

Parks, Play and Open Space Improvement Plan Phase 1. 2017/18

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The council has agreed to an improvement programme is to promote greater use and enjoyment of the parks and open spaces and encourage positive activity. This programme is specifically intended to support the Council's priorities of: a) to "promote and protect our clean and green environment"; and b) the Health and Well-being Plan objective of 'creating outdoor spaces that make it easy to exercise and be active'.
- 1.2. To fund the required improvements the Council has allocated the provision of £500,000 for open space enhancements within the 2017/18 Capital Programme. A further £725,000 has been allocated for 2018/19 and £125,000 for 2019/20.
- 1.3. The first phase of this project is to identify a robust methodology to establish priorities as to which parks, open spaces and play areas to make the in investment in.
- 1.4. Officers from various Departments have been reviewing the approach and developing a methodology and for prioritising investment in the parks and open spaces on the basis of the following criteria:
 - Quality and value findings from the Active Place Parks and Open Space needs assessment
 - Parks and Open Space public consultation
 - Residents survey
 - Health data
 - Known operational requirements and issues
 - Areas of Vandalism and Anti-Social behaviour
 - Health and Safety Issues
 - Physical Activity Levels (Adults)
 - Deprivation
- 1.5. A summary of the assessments criteria is shown below.

2. QUALITY AND VALUE FINDINGS OF THE DRAFT OPEN SPACE ASSESSMENT

- 2.1. The Open Space Assessment, which is currently in draft, was commissioned to inform the development of the Thurrock Active Place Strategy. This Strategy will help inform the future direction of sport, parks and open space provision within the borough and will form part of the Thurrock Local Plan evidence base.

2.2. This part of the work involved the assessment of all categories of parks and open space within the borough with the aim of determining their quality and value.

2.3. The Open Space Assessment set out a standardised approach to assessing the quality and value of each site.

2.4. The following factors were considered when establishing a site's quality:

- Physical access, e.g. public transport links, directional signposts,
- Personal security, e.g. site is overlooked, natural surveillance
- Access-social, e.g. appropriate minimum entrance widths
- Parking, e.g. availability, specific, disabled parking
- Information signage, e.g. presence of up to date site information, notice boards
- Equipment and facilities, e.g. assessment of both adequacy and maintenance of provision such as seats, benches, bins, toilets
- Location value, e.g. proximity of housing, other greenspace
- Site problems, e.g. presence of vandalism, graffiti
- Healthy, safe and secure, e.g. fencing, gates, staff on site
- Maintenance and cleanliness, e.g. condition of general landscape & features
- Groups that the site meets the needs of, e.g. elderly, young people
- Site potential

2.5. The following factors were considered when establishing a site's value:

- Level of use (observations only), e.g., evidence of different user types (e.g. dog walkers, joggers, children) throughout day, located near school and/or community facility
- Context of site in relation to other open spaces
- Structural and landscape benefits, e.g., well located, high quality defining the identity/ area
- Ecological benefits, e.g., supports/promotes biodiversity and wildlife habitats
- Educational benefits, e.g., provides learning opportunities on nature/historic landscapes
- Social inclusion and health benefits, e.g., promotes civic pride, community ownership and a sense of belonging; helping to promote well-being
- Cultural and heritage benefits, e.g., historic elements/links (e.g. listed building, statues) and high profile symbols of local area
- Amenity benefits and a sense of place, e.g., attractive places that are safe and well maintained; helping to create specific neighbourhoods and landmarks
- Economic benefits, e.g., enhances property values, promotes economic activity and attracts people from near and far.

- 2.6. The assessment recognised that for different site categories not all factors were relevant and therefore the thresholds for high and low quality and value were set accordingly.
- 2.7. Quality and value are fundamentally different and can be unrelated. For example, a high quality space may be inaccessible and, thus, be of little value; whereas a rundown (poor quality) space may be the only one in an area and thus be immensely valuable. As a result, quality and value are also treated separately in terms of scoring.
- 2.8. To determine whether sites are high or low quality; the results of the site assessments were colour-coded against a baseline threshold (high being green and low being red). The primary aim of applying a threshold is to identify sites where investment and/or improvements are required. It can also be used to set an aspirational quality standard to be achieved at some point in the future and to inform decisions around the need to further protect sites from future development (particularly when applied with its respective value score in a matrix format).
- 2.9. The following summaries highlight the key results of the assessment:
- 2.10. Parks Summary

- 24 sites are classified as parks and gardens and these total over 90 hectares.
- Catchment gaps were noted to the Central Analysis Area and to the West Analysis Area. This was thought to be sufficiently served by other forms of open space; which are likely to provide similar recreation opportunities.
- Quality of parks is mixed; reflecting the range of provision identified. Low scoring sites is usually a result of poor appearance and need of new investment maintenance. There are also a number of sites lacking the ancillary facilities often expected of parks.
- High scoring sites for quality, such as Coalhouse Fort and Park and Grays Town Park, do so due to the wide range of features they contain and the excellent standard of provision.
- Coalhouse Fort and Park is the only site with Green Flag Award status.
- All sites (except four) were assessed as being of high value, with the important social interaction, health benefits, ecological value and sense of place sites offer being recognised.

2.11. Amenity Greenspace Summary

- There were 102 amenity greenspace sites in Thurrock, totalling over 189 hectares.

- Provision is centred more so in the Central Analysis Area. However, the East Analysis Area has the greatest amount of provision per 1,000 population (1.49).
- The five-minute walk time suggests a reasonable level of coverage. Although, gaps in provision were noted. These, however, were likely to be served by other forms of open space.
- Overall amenity greenspace quality is mixed. Over half of sites rate below the threshold with a handful of sites having specific issues; often due to size, access or maintenance.
- In addition to its multifunctional role, amenity greenspace makes a valuable contribution to visual aesthetics for communities – hence most sites (77%) rate above the value threshold.
- There are 19 sites rating low for quality and value. Where they cannot be improved, some may be better suited to potentially become different forms of open space.

2.12. Play Summary

- There are 64 play provision sites in Thurrock; a total of over seven hectares. Half of sites are identified as containing a form of casual or piece of equipment aimed at older ages.
- The West Analysis Area has a slightly greater amount of provision per 1,000 populations. However, it is the Central Analysis Area with the greater amount of total provision.
- The 10 minute walk time accessibility standard covers the majority of the area. However, there is a slight gap to the eastern edge of the West Analysis Area.
- Overall, quality of play sites is mixed. Only a slightly greater proportion of play sites (53%) rate above the threshold for quality. Lower quality scoring sites tends to reflect a lack in range of equipment and/or its general condition.
- Nearly all play provision rates above the threshold for value; reflecting the social, healthy and developmental benefits provision can provide.

3. PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PUBLIC CONSULTATION SUMMARY

- 3.1. An online and paper public consultation was undertaken as part of the Open Space Assessment between December 2015 and February 2016. This resulted in a total of 207 responses being received. This is a relatively small sample, which gives a confidence limit of +/- 6.8%, and under-represents the views of male users and key users i.e. children and the 18-24 age group. Consequently, while the data is indicative of public opinion and behaviour it is recommended that its results are not used in isolation.
- 3.2. The headline results from the Public Parks and Open Space Consultation were as follows:

<i>Local parks –</i>	<i>Play areas –</i>
<p>People visit parks and gardens for several reasons; more than one in four people go to either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play informal sport (42.9%) • Walk the dog (30.8%) • Allow children to play (30.8%) • Enjoy the views (28.0%) • Meet family and friends (26.9%) 	<p>People tend to have fewer reasons for a visit, predictably the main one is to allow children to play. More than one in four people go to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow children to play (73.7%) • Meet family and friends (27.2%)
<p>Reasons for people not visiting parks and gardens include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard of the facility (44.4%) • Personal safety (34.2%) • Toilets and car parking (32.5%) 	<p>Reasons for people not visiting play areas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard of the facility (50.0%) • Toilets and car parking (25.6%) • Personal safety (23.3%)

4. THURROCK HEALTHWATCH PUBLIC CONSULTATION

4.1. Thurrock Healthwatch conducted a public consultation and the report identified the following themes:

- Access for those with mobility issues
- Cost
- Maintenance and cleanliness in parks
- None local, nearby
- Not enough to do there e.g. Groups, equipment, things to see
- Preference
- Raising awareness
- Safety (personal safety such as not wanting to walk alone, or fears of being mugged)

4.2. Healthwatch have made the following Community recommendations to reflect feedback received through public consultation:

- Community to set up groups to support parks and upkeep.
- Use time banking services to increase volunteering to maintain parks and green spaces.

- Look at ways to increase safety in parks and green spaces such as lighting, and CCTV. Offer more within parks and green spaces such as voluntary run tea rooms, food outlets, gym sessions etc.

5. THURROCK DISABILITY PARTNERSHIP BOARD

5.1. Thurrock Disability Partnership Board have previously been invited to provide their views on how outdoor spaces could be created to make it easy to exercise and be active and how this might be achieved. Feedback provided included the provision of:

- More “outside Gym” facilities – in public view. Consideration to be given to the merits of micro gyms
- More published/advertised dog walking routes (e.g. dog bin facilities)
- More facilities for people to “gather/rest/refresh” – and accessible. Involvement of disabled people/groups in developing planning policy (someone responsible for access)
- Ensuring that outdoor places are accessible to everybody in the community.

6. THE RESIDENT’S SURVEY SUMMARY

6.1. The 2016 Residents Survey in Thurrock showed that residents in Thurrock have varying levels of satisfaction with local parks, playgrounds and open spaces in their area. Data from the residents survey indicates that whilst satisfaction in areas such as The Homesteads and Corringham and Fobbing is relatively high, satisfaction in the following areas is the lowest in the borough:

- East Tilbury
- Stifford Clays
- Tilbury St Chads
- Ockendon
- Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park
- West Thurrock and South Stifford

6.2. There is also local variation in residents’ perception of the role in Thurrock Council in terms of making it easy to use outdoor spaces for exercise and physical activity, with high proportions of residents in some of the Eastern areas agreeing that it is easy to exercise outside (Stanford East and Corringham Town, The Homesteads and Orsett). However, the following areas have the lowest proportions of residents feeling it is easy to exercise outside:

- Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park
- Tilbury St Chads
- Stifford Clays

- Ockendon
 - East Tilbury
- 6.3. It is interesting to note that there is also variation in this perception between those with and without a disability (75% of those without a disability feel it is easy to exercise compared to 69% of those with a disability). This indicates that accessibility may need to be considered.

7. HEALTH DATA SUMMARY

- 7.1. In addition to 'creating open spaces that make it easy for residents to be active', increasing physical activity in children through higher quality and accessible play provision will also support in the achievement of the health and well-being strategy goal 5, objective A to 'increase the number of people who are a healthy weight' in Thurrock.
- 7.2. The latest National Childhood Obesity Programme (NCMP) data for year 6 (age 10-11) shows that there is variation in the levels of obesity in the Borough. The lowest proportions of children who are obese are observed in the East and North of the borough. Higher levels of obesity are observed to the West and South of the borough, in particular the following areas
- West Thurrock and South Stifford
 - Ockendon
 - Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park
 - Tilbury St Chads
 - Grays Riverside
 - Belhus
 - Aveley and Uplands
- 7.3. It is recommended that focus on improvements to parks and play provision should be targeted to those parks in the highlighted areas above to help reduce the inequalities in health experienced in the borough. As a priority specific focus should be given to West Thurrock and South Stifford, Ockendon and Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park and Tilbury St. Chads, all of which are all in the highest quintile in Thurrock for Childhood Obesity at year 6 (age 10-11) and which also predominantly feature in the residents survey feedback outlined above.
- 7.4 Further investigation to correlate the quality of the park provision with the NCMP data is being undertaken, and will also be used to ensure that resource is targeted appropriately.

8. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS (ADULTS)

- 8.1. Sport England figures for the amount of adult physical activity at 3x30 mins per week have been used to identify the least active areas of the Borough.

9. DEPRIVATION

- 9.1. Parks and open spaces offer residents free access opportunities to be active. Consideration has therefore been given to areas that are in the national Indices of Multiple Deprivation lower 2 quartiles.

10. OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF NEED AND PRIORITIES.

- 10.1. The overall assessment of need and priorities have been assessed using the criteria above and are tabled in Appendix A. These results will be used to inform where future investments are made.

10.2. NEXT STEPS

- 10.3. The first phase of the projects was to identify a robust methodology to establish priority for investment. The second phase is a more detailed review of the areas identified and a rolling programme of individual plans developed for the sites prioritised. In some instances, where simple and immediate improvements can be made, they will be. In other areas where redesigning is required, plans will be developed and consulted on.
- 10.4. Where significant works are required they will be scheduled, where possible, for the winter and early spring when parks are less busy.