

By: Emma-Jane Allen, Senior Infrastructure and Delivery Officer, DDC
To: Dover and Shepway Health and Wellbeing Board, 23 October 2012
Subject: Draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

Summary:

Open space is essential to urban areas, providing significant quality of life and health benefits for the local community. As part of the 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 most types of open space, particularly for accessible natural and semi-natural open space. 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. For example Kearsney Abbey attracts large numbers of regular visitors from both within and beyond the district. Although the day-to-day maintenance of these urban parks is 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, which is a lower tally than in neighbouring authorities; increasing the number of awards is a major objective.

Dover District's 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 need, publicly accessible open space in the district has been audited and standards for its provision have been proposed. Standards apply to the following categories:

- 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
- Community gardens and allotments

The proposed standards will be consulted upon and taken to examination in public as part of the Land Allocations Local Plan document. Strategies are being developed to demonstrate how the standards may be delivered, in this case focussing on provision of parks, amenity green space and multifunctional open space. The National Planning Policy Framework specifies that 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 expected future changes and barriers to improving health and well-being (paragraph 171), therefore consultation with the Health and Wellbeing Board will form an important part of shaping the strategy.

The Parks and Open Spaces strategy will include distribution maps, an analysis of audit findings, identification of strategic sites and action plans. Current levels of provision will be assessed against the accessible green standard to identify any gaps in provision or spare capacity. Information presented in the strategy will help to ensure existing funds are deployed as efficiently as possible and will be used to support applications for external capital funding. By 23rd October, the strategy will be well advanced and the Health and Wellbeing Board will be presented with the latest findings.

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