

**MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY**

improving our parks  
and open spaces

**PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS**

**MANAGEMENT PLANS**

**MOTE PARK**

**WARD: SHEPWAY NORTH**

**MP 0614**

**MARCH 2006**



## **CONTENTS:**

- 1. INTRODUCTION**
- 2. RELATIONSHIP TO COUNCIL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**
- 3. VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE SITE**
- 4. THE SITE AND ITS FACILITIES**
  - 4.1 Boundaries and entrances**
  - 4.2 Roads, paths, cycleways and car parks**
  - 4.3 Lighting**
  - 4.4 Grass areas**
  - 4.5 Trees and other vegetation**
  - 4.6 Biodiversity assessment**
  - 4.7 Provision of seats and bins**
  - 4.8 Signage**
  - 4.9 Provision of recreational and other facilities**
- 5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**
  - 5.1 Cleanliness**
  - 5.2 Safety and security**
  - 5.3 Infrastructure maintenance**
  - 5.4 Horticultural management regimes**
- 6. FORTHCOMING IMPROVEMENTS**
- 7. FUNDING**
- 8. RESULTS OF QUALITY AUDITS**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Management Plan for Mote Park describes the site and outlines the adopted maintenance regime. It also lists the further improvements to the site that will be carried out in the years 2007-08, as well as other work that the council would like to carry out in the medium term of 10 years or so, using mainly external funding.

Mote Park is the largest public open space in Maidstone, located close to the town centre and surrounded by residential areas.

It is a former landscaped park of a country estate. It surrounds a mansion, Mote House, and its pleasure grounds, as well as walled areas of former kitchen and flower gardens. Mote House and most of the gardens are not open to the public; it is expected they will be converted to residential use in the near future. Mote Park, Mote House and several smaller buildings in the park have English Heritage designations.

The dammed river Len forms an 11 ha lake in the centre of the park. The western half of the park is quite open and comprises 12 sports pitches, a modern playground and other public facilities. The eastern half is more densely covered with trees, scrub and areas of spring and summer meadows with a network of made and unmade paths. These areas have considerable nature conservation value and form a link between a Local Nature Reserve (Vinters Valley) and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (Spot Lane Conservation Area) just outside the park's boundary. Most of the boundary is marked by a ragstone wall.

The lowest parts of the park are liable to flooding.

It is a very popular and much loved park. It is a venue for numerous events throughout the year and it hosts a number of recreational clubs.

Cobtree Hall and several cottages ('lodges') within the park are owned either privately or by the MBC are leased to tenants.

### **HISTORY OF MOTE PARK**

Part of what is now Mote Park had been a deer park since before the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A medieval manor house stood within in, south of the river Len. In the 18c the house was surrounded by formal walled gardens, with a spectacular water cascade down to the river. The traces of those structures can still be seen on the ground now.

The park is the 18/19<sup>th</sup> century creation of the Marsham family (later Earls of Romney). The first Earl replaced the old mansion with the present Mote House in 1795, creating a model estate around it and landscaping the grounds in an English landscape style. Further improvements to the grounds were carried out during the 19<sup>th</sup> century: more trees were planted, pleasure grounds were established to the north of the house, elaborate flower gardens were created near the mansion as well as a state-of-the-art kitchen garden within an octagonal walled enclosure. In 1895 the estate was sold to Marcus Samuel (later 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Bearsted). In 1929 Maidstone Corporation (now MBC) purchased the 558 acres of the Park from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Bearsted. During 1939-45 army units were stationed here and after the war it was a showground for the Kent County Show. Later, significant changes included the construction of a park and ride

facility and the building of a leisure centre. Mote House was acquired in 1960 by Cheshire Homes who used it as a residential home for the disabled. It has stood empty since late 1990s.

Despite all these intrusions and a gradual decline of landscape quality during C 20, Mote Park is remarkable for retaining much of its 19<sup>th</sup> century fabric and character, and for possessing large areas which still have a pastoral rather than municipal character. It is included at Grade II on the English Heritage *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest*.

The following historic structures survive within the park:

- Mote House mansion (Grade II\*) and its outbuildings (Grade II),
- kitchen garden walls,
- 19<sup>th</sup> century memorial Doric pavilion (Grade II),
- ice house(?),
- entrances to C.18(?) ragstone mines,
- boundary stone walls,
- drives,
- the lake,
- boat house,
- a number of inhabited park lodges (three of them listed at Grade II), with various types of occupancy agreements.

MBC intends to commission a Conservation Plan that would put together all the available information about the park, assess the value of the park and its various elements, and come up with a set of policies for its protection and future enhancement. This Plan, in due course, may form the main part of an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a restoration grant for Mote Park.

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

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents that are relevant to Mote Park.

- 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 PARK**

#### **3.1 The overall vision for Mote Park is:**

**“To create and maintain a public green space of regional significance, which provides opportunities for outdoor contemplation, recreation and education, in keeping with its urban location, its size and its heritage value.”**

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

- Provide an interesting landscape feature for the people of Maidstone and of Kent.
- Interpret the history and the heritage value of the site through careful design, good signage, literature and publicity.
- Protect and enhance the biodiversity in the park.
- Provide a range of recreational facilities for a variety of interests, ages and abilities.
- Ensure that the site is clean and well-maintained.
- Ensure that it is welcoming and safe to use at all times.
- Develop and maintain links with the local stakeholders in order to consult on the management and maintenance of the park.

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

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

Mote Park is roughly rectangular in shape, with a boundary 6.2 km long. Out of that, about 3.5 km is a historic ragstone wall, which runs along most of the northern and eastern boundaries and along some of the southern one.

The remaining boundaries are marked by private garden fences (South Park Road), metal palisade fencing (York Road) and a chainlink fence (Mote Cricket Club and by Turkey Mill Pond). All the areas mentioned above used to be within the park before 1929.

The main entrance is in the north-west corner off Mote Avenue/Willow Way, through a wide double gate with pillars and past a small building known as Deer Lodge. The Lodge currently houses the Maidstone Scuba School (of scuba diving).

The other vehicular entrances into the park are off Willington Street by Park-and-Ride (entrance open at all times) and off School Lane (locked from dusk till dawn). Tarmac drives lead from both these entrances into the park. There are gates within the park

across the drives that are meant to be kept locked at all times to prevent unauthorised vehicle access. Park residents and the grounds contractors have keys to those gates. However, some of the gates tend to remain open and an effective way of insuring that they stay locked is yet to be devised.

The entrance off Wellington Street by Garden Lodge allows vehicular access to Mote Bungalows.

There are nine other entrances used by pedestrians; they stay open at all times

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

The park has a network of tarmac paths and tarmac drives with limited vehicular access. Speed ramps have been installed along the main drive from the main entrance to the Waterfall, and from the main entrance to the main car park.

There is also a network of grass paths and desire lines, mainly in the south-eastern quarter of the park.

A designated cycle route leads from the main entrance, past Mote House and out of the park by Otham Lodge. Along the route there is a conflict of use between cyclists and pedestrians.

There are three official hard-surfaced car parks; the two by the west end of the lake have disabled parking bays. Overflow parking is provided on a grass area nearby. There is another small car park near the School Lane entrance, with a crushed stone surface.

The Leisure Centre car park is used by many visitors to the park.

#### **4.3 Lighting**

Lighting is provided in the main car park and by the cafeteria.

#### **4.4 Grass areas**

Large areas of the park are kept as short grass, some of those contain football and rugby pitches. The south-eastern quarter consists largely of meadows where grass species predominate.

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

Thousands of trees grow in Mote Park. They vary in age from estimated 300+ (yews by Mote House) to trees planted in recent years, many of those sponsored by local residents. Apart from the yews, other trees in the park notable for their age are a tulip tree, black walnut, field maple, London planes and a group of sweet chestnuts.

There is a section of wet woodland with alder by the river Len and another one by the stream coming from Banky Meadow on the other side of Ashford Road.

There are trees in short grass, trees in long grass, scrubby woodland and scrub with bramble and nettle, as well as large patches of naturalised daffodils.

Around the lake and on the islands there is a variety of waterside vegetation, from trees (alder, wipping willow etc) to reeds.

#### **4.6 Biodiversity assessment**

The park, particularly its eastern half, is of great biodiversity value. It has many different habitats and a variety of flora and fauna. During 2006 a habitat survey is being undertaken in conjunction with Kent Wildlife Trust, with the results expected in the autumn.

There appears to be potential for designating parts of the park as a Local Nature Reserve.

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

There are numerous seats along the paths and on the grass, in a variety of styles. Some have side rails for easier use by the disabled. Ideally, all the seats should conform to a uniform design to provide an element of unity throughout the park.

In view of a possible whole park restoration project, it would not be recommended to replace good, undamaged seats at this stage. Instead, the Council has now adopted the policy of installing new seats, when necessary, of one specific design named 'Nouveau seat', supplied by Glasdon and made from recycled materials.

There are numerous litter bins in several designs. Some are in poor condition and should be replaced. Like with the seats, any new bins installed are going to be of one design and made from recycled materials.

There are many dog litter bins in the park. Unfortunately, some of them are situated near the main play area and the picnic tables. This tends to draw dog owners and their pets to this area. Eventually, these bins should be re-sited in more suitable places.

#### **4.8 Signage**

There is a variety of information and directional signs in the park. A full audit should be carried out to assess their current condition and suitability.

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

Cafeteria – open every day throughout a year, from 10 am to 5 pm.

Toilets – open every day during park opening hours; they have disabled facilities.

Adventure Playzone – a play area and a junior skate park with a mini climbing wall. Both were installed in 2005, replacing an older play area.

A small play area by School Lane - scheduled for enhancement after 2007.

Picnic areas – 3 picnic benches next to the Adventure Play Zone, unfenced, and several picnic benches surrounded by a low picket fence at the west end of the lake.

Pitch-and-Putt – facility currently not available.

Kiosk by the lake, with toilets – sells basic refreshments.

Miniature Railway – ride-on miniature trains with steam and diesel locomotives on a 3.8 mile track, available on Sunday and Bank Holiday afternoons in summer only. The facility is run and maintained by the Model Railway Society.

The Lake – 11 hectares, shallow, last de-silted about 30 years ago. Several man-made islands inhabited by a variety of water fowl. The lake created in late 17C by damming the River Len. Used by the following clubs for their activities:

- Maidstone Sailing Club – boat launch site with a compound is on the north side of the lake; members have vehicular access to the compound. Club-house in one of the outbuildings by Mote House soon to be lost due to the House development
- Maidstone Victory and Medway Preservation Society Angling Club,
- Cygnets Model Boat Club

Disabled members of the Angling Club are allowed vehicular access to the concrete embankment at the north-west side of the lake.

Playing pitches – 10 football and 2 rugby pitches are available for hire to clubs; bookings are made through the MBC (Parks & Open Spaces Office). Goals are provided for the playing season by the Council.

Cycling route – runs between the main park entrance off Mote Avenue/Willow Way and Downswood.

Historic buildings and other structures (stone walls, bridges) – a large number of them have survived in the park. None of the buildings are accessible inside to the public.

The Boathouse by the lake houses the sluice that regulates the level of water in the lake; it is operated by a member of staff from Turkey Mill Business Park.

Cobtree Hall is used by the charity MIND for their activities, e.g. a children's nursery.

Maidstone Leisure Centre – operated by Serco on behalf of the MBC.

Bowling Club

The Mote Cricket Club and Rugby Club

Park-and-Ride off Wellington Street.

## **5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

Mote Park is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council.

It is maintained by a grounds contractor (Glendale). Tasks are carried out by peripatetic teams based in Park Wood. Help is given by voluntary groups like Friends of Mote Park

who have done scrub clearance and litter picking. Litter picking has also been carried out by local scout groups and by Probationary Service.

Friends of Mote Park, established in 2005 and supported by the MBC and BTCV, is a voluntary group of local residents who, as park users, provide feedback to the council and carry out practical maintenance tasks.

Numerous other groups and organisations are involved with various aspects of the park's management.

Len Valley Action Group – have an interest in maintaining pedestrian access along the River Len, as the park lies on the route of the Len Valley Walk.

The Angling Club – keep the edges of the lake litter free and test the quality of the lake water. The club 'bailif' the lake: they check that anglers are in possession of a 'rod licence' and a valid ticket to fish the lake.

Turkey Mill – control the water level in the lake

Kent Wildlife Trust - consultants on nature conservation issues.

Environment Agency - a statutory consultant in matters related to the lake and the River Len.

English Heritage – a statutory consultant to the matters related to the heritage value of the park.

It is envisaged that later this year the Raven Group, a property development company, will start work on converting Mote House and the walled gardens into assisted residential accommodation by elderly disabled and their families. Negotiations have taken place over planning issues. It is anticipated that once development work commences there will be close co-operation between 'Mote House' and the MBC on the management and maintenance of the park.

Currently, the feasibility of joining the Environmental Stewardship Scheme is being investigated. This would provide additional funds for the park maintenance on condition of adopting certain maintenance routines.

## **5.1 Cleanliness**

During school holidays litter is collected, and litter bins are emptied, every day in the most popular north-west part of the park. At other times of year this task is carried out weekly. Twice a month the contractors carry out a 'litter scavenge' over the whole area of the park.

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

## **5.2 Safety and security**

The site is very large, with dense ground cover in places, easily accessible from outside and it has no lighting except by the Cafeteria. This potentially provides many

opportunities for anti-social behaviour which, unfortunately, does occasionally happen. It usually takes form of driving cars and motorcycles on the grass, burning fires and using drugs and/or alcohol.

There are 5 CCTV cameras installed around the Leisure Centre.

Park 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.

The most popular north-western part of the park is overseen by a dedicated warden, provided by Glendale, during the busiest times, i.e. school holidays. The warden's duties include checking the safety of the play equipment, overseeing the play facilities at busy times, reporting any damage to park furniture, collecting litter, reporting anti-social behaviour.

### **5.3 Maintenance of infrastructure and facilities**

The play areas are inspected every day and any damage is made safe and repaired asap.

The toilet building is maintained by the Property Section of the MBC and kept clean by a member of staff employed by the Council.

The Property Section of the MBC carry out maintenance work on the ragstone walls, historic buildings (those not privately owned) and structures.

The privately owned lodges are the responsibility of their owners.

The paths and drives, bridges, seats, bins, trees and the remaining vegetation, the lighting columns and some of the fencing are the responsibility of the Parks Section of the MBC.

### **5.4 Horticultural management regimes**

The short grass areas are 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 areas of daffodils naturalised in grass are cut once a year in late spring.

The meadows are cut once a year in late summer.

A programme of Japanese knotweed eradication is due to start in the autumn 2006 and will take about two years. A specialist contractor will apply an approved weedkiller to the patches of knotweed growing within the park.

The trees in the park were inspected in 2004 and the tree maintenance work identified as high priority has been carried out. Additionally, in response to complaints from the public, trees are assessed by a Tree Officer and work is scheduled as required. In the

autumn 2006 a Tree Management Plan will be published, with the adopted routines and methods of response to call-outs.

## **6. PLANNED FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

Sites like Mote Park, historic public parks, are eligible for restoration grants. Currently grants are available from the Parks for People fund run by the Heritage/BIG Lottery, although competitive bidding is required. It is the council's aim to take advantage of this opportunity in order to ensure that the park survives and thrives in the future. This is a medium to long term aspiration. Any restoration and enhancement work would be carried out following a thorough research of the needs of the park and its users.

For now, the funds available from the Parks Section revenue budget and through the Green Spaces Strategy will be used to carry out the most urgent repairs and improvements:

- provide/repair/replace anti-vehicle railing, where necessary
- repair the broken edge of the path by a stone bridge, south of Mote House
- repair the lake crossing (the Weir)
- improve signage
- repair the surface of the main car park

## **7. FUNDING**

Apart from the Heritage Lottery Fund (Parks for People), 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.

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.

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.

Local Heritage Initiatives – assist local communities in the preservation of their environment, landmarks and traditions, including archaeological, natural, built and industrial heritage. Projects like an exhibition on the history of the site, or a repair of a feature; funding up to 100% for project costs of £3,000 to £25,000.

English Heritage offers grants for historic parks and gardens.

Private sector funding – for specific projects to be sponsored in exchange for a plaque or local media publicity.

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