

MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

improving our parks
and open spaces

PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS

MANAGEMENT PLANS

SOMERSET ROAD RECREATION GROUND

WARD: SHEPWAY NORTH

MP 0619

MARCH 2006



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Management Plan for Somerset Road 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.

Somerset Road Recreation Ground is situated in the Shepway area of Maidstone, approximately two kilometres south-east of the town centre. It lies within a residential area, with rear gardens bordering it all around.

It has irregular elongated shape and lies on a gentle north-facing slope with views of the North Downs from its upper end.

It is basically an area of grass with two junior football pitches and a play area at one end. It serves mainly the local community.

2. RELATIONSHIP TO COUNCIL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents which are relevant to Somerset Road 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 Somerset Road 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 site has a shape of an irregular rectangle, stretching approximately north-south.

Its western boundary is formed by the fences of adjoining gardens. The remaining boundaries are formed by an unmade access road to bottoms of gardens and private garages.

A knee high tubular metal fencing separates the ground from the access road. There are several intentional gaps in the fencing allowing pedestrian access, and several unintentional ones where fencing has been vandalised and needs to be replaced.

Vehicular access for the contractor is through a wider gap on one of the corners. The gap is meant to have a low lockable gate. This is currently missing and should be replaced either as a gate or a pair of removable bollards.

Pedestrian access to the site from the surrounding streets is through four wide gaps between properties. Two of those gaps also allow vehicular access to the unmade road.

One of those access gaps, off Marion Crescent, should have a hard path provided in order to avoid the grass being worn out by people walking on this narrow grass strip.

4.2 Roads, paths, cycleways and parking

There are no footpaths or roads across the recreation ground.

Parking is possible in the surrounding residential streets and along some of the unmade road.

4.3 Lighting

There is no lighting on the site.

4.4 Grass areas

The site is mainly amenity grass with meadow areas recently introduced in some places.

4.5 Trees and other vegetation

There are no trees or shrubs on the site. The only visible tall vegetation is in the adjoining gardens.

4.6 Biodiversity assessment

The short amenity grass is of low biodiversity value. The longer grass areas contain a mixture of various grass species together with some broadleaf native plants like white clover, speedwell, lady's smock and others. Together, they provide food and shelter for small animals.

The annual removal of grass cuttings off those 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.

The biodiversity and amenity value can be enhanced further by planting native trees and spring flowering bulbs (snow drops and native daffodils).

4.7 Provision of seats and bins

There is one seat in the play area and one litter bin. Only one dog litter bin serves the whole site. As the site has had a problem with dog faeces, there is need for more dog bins.

4.8 Signage

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

4.9 Provision of recreational facilities

There are two junior-size football pitches, with goal posts, in regular use by local clubs from beginning of September till the end of April.

The play area with four pieces of apparatus (plus two missing) is located near the northern end of the ground. It is scheduled for improvement work after 2007.

5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Somerset Road Recreation Ground is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council. The day-to-day maintenance is undertaken by the grounds contractor Glendale.

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 quite secluded. A degree of surveillance is provided by the 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.

5.3 Infrastructure maintenance

The play area is inspected by the grounds contractor every week and any damage is made safe and rectified at the earliest opportunity.

Annual inspections are carried out by an insurance company.

The wooden goal-posts are provided for the football season by MBC 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.

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.

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:

- Repair damaged anti-vehicle rail.
- Fit bollards in some of the entrances.

- Provide a hard path along the entrance from Marion Crescent.
- Provide more seats and bins.
- Install information signs.
- Enhance the play area.
- Plant native and semi-native trees in selected locations.
- Introduce clumps of native daffodils and snowdrops 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.

Esme 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.

SOMERSET ROAD RECREATION GROUND					
ATTRIBUTE	AUDIT DATE AND SCORE				
	mid 2004:	autumn 2004	2008	2010	
Main entrance	-	2			
Boundaries including hedges, gates etc	-	4			
Roads, paths, cycleways and access points	1	1			
Parking	-	1			
Availability of public transport	-	-			
Lighting	-	none			
Cleanliness	3	3			
Planted areas (trees, shrubs, floral displays)	-	-			
Grass areas	3	4			
Litter and dog litter bins	1	2			
Seats	1	2			
Toilets	-	none			
Health and safety	-	3			
Nature conservation value	-	-			
Access for disabled	-	-			
Information	-	-			
Sustainability	-	-			