

**MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY**

improving our parks  
and open spaces

**PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS**

**MANAGEMENT PLANS**

**GATLAND LANE RECREATION GROUND**

**WARD: FANT**

**MP 0609**

**JULY 2006**



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

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

Gatland Lane Recreation Ground is situated in the Fant area of Maidstone, south of Tonbridge Road and approximately two and a half kilometres west of the town centre.

Its northern, upper, part lies on a gentle south-facing slope, with extensive views of the countryside outside Maidstone. It is sandwiched between a primary school and three apartment blocks belonging to the Maidstone Housing Trust. The lower part is flat, with trees and hedgerows on two sides.

The site serves mainly the local community. There is a play area, football pitches, a basketball court and a derelict pavilion.

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

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents which are relevant to Gatland Lane 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.

## **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 it 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 boundary is open and unmarked in some places, but most of it is formed by a mixture of hedgerow, dilapidated chainlink and wooden fencing, and a substantial galvanised fence which surrounds the neighbouring school ground.

There are many entry points onto the Ground, including 'official' gaps in the hedge. None of them attractive or welcoming.

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

There are no hard pathways or cycleways across the Ground.

Vehicular access is along a tarmac lane leading from Gatland Lane to an informal car park with surface of crushed stone.

### **4.3 Lighting**

There is no lighting on the site.

### **4.4 Grass areas**

The site is mainly amenity grass with meadow areas on a bank and in the upper part of the Ground.

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

There are two trees growing in the south-west corner of the site. Many more trees grow outside the boundary and form a 'borrowed landscape'.

A mixed hedge of hornbeam, beech and field maple grows along the western and southern boundaries of the lower field.

#### **4.6 Biodiversity assessment**

The hedgerows and trees growing on and around the site are of some biodiversity value. They provide food and shelter to a variety of creatures. Both biodiversity and amenity value of the site could be enhanced by planting more trees, of native species, already present in the area.

Snowdrops and native daffodils could be naturalised under some of the trees.

Currently the grass area is of fairly low value with regards to natural habitats. The annual removal of grass cuttings off the long grass areas of the site will over the years result in the ground becoming poorer. This should encourage more non-grassy flowering plants to thrive and to provide more variety and colour in spring and summer. In turn, this would encourage more insects and other invertebrates to move into the meadow areas.

Broad leaved meadow plants noted were: white clover, birds foot trefoil and chickory (*Cichoria intybus*).

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

There are seats and litter bins in the play area. Dog bins are present on the site.

#### **4.8 Signage**

There is no signage on or around the Recreation Ground. An information board should be provided at either end giving the council contact details and the relevant bylaws.

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

The football pavilion is now derelict and it is likely to be demolished in the near future.

On the flat lower field there are two full-size football pitches and one junior football pitch, with goal posts, in regular use by local clubs from beginning of September till the end of April. Ball-stopping net protects the neighbouring private properties. Following vandalism, the net was replaced in 2006.

Near the pavilion there is a basketball court, installed recently. Its floor has been damaged and should be repaired or replaced with tougher material.

The play area contains a multiplay unit and several smaller pieces of apparatus. It is scheduled for enhancement after 2007.

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

Gatland Lane Recreation Ground is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council. It is maintained on a day-to-day basis by the grounds contractor Maidstone Borough Services.

## **5.1 Cleanliness**

Litter bins in the play area are inspected and emptied at weekly intervals. 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 a week.

## **5.2 Safety and security**

The site is overlooked by the apartment blocks.

Visitors can report problems:

- general – 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 basketball court are regularly inspected by the grounds contractor and any significant damage is made safe and rectified at the earliest opportunity.

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 pavilion is secured and awaiting demolition.

## **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.

The hedge is trimmed once a 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:

- Pavilion to be demolished and the ground made good.
- Play area to be refurbished with better equipment.
- Remains of old boundary fencing to be removed and replaced with anti-vehicle railing or wooden railing, where appropriate.
- Car park surface to be improved.
- Picnic tables to be installed near the ball court.
- Ball court surface to be replaced with coloured tarmac.
- New information signs to be installed.
- Native trees to be planted.
- Clumps of native daffodils and snowdrops introduced for spring colour.

## **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.

Play Areas Strategy – funds have been allocated to improve the play facilities for children and teenagers within the council's parks and open spaces. The work commenced in 2005 and it includes refurbishment of existing play areas as well as new provision, mainly multi-use games areas and teen shelters.

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>GATLAND LANE RECREATION GROUND</b>					
<b>ATTRIBUTE</b>	<b>AUDIT DATE AND SCORE</b>				
	January 2004	Mid 04	2008	2010	
Main entrance	2	-			
Boundaries including hedges, gates etc	3	3			
Roads, paths, cycleways and access points	1	1			
Parking	2	2			
Availability of public transport	-	-			
Lighting	none	-			
Cleanliness	2	3			
Planted areas (trees, shrubs, floral displays)	2	-			
Grass areas	3	3			
Litter and dog litter bins	1	1			
Seats	3	3			
Toilets	none	-			
Health and safety	3	-			
Nature conservation value	2	-			
Access for disabled	-	-			
Information	-	-			
Sustainability	-	-			