circulation to the other two sites. Once this project is underway and capacity becomes available to develop another project, the emphasis will move to rectifying the current deficiency in strategic level provision in Sandwich. That will require partnership working between open space land owners, principally Dover District Council and Sandwich Town Council. Dover District Council will aim to have one Green Flag award by 2018 and at least one more by 2023. The strategic and day-to-day management of all strategic sites should be at the required standard, but not necessarily with award, by 2023.

A2 Promote and increase inter and cross departmental working to achieve the adopted standards. Parks and open spaces are the second most frequently accessed of the Council's services. At present the management is rather narrowly focused on horticulture. The adoption of the Green Flag standards as the quality standard for the District's strategic parks will necessitate a holistic approach to their management and strategic planning. The Green Flag standard has a wide range of criteria, including health and safety, community involvement, biodiversity and marketing that need to be fulfilled to reach the required standard (for a full list of Green Flag criteria see Annex 1), and will involve new ways of working. To achieve the adopted standards and to reflect the importance of strategic parks across the District, greater communication and joint working between and in departments is necessary. As well as the Parks and Open Spaces team, useful contributions from, amongst others, the Community Engagement team, the Community Safety Unit and the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership would help to achieve the adopted standards.

A3 Source external funding to deliver key improvements to strategic sites and meet the adopted standards. To meet the adopted standards and to protect and enhance the heritage and biodiversity value of strategic sites will require investment. The majority of the investment required could be sourced externally through grant programmes and development contributions. Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) Parks for People programme offers grants of up to £5 million for projects that regenerate public parks of national, regional or local heritage value, the end point of which is to attain and maintain the Green Flag standard. The programme is particularly suited to the District's strategic sites. Funding streams of this nature will require cash match funding contributions from the Council, as well as additional officer time to put together and coordinate applications. Project development grants are available from the HLF as part of the application process.

A4 Utilise planning opportunities to deliver key improvements to sites and enable them to sustain greater usage levels arising from the District's planned growth. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will provide an opportunity to secure funding for increasing capacity at strategic sites, particularly in the context of the proposed growth in Whitfield and Dover. It is important to note that the government intends the levy 'to fill the funding gaps that remain once existing sources (to the extent that they are known) have been taken into account'⁽⁴⁾. CIL receipts may be able to fund improvements to parks not admissible in grant funding applications, such as improved car parking facilities and connectivity projects, and act as the Council's cash match to grant funding, and, thus, assist in achieving the adopted standards. The Council is currently developing a local CIL charge.

A5 Investigate the transfer of non-strategic sites of less than 0.1 hectares. The Council currently maintains numerous small sites in excess of the proposed quantity standards (50 sites under 0.1 ha were listed in the audit and many more are shown on the maps). In the main these provide visual amenity and have little potential for quality improvement, e.g. roadside verges. However, there are sites that if transferred to local management and improved according to users' priorities, could provide significant benefit to residents nearby. The Council will open dialogue with town and parish councils, community groups and private individuals to discuss possible transfers. This could help to refocus the Council's funding for maintenance of accessible open space on the attainment of the adopted quality standards.

A6 Review current horticultural contracts and maintenance arrangements In advance of negotiating a new maintenance contract, the Council should carry out a review of its current arrangements to ensure they are appropriate in terms of scale and remit. Again, savings made through this review could assist the Council in achieving the adopted standards.

A7 Review the action plan of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy annually. Progress reports to Portfolio Holders and relevant departments and stakeholders.

A8 Conduct an audit of open space provision every five years. Assess the quantity and quality of parks and open spaces with site visits to evaluate the success of the strategy.

4 'Community Infrastructure Levy, an Overview', DCLG May 2011

5.2 Action Plan

Table 5.1

Action	Target	When by	Lead	Cost/resources required	Links to other actions
A1	Manage strategic parks to high quality standards	2018 (1), 2023 (3)	DDC	Additional resources outlined in Action 2	2, 3, 4, 5, 6
A2	Promote and increase inter and cross departmental working to achieve the adopted standards	Ongoing	DDC	Existing staff resources	1,3
A3	Source external funding to deliver key improvements to strategic sites	2018	DDC	Expression of interest and stage 1 application to be prepared within existing staff resources. Cash match will be required if stage 2 application is pursued	1,2,4
A4	Utilise planning opportunities to deliver key improvements to strategic sites	Ongoing	DDC	Existing staff resources	1,3
A5	Investigate the transfer of non-strategic sites of less than 0.1 ha	2018	DDC	Existing staff resources	1

	Action	Target	When by	Lead	Cost/resources required	Links to other actions
A6	Review current horticultural contracts and maintenance arrangements	Make cost savings to help meet the adopted standards	2018	DDC	Existing staff resources	1
A7	Review the action plan of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy	N/A	Annually	DDC	Existing staff resources	N/A
A8	Conduct an audit of open space provision every five years	N/A	2018	DDC	Existing staff resources	N/A

Annex 1 Green Flag Award scheme - key criteria

The following is an outline of the key criteria against which every site for which an application is made will be judged.

Where certain criteria are not met, an applicant may provide justifications which will be taken into account in the judging process. Similarly, where changes in management practice are in progress but not yet fully implemented, transitional phases will be acknowledged and viewed positively.

Sites will inevitably offer a variety of facilities and be managed and developed in response to a wide range of opportunities and constraints. Judging criteria will be sufficiently flexible to allow for these as well as recognising and encouraging innovation.

In principle, any facility or feature which the site offers should conform to the relevant key criteria but the range of facilities offered and their appropriateness to the needs of the user community will also be taken into account.

1. A welcoming place

The overall impression for someone approaching and entering the park should be positive and inviting.

Features of particular importance are:

- good and safe access;
- effective signage to and in the park;
- adopting the principle of 'something for everyone'.

2. Healthy, safe and secure

The site must be a healthy, safe and secure place for all members of the community to use. Relevant issues must be addressed in management plans and implemented on the ground. New concerns which arise must be addressed promptly and appropriately. Particularly important is that:

- equipment and facilities must be safe to use;
- the site must be a secure place for all members of the community to use or traverse;
- dog fouling must be adequately dealt with;
- health and safety policies should be in place, in practice and reviewed; and
- toilets, drinking water, first aid, public telephones and emergency equipment where relevant (e.g. lifebelts by water) should be available on or near the park and clearly signposted.

3. Well maintained and clean

For aesthetic as well as health and safety reasons issues of cleanliness and maintenance must be addressed, in particular:

- litter and other waste management issues must be adequately dealt with;
- grounds, buildings, equipment and other features must be well maintained; and
- a policy on litter, vandalism and maintenance should be in place, in practice and regularly reviewed.

4. Sustainability

Methods used in maintaining the park and its facilities should be environmentally sound, relying on best practice according to current knowledge. Management should be aware of the range of techniques available to them, and demonstrate that informed choices have been made and are regularly reviewed.

Specifically:

- an environmental policy or charter and management strategy should be in place, in practice, and regularly reviewed;
- pesticide use should be minimised and justified;
- horticultural peat use should be eliminated;
- waste plant material generated in the park should be recycled;
- high horticultural and arboricultural standards should be demonstrated;
- energy conservation, pollution reduction, waste recycling and resource conservation measures should be used.

5. Conservation and heritage

Particular attention should be paid to the conservation and appropriate management of:

- natural features, wildlife and flora;
- landscape features; and
- buildings and structural features.

These features should serve their function well without placing undue pressure on the surrounding environment.

6. Community involvement

Park management authorities should actively pursue the involvement of members of the community who represent as many park user groups as possible. Management should be able to demonstrate:

- knowledge of user community and levels and pattern of use;

- evidence of community involvement in park management and/or development and results achieved;
- that there are appropriate levels of provision of recreational facilities for all sectors of the community.

7. Marketing

Is there:

- a marketing strategy in place? Is it in practice and regularly reviewed;
- good provision of information to users e.g. about management strategies, activities, features, ways to get involved; and
- effective promotion of the park as a community resource?

8. Management

A Green Flag site must have a well developed management plan. It must set out the balance between all the priorities, policies and partners that apply to a particular park. It should establish a time scale for putting the objectives into practice. It should also identify the contribution the park is making towards an area's wider strategic aims. It must be actively implemented and regularly reviewed.

Financially sound management of the park must also be demonstrated



Annex 2 Examples of possible individual projects at the District's Strategic Sites that could be funded via a range of external partners

Kearsney

- Car park extension
- Establish a friends organisation
- Visitor centre
- Improved off-road connectivity to link with the proposed urban expansion at Whitfield
- Improved and new pathways/walks/sculpture trails/signage
- Fencing and lighting to improve security of the site
- Repairs to perimeter and lake walls

Programmes developed to improve the strategic parks would be subject to specific consultation. The following project ideas are preliminary suggestions that, subject to a detailed appraisal, could be put forward for further consultation when such programmes are being developed. Any such activities would depend on securing additional capital funding, e.g. through proposals to funding bodies, and should involve partnership working between open space providers.

Russell Gardens/ Bushy Ruff

- New shelter/ outdoor classroom
- New fencing for the perimeter and tennis courts
- Condition surveys of historic terraces
- Refurbishment of toilet facilities
- Improved access and signage

Connaught Park

- Car parking facilities
- Café/ visitor centre
- Improved off-road connectivity linking to proposed new developments
- Improvements to pathways and lighting

Pencester Gardens

- New pathways and repairs to existing ones

Victoria Park

- New and improved pathways and signage
- Repairs to tennis courts

Marke Wood

- Refurbishment/ extension of the pavilion
- Café
- Improved parking facilities
- Improvements to pathways and signage
- Resurfacing of tennis courts