

**MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY**

improving our parks  
and open spaces

**PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS**

**MANAGEMENT PLANS**

**BARMING HEATH RECREATION GROUND**

**WARD: HEATH**

**MP 0603**

**MARCH 2006**



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Management Plan for Barming Heath Recreation Ground 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.

Barming Heath Recreation Ground is situated in the Heath area of Maidstone, approximately three kilometres west of the town centre. It is surrounded by residential areas, with busy Hermitage Lane along its eastern boundary. The history of the site is not known.

The site is roughly rectangular and uniformly flat, with mature lime trees growing along its eastern and southern boundaries, giving it a bit of a rural character.

The Heath serves the local community. It has a play area and a 'teenage hangout'. It is popular with dog walkers. A football pitch with changing rooms is used by a local football club.

## **2. RELATIONSHIP TO COUNCIL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents which are relevant to Barming Heath Recreation Ground:

- 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. Some of those improvements have already been implemented at Barming Heath Recreation Ground.

## **3. VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE SITE**

### **3.1 The overall vision for the Recreation Ground is:**

**"To create and maintain a recreation ground which provides opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, as well as quiet contemplation, for local residents."**

### **3.2 The key objectives for the Ground are to:**

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

## **4. THE SITE AND ITS FACILITIES**

### **4.1 Entrances and boundaries**

The northern boundary consists of timber fencing and is owned and maintained by the Maidstone Housing Trust. The western boundary is formed by the fences of adjoining private properties. The eastern and southern boundaries are formed by streets, with tubular metal railing installed to prevent vehicle access. This railing was painted green in spring 2006.

There are six open pedestrian access points to the site, as gaps in fencing or metal railing; they are rather unattractive, with grass worn out. In the north-eastern section two wide lockable gates allow access for emergency vehicles to the housing estate. One of them, off Hermitage Lane, is used by grounds maintenance vehicles.

### **4.2 Roads, paths and cycleways**

The only hard surface is a short 'grass-crete' road in the north-east corner of the site providing access to the housing estate for emergency vehicles.

### **4.3 Lighting**

There is no lighting on the site.

### **4.4 Grass areas**

The site is mainly amenity grass. Meadow areas have been trialled in 2006 in the peripheral sections, in order to enhance the appearance and the biodiversity value of the site.

### **4.5 Trees and other vegetation**

Mature lime trees grow in single rows along the street boundaries, with a small number of limes remaining by the northern boundary. The lime trees along the southern

boundary are interspersed with younger and smaller varieties of ornamental apple and cherry, planted for the colour of their spring blossom.

#### **4.6 Biodiversity assessment**

The mature lime trees offer shelter and food to insects and birds, and may also be offering shelter to bats. It would appear that originally lime trees were planted along the entire boundary, but many have been lost. Some have been replaced with ornamental varieties of plum and apple, providing nectar and fruit.

Both biodiversity and amenity value of the site could be enhanced by planting more trees, of native species, already present in the area, alongside existing rows of trees and in other selected places.

A shrubbery of both good amenity species and of native species along some of the northern boundary would aid biodiversity, as would leaving some of the grass unmown in spring and summer. The north east corner has poorer soil and particularly good flora with white and red clover, plantain, meadow cranesbill, selfheal, ox-eye, mallow and poppies.

Snowdrops and native daffodils could be naturalised under the lime trees.

#### **4.7 Provision of seating and bins**

There are several seats in the play area and under the lime trees. The seats along Hermitage Lane should be removed and placed in more suitable locations.

There is a litter bin in the play area and dog litter bins in the corners of the site.

#### **4.8 Signage**

There is no signage on the site. Information board containing the council contacts and byelaws should be installed.

#### **4.9 Provision of recreational facilities**

The recreation ground has a pavilion with changing rooms. There is one full-size football pitch, with goal posts, in regular use by local clubs from beginning of September till the end of April. A length of plastic netting stops footballs from rolling into Hermitage Lane; this should be replaced with a more permanent structure.

Near the pavilion there is a sports wall and some 'hanging-out' seats for young people and a play area for young children (refurbished in spring 2005).

### **5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

Barming Heath is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council. The day-to-day maintenance is carried out by a contractor Maidstone Borough Services.

## **5.1 Cleanliness**

Litter bins in the play area are inspected and emptied weekly. During the grass-cutting season litter is collected from the site prior to each cut. This includes the meadow areas.

Dog litter bins are emptied twice every week.

## **5.2 Safety and security**

The site is overlooked by a busy road and by residential properties.

Park users can report problems:

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

## **5.3 Infrastructure maintenance**

The play area and the teenage 'hang-out' are regularly inspected by the grounds contractor, and any damage is made safe and rectified at the earliest opportunity.

The play area is inspected annually by an insurance company.

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.

The maintenance of the pavilion is the responsibility of the Property Services Section of the MBC.

## **5.4 Horticultural management regimes**

The open grass area is cut following the amenity regime, i.e. 15 cuts a year, the frequency of cuts depending on the weather and the speed of grass growth.

The meadow areas are cut each year in late summer and the cuttings are removed from the site.

Epicormic growth ('suckers') growing at the bases of the mature trees are removed every year in late summer.

## **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:

- Entrances to be improved with hard surfaces.
- New information signs to be installed.
- Low ball-stopping metal mesh to be fixed to the railing along Hermitage Lane.
- Seats and bins to be moved to more suitable locations on the site.
- Planting of trees alongside the existing rows, to provide replacements when the mature limes have to be removed.
- Planting of trees and native and semi-native shrubs along the northern boundary.
- Clumps of native daffodils and snowdrops for spring colour.
- There is potential for adding more meadow flowers in the form of 'plugs' to be planted in the autumn.

## **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 available 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.

## **9. 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.

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