

**MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY**

improving our parks  
and open spaces

**PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS**

**MANAGEMENT PLANS**

**LEN VALLEY CONSERVATION AREA**

**WARD: HIGH STREET**

**MP 0611**

**MARCH 2006**



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Management Plan for Len Valley Conservation Area describes the site and outlines the adopted maintenance regime.

Len Valley Conservation Area is situated close to the Maidstone town centre. It includes the River Len and the ground along its banks between the Sainsbury's supermarket to the west and Turkey Mill Business Park to the east. It is divided into three parts by two roads: Square Hill Road and Wat Tyler Way. There are residential properties adjacent to some of the Conservation Area boundary.

The large part of the Area is overgrown with trees and scrub, with a meadow at the eastern end and planted shrubberies at the western end. At that end Len disappears in a culvert under the Sainsbury's car park and the Chequers Shopping Centre.

A part of the Len Valley Walk runs through the Conservation Area.

The Conservation Area can be seen as a starting point of a green corridor that follows the River Len out into the countryside east of Maidstone, through Mote Park, Spot Lane Nature Reserve and Mallard Way Recreation Area.

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

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents which are relevant to Len Valley Conservation Area.

- 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 Len Valley Conservation Area is:**

**“To create and maintain a public green space which provides opportunities for recreation, as well as contemplation and education. To maintain the site as an effective conservation area for the local flora and fauna, a valuable part of the Len Valley Walk and the River Len Green Corridor.”**

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

- Provide an interesting nature conservation facility for local people.
- Ensure that the site is clean and well-maintained.
- Ensure that it is safe to use at all times.
- Secure and/or enhance 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 site.

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

#### **4.1 Entrances and boundaries**

All around the site the boundaries are marked by the fencing of adjoining properties. There is a variety of fencing types and a variety of land uses. Those are: residential properties, allotments, a piece of woodland, a grass area belonging to Turkey Court Business Park. A short piece of boundary is shared with Mote Park.

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

There is just a single footpath that runs alongside the river. The path is constructed of tarmac through the western and middle part of the site, and of compacted stone through the eastern part.

Walkers have to cross Square Hill Road but they can walk under the busy Wat Tyler Way which at this point forms a bridge over the River Len.

#### **4.3 Lighting**

There is some lighting along the tarmac path accessed off Wat Tyler Way, but it stops at Square Hill Road.

#### **4.4 Grass areas**

There is a small area of grass between the shrubberies at the western end of the Conservation Area, and about half an acre of riverside meadow by the Turkey Mill.

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

There is a mixture of tree ages and species on the site: sycamore, elder, hybrid black poplar, ash, silver birch, wild cherry, hazel, wych elm, hawthorn, elder.

Amenity-type shrubberies have been planted between the supermarket and Wat Tyler Way, containing mainly varieties of dogwood.

#### **4.6 Biodiversity assessment**

A Management Plan for nature conservation was produced for the site by cllr Tony Harwood in 2005. The following summarises that document.

The Conservation Area contains a variety of habitats: aquatic, woodland, species-rich damp grassland with numerous seepages, scrub, diverse wetland habitats. The latter include the sedge and reed-mace lined river channel and willow/alder carr.

Numerous examples of invertebrate fauna have been recorded here. These include the soldier beetle, a Red Data Book species, and many grassland butterflies.

The water vole has been found (a protected species, listed in Kent Red Data Book).

Management prescriptions have been drawn with the aim to continue the established habitat types. The proscriptions concentrate on reducing the amount of sycamore and on keeping Japanese knotweed at bay. Sycamore timber is to be retained on site as wood piles. Seedlings of other tree species are to be retained where appropriate.

Grassland in the eastern part of the site is to be cut on a sectional basis, half in alternate years. A strip of woody vegetation alongside residential gardens is to be widened with planting of more trees and shrubs.

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

There are currently no seats or litter bins in the Conservation Area.

#### **4.8 Signage**

There are currently no signs on the site. This should be remedied by providing at least two boards giving information about the nature conservation value of the site, and stating the council contact details and the relevant bylaws.

#### **4.9 Provision of recreational and other facilities**

This is a nature conservation area and as such it does not contain any facilities other than the path, the river and the plants and animals around. It is a great facility for walkers and nature lovers.

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

Len Valley Conservation Area is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council. The day-to-day maintenance is carried out by a contractor Maidstone Borough Services.

The Len Valley Action Group is also involved in the maintenance of the Area.

#### **5.1 Cleanliness**

The Council carries out two thorough 'litter sweeps' a year on the site.

#### **5.2 Safety and security**

The site is fairly enclosed and overgrown. A degree of surveillance is provided from Wat Tyler Way and from adjoining properties.

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.

#### **5.2 Maintenance of infrastructure and facilities**

At the time of the 'litter sweeps' the site is inspected and, following that, any necessary maintenance work is carried out.

#### **5.4 Horticultural management regimes**

The annual cutting of the river meadow area is carried out on a rotational basis, half of the area at a time.

### **6. PLANNED FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

Following site audits and a public consultation in summer 2005, a list of improvements has been drawn up for a number of green spaces in Maidstone. 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 for the Len Valley Conservation Area:

- installation of signs and information boards,
- planting of native shrubs to screen properties adjacent to the riverside meadow.

## **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.

## LEN VALLEY CONSERVATION AREA

ATTRIBUTE	AUDIT DATE AND SCORE			
	2004	2008	2010	
Main entrance	2			
Boundaries including hedges, gates etc	4			
Roads, paths, cycleways and access points	2			
Parking	3			
Availability of public transport	-			
Lighting	2			
Cleanliness	3			
Planted areas (trees, shrubs, floral displays)	3			
Grass areas	2			
Litter and dog litter bins	2			
Seats	1			
Toilets	-			
Health and safety	4			
Nature conservation value	5			
Access for disabled	2			
Information	2			
Sustainability	-			