



Blaby District Council

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2024-2034

January 2024

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2024-2034

Original Publish Date	15/01/2024	Review Frequency	Every 3 Years	Current Version Publish Date	15/01/2024
Approved By*	Group Managers (Collective)	Approval Date*	15/01/2024	Version Number	001
Author Job Title	Parks and Open Spaces Development Officer	Service Area	Neighborhood Services	Document Register Reference	A1509

*Approved by and 'approval date' are in relation to the most recent version.

Review History			
Version*	Reviewed By (Job Title)	Review Completion Date	Brief Description of Changes (add 'no changes required' if applicable)

*Version number remains the same if no significant changes are made upon review.

To what and to whom this strategy applies

This new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for Blaby District Council provides strategic direction for the future of district council owned parks and open spaces; and to define how BDC open spaces are to be managed in a practical way that gives regard to emerging environmental legislation through site specific management plans.

Appendices

A – Supplementary Technical Report (TEP, 2023)

B – Landscape Management Plans (LMP) for strategic sites

Introduction

The Environment Partnership (TEP) Ltd was commissioned by Blaby District Council in 2022 to produce a Blaby Parks and Open Space Strategy (POSS) for the District. The POSS provides an update to the 2012 Green Space Strategy and covers the period 2023—2033.

Throughout the lifetime of the previous strategy, significant capital investment has been made to parks and open spaces in the District for people and nature which is echoed through two Green Flag Award success in 2022.



Image 1: Glen Hills Nature Reserve, a Green Flag Award winning site, 2022

Improvements have been made in the face of significant challenges for parks and open spaces, including continued financial challenges and increased pressure from use, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Strategy has been developed by TEP alongside Blaby District Council and its key stakeholders through research, site audits and consultation to assess the key challenges District Council owned parks and open spaces face. The strategy aims to deliver practical, pragmatic solutions to address these challenges.

Parks and open spaces are important due to their valuable contribution to quality of life, health and the economy. Provision of a range of open space facilities in our towns and villages is important in planning for a sustainable future and is embedded in national planning policy.

The POSS recognizes the importance of parks and open spaces and the multiple functions they provide.

The Strategy aims to ensure that parks and open spaces are managed well for both people and nature, and are accessible to address common themes including:

- Sustainable and active travel
- Accessible spaces for recreation, sport and play
- Community cohesion
- Mitigating impacts against climate change
- Improving biodiversity; and
- Active lifestyles.

Parks and open spaces continue to offer sustainable approaches to global challenges including climate change and the biodiversity crisis and provide, in part, a solution to mitigating risks relating to these challenges.



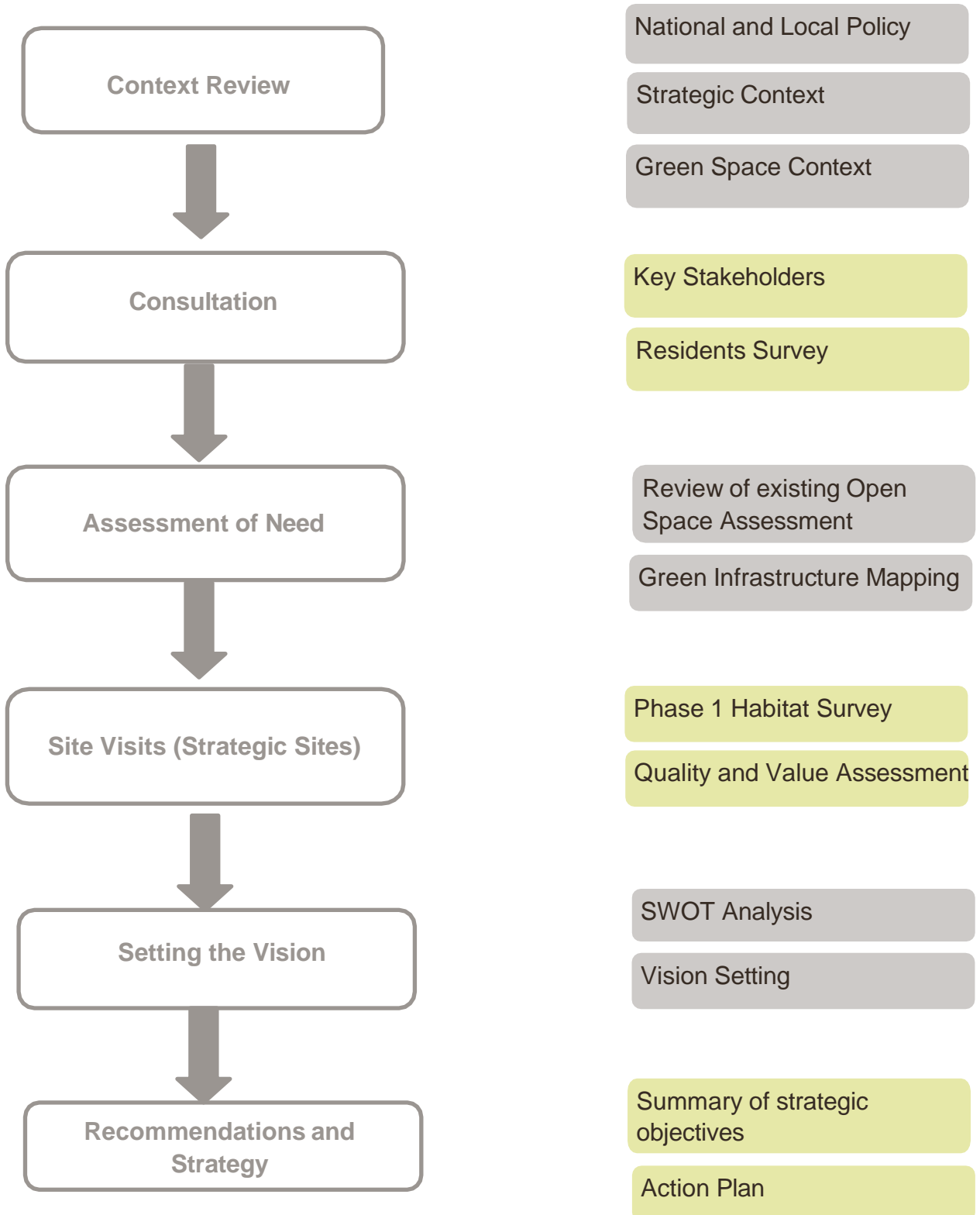
Image 2: Bouskell Park Amenity Grassland

The POSS relates to Council owned parks and open spaces within Blaby District and provides a basic guide to maintaining each open space typology identified below:

Open Space Typology	Description
Allotments and Community Gardens	Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion.
Amenity Green space	Most commonly but not exclusively found in housing areas. Includes informal recreation green spaces and village greens.
Cemeteries and Burial Grounds	Cemeteries and Burial Grounds including disused churchyards and other burial grounds.
Civic Spaces	Hard surfaced areas usually located within town or city centers.
Natural and Semi-Natural Green space	Includes country parks, nature reserves, publicly accessible woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands, wetlands and wastelands.
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Usually in the form of pitches or other sports provision, such as football, rugby or cricket pitches as well as tennis courts or bowling greens.
Parks and Gardens	Includes urban parks and formal gardens. Parks usually contain a variety of facilities and may have one or more of the other types of open space within them.
Play Space (Children)	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction specifically designed as equipped play facilities for children.
Play Space (Youth and Teenagers)	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction specifically designed as equipped play facilities for young people.

Methodology

The POSS has been developed as an update to the existing 2012 Strategy and draws on key themes using the methodology outlined below. TEP worked alongside Council officers to develop a pragmatic approach to Blaby District Council owned parks and open spaces.



Scope

The POSS covers Blaby District Council owned Parks and Open Spaces only. Additional Management Plans are provided for the ten Strategic Sites identified in the Strategy, including:

- Bouskell Park
- Countesthorpe Country Park
- Crow Mills
- Fosse Meadows
- Glenhills Nature Area
- Jubilee Park
- Osiers Nature Area
- Whetstone Way North and South
- Whistle Way

Strategic Site Assessment

The strategic assessment criteria used in the previous (2012) strategy was applied to existing strategic sites. Existing and new sites were audited and all met 'Green Flag' standard. 'Strategic sites ranged from Fair to Excellent quality, with Bouskell Park and Glen Hills achieving the highest score at 95% (excellent quality).

Full site audit results are provided in Appendix B of the Technical Report.

Consultation

A public consultation questionnaire was issued in 2022 to gather views on the provision of District Council owned parks and open spaces, 201 responses were received. The following points represent key headlines from the survey:

- Natural and Semi-Natural greenspaces are used the most often (71.1% of respondents)
- Parks and open spaces are used most for walking and relaxation
- Of the Strategic sites Bouskell Park and Fosse Meadows are visited most often daily, and Fosse Meadows is visited most overall.

The following were noted as of most value to users:

- Safe access for cyclists and pedestrians
- Additional tree planting and wildlife interpretation boards
- Additional facilities including toilets, benches and bins
- Mobile catering facilities
- Secure, dog walking areas

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis was undertaken to identify key themes outlined below. SWOT analysis was also completed for each strategic site, the details of which are provided in each site-specific management plan.

Strengths

- Value of habitats for a range of species
- Free access for all
- Links as wider GI assets
- Aesthetic value
- Multi-functionality
- Traffic-free

Weaknesses:

- Access – restricted on some sites for all abilities.
- Lack of parking at most sites.
- Outdated information
- Multiple landowners across some wider assets.
- Redundant or lack of street furniture.

Opportunities:

- Partnership opportunities with Parish Councils, external organisations
- Change in maintenance regimes
- Rationalising street furniture
- Interpretation of habitat features
- Commercial e.g. mobile coffee / pizza vans
- Tree planting
- Funding through emerging opportunities e.g. Biodiversity Net Gain

Threats:

- Budgetary constraints and reduced funding
- Antisocial behaviour
- Dog fouling
- Litter
- Invasive non-native species
- Climate change
- Development

Strategic Vision

The strategic vision has been developed through review of all existing documentation, site visits and discussions with key stakeholders.

“To ensure Blaby District Council owned parks and open spaces are sustainable, high quality, accessible and continue to provide value to people, place, and nature.”

The Council acknowledges that each park and open space is unique and that flexibility in approach to management is required to ensure each site maximizes its potential for:

- Biodiversity
- Meeting the needs for people; and
- Responding to existing and emerging challenges.

The Vision can be achieved through a combination of robust management plans and clear planning policy which ensures parks and open spaces continue to contribute to the local environment and meet the needs of Blaby’s residents.

To achieve this, the Council should aim to meet the following strategic objectives which include specific actions against each objective.



Strategic objectives

The Parks and Open Space Strategy has resulted in the following 11 strategic objectives and actions that will address key issues relating to District Council owned parks and open spaces:

Objective 1: To review all strategic parks and open spaces owned by Blaby District Council and recommend the best ownership and management for their respective communities:

Park and Open Space	Purpose	Car Park (Y/N)	Recommendation
Bouskell Park, Blaby	The park is a wildlife rich asset in a village location, visited by people of all ages and abilities for recreation and greater understanding of the natural environment. The historic ice house also provides a tourist attraction.	Yes	To retain the park including the car park and seek to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduce car park charges (subject to a business case), - introduction of a licence to allow catering facilities on site, - explore funding options through BNG, manager the heritage feature to ensure it remains a well maintained asset.
Crow Mills, Blaby	Crow Mills is a wildlife rich asset and provides an accessible green space on the urban fringe.	No	To offer to transfer ownership of this site to the Parish Council or conservation organisation including any associated or remaining commuted sum. If retained by BDC then seek to reduce maintenance by the creation of wildlife zones to improve biodiversity; explore funding opportunities through increased provision of BNG units; to retain as a walkway to support the Council's walk ride priority.
Countesthorpe Country Park, Countesthorpe	The park is a wildlife rich asset located between two villages, visited by people of all ages and abilities for recreation and greater understanding of the natural environment. The park provides accessible pathways for site users.	No	To offer to transfer to a third party such as the Parish Council or a Conservation organisation including any commuted sum. If retained by BDC then seek to reduce maintenance to increase biodiversity; for example, through increased provision of wildflower planting; promote and maintain existing walkways between Blaby and Countesthorpe, and seek funding opportunities through increased provision of BNG units.

Park and Open Space	Purpose	Car Park (Y/N)	Recommendation
Fosse Meadows, Sharnford	The park is a wildlife rich asset in Sharnford and surrounding area, visited by people of all ages and abilities for recreation and greater understanding of the natural environment. The park also offers ample parking, an equipped play area, bird hide, lake, walks and much more.	Yes	<p>To retain provision of this site and explore commercial opportunities and financially sustainable development including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discovery centre attraction - Solar and energy generation - Car park charging (subject to a business case) - Engage third sector organisations to undertake specialist maintenance, land management, and community educational events and activities. - Seek funding opportunities through increased provision of BNG units - Reduce maintenance through creation of wildlife zones to improve biodiversity such as increased provision of ground flora such as wildflower planting.
Glen Hills Nature Area, Glen Parva	The park is a wildlife rich asset in the Sence and Soar Valley green wedge, visited by people of all ages and abilities for recreation and greater understanding of the natural environment.	No	<p>To offer to transfer ownership of this site to the Parish Council.</p> <p>If retained by BDC then seek to reduce maintenance to increase biodiversity through increased provision of wildflower planting. Explore additional funding opportunities through provision of BNG or other externally available funding.</p>
Jubilee Park, Enderby	The park, located in the village of Enderby, provides a flood capacity whilst creating a wildlife rich asse, visited by people and nature.	Yes	<p>To offer to transfer ownership of the site including the car park to the Parish Council.</p> <p>If retained by BDC then:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seek to reduce maintenance to increase biodiversity through increased provision of wildflower planting. - Explore additional funding opportunities through provision of BNG or other externally available funding. - Continue to support its function as a natural flood plain.
The Osiers Nature Area, Braunstone	The park provides valuable and varied habitat for a range of species whilst providing accessible pathways for site users.	No	<p>To offer to transfer ownership of this site to the Town Council.</p> <p>If retained by BDC then:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seek to reduce maintenance to increase biodiversity through increased provision of wildflower planting. - Explore additional funding opportunities through provision of BNG or other externally available funding.

Park and Open Space	Purpose	Car Park (Y/N)	Recommendation
			- Seek to create wildlife zones to improve biodiversity subject to available funding.
Whetstone Way, Whetstone	Whetstone Way provides an important green corridor for people and nature on the urban-rural fringe.	No	To offer to transfer ownership of this site to the Parish Council. If retained by BDC this site will remain a walkway to support the Council's walk/ride priority.
Whistle Way, Narborough	Whistle Way provides an important green corridor for people and nature whilst maintaining a connection between the urban-rural fringe.	No	To offer to transfer ownership of this site to the Parish Council. If retained by BDC this site will remain a walkway to support the Council's walk/ride priority.
Narborough Park	An open space valued by the local community and currently leased to the Parish Council	Yes	To offer to transfer ownership of the park to the Parish Council.
Southey Close	An open space valued by the local community including a football pitch and play area.	No	To offer to transfer ownership of the park to the Parish Council subject to full consideration of any future land management obligations on the district Council.
Thorpe Astley Community Centre and playing fields	This is an important open space valued by the community and currently leased by the Town Council.	No	To offer to transfer ownership of this site to the Town Council.
Meadows Sports Ground Countesthorpe	Purchased to secure the use of this Community Asset for use as a sporting facility within the District. Consists of 6 football pitches and a cricket pitch.	Yes	Continue to lease to the sports association on a long term lease (100 yrs) with rent reviews as per the contractual arrangements.

Objective 2: To continue the current strategy of not adopting open space offered by developers and to regularly assess land assets to identify underutilised sites and consider transferring or disposing of them for the benefit of the wider community.

- Regularly assess assets for potential disposal by Council.
- Explore rationalising ownership of surplus open spaces.

Objective 3: To ensure all parks and open spaces are considered for any future Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) benefits.

- Work with planning team to grasp BNG opportunities
- Find best BNG sites and gather data for feasibility study

Objective 4: To implement the management plans subject to appropriate resources being available.

- Provide eco-friendly maintenance.
- Ensure parks and open spaces are safe and accessible.
- Review site management plans regularly.

Objective 5: To ensure parks and open spaces contribute to the Council's 2030 net zero target through its management operations including the use of the land.

- Consider use of alternative energies on open space assets.
- Consider the reduction of maintenance on sites
- Increase the use of electric maintenance tools.

Objective 6: To support the Council's parks and open spaces so that where possible they are easily accessible and complement the Council's walk/ride priority.

- Work collaboratively across Council teams to promote existing non traffic pedestrian and cycle connectivity
- Improve open space access for active travel.

Objective 7: To consider how parks and open spaces can be managed to enhance biodiversity and wildlife through more sympathetic maintenance, appropriate planting schemes, and other ecological enhancements.

- Implement site management plans within budget.
- Conduct yearly site quality assessments using relevant criteria.
- Explore rewilding sites with wildflowers and trees.

Objective 8: To maximize the use of community spaces for recreational purposes and commercial opportunities suitable to the site.

- Support appropriate community events.
- Assess site suitability for commercial activities like on-site catering and event hire.

Objective 9: To continually strive to ensure that parks are financially self-sustaining.

- Seek community groups help for park improvements.
- Implement parking fees where financially viable.
- Find external funding for site upgrades.

Objective 10: To encourage community involvement and participation in maintaining parks and open spaces.

- Promote community involvement via volunteering and corporate events.
- Conduct occasional user surveys to identify improvement and satisfaction levels.

Objective 11: To promote site locations, provide informative signage, and encourage educational programs on-site where appropriate.

- Market the parks with updated literature.
- Partner with schools and universities for informative signage.

A detailed Action Plan is included in Appendix F of the technical report which sets out how the Council aims to achieve the strategic objectives. The Strategy has been developed with existing resources in mind allowing for flexibility in operations to align to available resources.

Larger Park improvement schemes and projects identified within individual management plans which cannot be delivered within existing revenue may be delivered with alternative income streams. In the first instance external funding will be sought through either available grant funding, S106 monies, and biodiversity net gain opportunities. If no external funding is available, then approved schemes may be funded through the capital program if sufficient funding is available. Projects set out in the management plans are aspirational subject to resources and their inclusion does not commit the Council to deliver on every item.

End of document