

# MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

improving our parks  
and open spaces

## PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS

# MANAGEMENT PLANS

## MALLARD WAY RECREATION AREA

WARD: DOWNSWOOD AND OTHAM

PARISH: DOWNSWOOD

MP 0612

**MARCH 2006**



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Management Plan for Mallard Way Recreation Area provides guidelines for the maintenance and the development of the space 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.

Mallard Way Recreation Area is situated on the outskirts of Maidstone, in the Downswood area, about 3.5 km to the east of the town centre. It lies between a residential area and open countryside.

River Len runs along its northern boundary and it feeds a small lake within the Recreation Area. The site is prone to flooding in winter and spring. It lies within the ancient valley of the river Len.

To the west of the site, the Spot Lane Nature Reserve stretches along the Len all the way to Mote Park.

Apart from the lake, which is stocked with fish and used by the Len Valley Preservation and Angling Society, the facilities include a play area and a football pitch.

Bank stabilisation work has recently been carried out on the lake and there are plans to install a number of fishing platforms.

A Public Footpath runs across the site and joins with a network of other PROWs in the countryside east of the town.

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

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents which are relevant to Mallard Way Recreation 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 Mallard Way Recreation Area is:**

**“To create and maintain a green open space which provides opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, as well as quiet contemplation and education, for local residents. To develop Mallard Way Recreation Area as a gateway to the countryside areas beyond.”**

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

- Provide appropriate sports and amenity facilities in a pleasant setting.
- Ensure that the site and its facilities are clean and well-maintained.
- Ensure that it is safe to use at all times.
- Enhance the biodiversity value of the site.
- Develop Mallard Way Recreation Area as a gateway into the countryside through appropriate signage, literature and publicity.
- 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**

Along the western and south-western boundary with Mallard Way there is a wooden ranch-style fence.

On the south site, a chainlink fence separates the play area from a public house car park situated higher up on top of the ancient river bank.

To the east, the boundary with farmland is marked by a drainage ditch and a fence topped with barbed wire.

The River Len runs along the northern boundary and separates Mallard Way Recreation Area from a modern housing estate. Two pedestrian bridges cross the river.

There are two main entrances onto the site. Opposite Spot Lane there is a lockable wide vehicular gate with a pedestrian gate next to it. By the play area there is a hard path zig-zagging down a slope. All of the entrances are open at all times.

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

Two pedestrian paths made of tarmac dressed with shingle cross the site east-west and north-south. The latter one being part of a designated Public Footpath.

There is no hard access across the site for vehicles and as a result vehicles driving there in winter cause bad rutting between the path and the river.

Parking for visitors to the site is possible on the adjacent road.

## **4.3 Lighting**

There is no lighting on the site.

## **4.4 Grass areas**

The grassed area consists mostly of short amenity grass, with patches of long grass in selected locations.

## **4.5 Trees and other planting**

A row of alder trees grows along the River Len, with some more alder and willow by the lake and on three small islands on the lake.

Younger trees, mainly field maple, grow on the slope between the lake and the road and two groups of mixed native trees and shrubs have been planted between the lake and the open area containing the football pitch.

There is a thicket of trees and scrub near the play area, just outside the site boundary.

## **4.6 Biodiversity assessment**

The native trees and shrubs, growing in the nutrient rich soil on the site, are of considerable nature conservation value. They provide food and shelter for a variety of wildlife. The lake supports waterfowl (Canada geese, swans, coots, moorhens, mallards) and the banks of the river provide good conditions for water-edge flora and fauna.

The rest of the site (the amenity grass areas) is of fairly low value with regards to natural habitats.

Ecological survey is being carried out during 2006. The results will be available at the end of the year and may affect the current maintenance practice on the site.

## **4.7 Provision of seats and bins**

There are seats and litter bins in the play area and along the paths and around the lake. They are made of recycled materials.

There are dog litter bins on the site.

## **4.8 Signage**

There is currently no signage on the site but arrangements have been made for three glass-fronted notice boards to be installed by the main entrances. They will contain the information about the nature conservation of the site, fishing arrangements, borough and parish council contact details, bylaws etc.

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

The play area contains two multiplay units, swings and a slide. This is a large site suitable for enhancement in the future.

There is a football pitch with goal posts, in use by local clubs. The ground is drained with land drains.

The main facility on the site is the lake. It contains three islands covered in vegetation. It provides home for a number of species of waterfowl. The lake is stocked with fish and is used by the Len Valley Preservation and Angling Society (LVPA).

The lake and the river add greatly to the visual quality of the site and to its biodiversity.

## **5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

Mallard Way Recreation Area is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council. The day-to-day maintenance is undertaken by the grounds contractor Glendale.

Several bodies are involved in the management of the site. The LVPA maintain the lake, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP) have carried out enhancement work on the lake and Downwood Parish has provided new seats and notice boards.

### **5.1 Cleanliness**

Litter bins in the play area are inspected and emptied once a week. During the grass cutting season litter is collected from the site prior to each cut. This includes the long grass areas.

### **5.2 Safety and security**

The site has a fairly open character and is partially overlooked by 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.

A Community Policeman visits the site regularly. He works with the Parish Council on any safety issues arising on the site.

### **5.3 Infrastructure and facilities maintenance**

The play area is inspected by the grounds contractor every week and any damage is made safe and rectified at the earliest opportunity. A written report is produced once a month.

Also, the play area is inspected annually by an insurance company.

The wooden goal-posts are provided for the football season 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 edges of the lake on its northern side had become badly worn and were repaired by MVCP in the early 2006 by using stone gabions and backfilling.

### **5.4 Horticultural management regimes**

From March to October the amenity grass in all parts of the park receives 15 cuts.

The longer meadow area is cut once a year in late summer and the clippings are removed from the site.

The vegetation on the islands and along the river is coppiced on rotational basis: one island a year in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The next round of coppicing will be done in 15 years time. Mature weeping willow stands are not coppiced. The cut material is weaved around the edges of the islands.

In the coming autumn-winter the reeds in the lake will be partially removed, divided and replanted elsewhere along the edge of the lake.

The site will have a mosaic of ground covers. Some areas will be kept as amenity grass, some as 'conservation grass' (cut once a year) and in other areas scrub encroachment will be allowed; these will be cut every four years.

## **6. PLANNED FURTHER 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 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:

- Enhance the play area.
- Widen path for vehicular access.
- Install several fishing platforms (swims), including two with railings for disabled users (funded by LVPA).

- Renew main gate and timber fencing along the boundary and along the zig-zag path.
- Plant native trees and shrubs.
- Continue the coppicing programme.
- Install information boards.

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