

MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

improving our parks
and open spaces

PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS

MANAGEMENT PLANS

ALLINGTON OPEN SPACE

WARD: ALLINGTON

MP 0601

MARCH 2006



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Management Plan for Allington Open Space provides guidelines for the maintenance and the development of the site over the next three years. It outlines the adopted maintenance regime and describes the further improvements to the site which will be carried out as part of the process of implementing the Green Spaces Strategy.

Allington Open Space is situated in the Allington area of Maidstone, approximately three kilometres north-west of the town centre. It is accessible by Castle Road.

This green Open Space has been created on the disused Castle Quarries, later a council refuse tip, by covering the settled refuse material with topsoil, seeding it with grass and planting a grove of trees. Its semi-natural character is created by long grass with the trees planted in the centre and along the boundaries. The site is quiet and secluded, used mainly by local dog walkers.

There is a small car park, a new (2006) junior football pitch and a couple of picnic benches.

Allington Open Space is located close to the river Medway and forms part of the River Medway Green Corridor. It is within easy walking distance of the Allington Lock, following a public footpath (Medway Valley Walk).

2. RELATIONSHIP TO COUNCIL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents which are relevant to Allington Open Space:

- Green Spaces Strategy (2005)
- "Play for Today" Towards a Strategy for Outdoor Equipped Play Areas 2004-08 (2005)
- Sports and Play Facilities Strategy (2003)
- Maidstone Matters: Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough (2003)
- Best Value Review: A Clean and Tidy Borough (2002)
- The Local Cultural Strategy for Maidstone
- The Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Guidance (2005)

These documents recognise that public green open spaces are an important part of the environment in which we live. The quality and quantity of those open spaces have an effect on our quality of life. They are valuable and free resources for recreation and education. There is need in Maidstone to further improve the access, infrastructure, facilities and the biodiversity of public green spaces. The Green Spaces Strategy (2005) has set the way forward with a plan of improvements for years 2005-10.

3. VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE SITE

3.1 The overall vision for Allington Open Space is:

“To create and maintain a green open space which provides opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, as well as quiet contemplation, for local residents.”

3.2 The key objectives for the site are to:

- Ensure that the ground is clean and well-maintained.
- Ensure that it is safe to use at all times.
- Enhance the natural environment and the biodiversity value of the site.
- Provide a well-maintained sports facility.
- Develop and maintain links with the local community in order to consult on the management and maintenance of the site.

4. THE SITE AND ITS FACILITIES

4.1 Entrances and boundaries

The only entrance onto the site is off Castle Road. It has a vehicle height restriction bar, is shared by vehicles and pedestrians and leads into a car park. The height bar is in poor condition and there is no signage by the entrance.

The south-western boundary runs along the Strood to Paddock Wood railway line; it is defined by secure chain-link fence.

The south-eastern boundary is open near the railway fence and allows access to a wedge-shaped piece of woodland. Further along, a chain-link fence separates the Open Space from a Southern Water site. There is also a steep gully, overgrown with trees and scrub.

The remaining boundaries run along Castle Road and the access road to Allington Marina, with a wooden post and rail fence along the road edge.

4.2 Roads, paths, cycleways and car parks

There are no hard pathways or cycleways across the site. A peripheral grass path is maintained through regular use by dog walkers and an occasional cut with a lawn mower. There is scope for creating a more interesting network of footpaths.

The car park, which is surrounded by anti-vehicle tubular railings, is part tarmac and part chipped stone. A lockable gate in the tubular railing allows access onto the site by ground maintenance vehicles. Two narrow gaps in the railing allow pedestrian access. The car park and the access drive are in need of resurfacing; the pedestrian entrances onto the ground should be improved, taking into account the need to prevent unauthorised vehicles, especially motorcycles, from entering the site.

4.3 Lighting

There is no lighting on the site.

4.4 Grass areas

Most of the grass is allowed to grow long with just one cut a year ('conservation grass'). There is a junior football pitch, picnic area and the paths where grass is kept short.

4.5 Trees and other vegetation

Native tree species grow in the middle and along the periphery of the site. More trees can be seen in the areas surrounding the site. There is scope for more tree planting.

4.6 Biodiversity assessment

The trees, scrub and herbaceous vegetation are of considerable biodiversity value as they form a variety of habitats, meadow and woodland edge being most prevalent. These conditions are favoured by many animals: birds, bats, reptiles and others.

Medway Valley Countryside Partnership are currently conducting a Phase 1 habitat survey of the site. The results will be known in the autumn 2006.

4.7 Signage

There are no information signs on the site. Signage should be provided giving MBC contact details, byelaws and information on the biodiversity and local walking routes.

4.8 Provision of seating and bins

There are two picnic benches and two seats on the site. This is not sufficient. There are also litter bins and a dog litter bin by the car park.

4.9 Provision of recreational facilities

There is a junior football pitch with goal posts. The posts are provided by the council for the football season from September to April.

The paths provide opportunities for walking and exercising of dogs, and picnic benches for picnics in quiet green surroundings.

There is quite a lot of interest to a nature lover.

5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Allington Open Space is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council. The routine maintenance is carried out by a contractor, Maidstone Borough Services.

5.1 Cleanliness

Litter bins are inspected and emptied weekly.

Dog litter bins are emptied twice each week by a specialist contractor.

Litter is collected from the football pitch and its buffer zone prior to each grass cut. It is collected from the whole meadow area prior to its annual cut.

5.2 Safety and security

The site is secluded and not overlooked by any properties. It is open at all times.

Visitors can report problems:

- general – to MBC parks hotline on 01622 602747
- anti-social behaviour – to Community Safety Officer on 01622 602598
- any crime should be reported to the police.

5.3 Infrastructure maintenance

The wooden goal-posts are provided for the football season by the council and maintained by the grounds contractor. The ground in front of the goals is renovated each spring by cultivating and re-seeding with grass seed.

5.4 Horticultural management regimes

Most of the grass area is cut each year in August-September and the cuttings remain on site. This prevents the encroachment of scrub and maintains the meadow habitat.

The football pitch and its buffer zone are mown with a cylinder mower all through the year. The grass path is cut with a rotary mower when needed.

Non-intervention management has been applied to the trees. Any deadwood is retained on site.

6. FORTHCOMING IMPROVEMENTS

Following site audits and a public consultation in summer 2005, a list of improvements has been drawn up. Most of this work will be carried out by a specialist landscape contractor between autumn 2006 and spring 2008. This is part of the Green Spaces Strategy work aimed at enhancing the quality of public green spaces.

The following projects are planned:

- Carry out an ecological survey of the site during 2006 and analyse the results.
- Plant more native trees.
- Resurface the car park.
- Refurbish the anti-vehicle railing.
- Provide two suitable pedestrian entrances from the car park, and a new contractors' gate.
- Provide new height restriction barrier.
- Provide a hard path from the car park to the picnic place.
- Provide additional seats and litter bin(s)
- Install information signs.

7. FUNDING

There are a number of sources of funding, both internal and external, for further improvements to the facilities and the maintenance regimes, which can be considered for this site.

Green Spaces Strategy – improvements to the value of £500,000 are being implemented in Maidstone's main green open spaces during 2005-2008.

Planning obligations – Section 106 agreements on new residential developments can generate funds to improve existing public green spaces directly related to those developments.

Big Lottery Breathing Spaces Programme – starting in summer 2006, aimed at community groups involved in creating and maintaining wildlife-friendly green spaces in their local area. Grants of £300-10,000 to voluntary groups and to parish/town councils.

Awards for All – give grants towards projects aimed at improving quality of life of local communities. Grants of £500-5,000 are available to community groups, parish/town councils, schools and health bodies.

Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (Environment Programme) – promotes environmental improvements which balance the needs of people and wildlife, especially those aiming to conserve 'hard-to-fund', or lower profile, UK native species and habitats under demonstrable threat of loss or decline in urban, rural or marine areas.

Safer and Stronger Communities government funding stream – is aimed at tackling crime and anti-social behaviour through improving the condition of streets and other public spaces.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme – for projects within 10 miles of a landfill or extraction site, aimed at provision and maintenance of public amenities. Grants £250- 25,000.

8. RESULTS OF QUALITY AUDITS

Quality audits are carried out in parks and open spaces at regular intervals. Various attributes of each site are given points between 1 and 5, where 5 is the maximum score.

ALLINGTON OPEN SPACE					
ATTRIBUTE	AUDIT DATE AND SCORE				
	2004	2008	2010		
Main entrance	3				
Boundaries including hedges, gates etc	4				
Roads, paths, cycleways and access points	1				
Parking	4				
Availability of public transport	-				
Lighting	none				
Cleanliness	2				
Planted areas (trees, shrubs, floral displays)	3				
Grass areas	3				
Litter and dog litter bins	3				
Seats	3				
Toilets	none				
Health and safety	4				
Nature conservation value	3				
Access for disabled	-				
Information	-				
Sustainability	-				