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## Open Space Strategy – Executive Summary

The Open Space Strategy 2007 is a major document (to be) adopted by Milton Keynes Council and other local stakeholders, which will deliver high quality accessible open space throughout the Borough during the planned 20 year life of the Strategy.

The Strategy's vision is to achieve:

*"The best possible standard of provision, integration and quality of accessible open space within the Borough of Milton Keynes, serving the needs of the growing Milton Keynes community, ensuring that local people are involved and that open space is valued by all and managed in a sustainable manner for future generations".*

The Strategy is necessary to provide a firm framework in support of the Council's priorities which relate:

- Improve the quality of the environment
- Promote equality and social inclusion and improve health
- Deliver high quality outcomes for children and families
- Improve the experience of our customers.

Open Space is vital for other reasons; an Important element of people's everyday lives and Integral to key elements of Milton Keynes – growth, health, work, housing, wildlife, activity and fun. The Council and other stakeholders need to embrace latest guidance and good practice and be forward thinking about a major asset – existing & proposed open space.

There are three main themes within this strategic framework

- Open Spaces Improvement with public accessibility and involvement
- Linkages and movement corridors – for people and wildlife
- Effective management of the open space estate and resources

The Strategy provides a framework which has a different 'offer' in different parts of the Borough rather than duplication or uniformity and within which all agencies and stakeholders can meaningfully discuss effective use of resources and best value for the community.

The Strategy recognises that although the overall perception is of abundant open space, there are significant gaps in current open space provision which the proposals seek to address through the following developments:

- Blue Lagoon / Newton Leys Country Park
- Stanton Low Country Park and the Ouse Valley

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- Open space in Western Expansion Area and extension of North Bucks Way
- Open space in Eastern Expansion Areas and links to Marston Vale

To support the Strategy and guide delivery of objectives across the whole open space issue is planned a series of Policy Papers on:

- 1] Community Involvement.
- 2] Open Space Provision and Adoption.
- 2] Partners/Stakeholders/Responsibilities.
- 4] Design and Standards.
- 5] Landscape Maintenance.
- 6] Country parks and Rural Networks
- 7] Growth and Open Spaces.
- 8] Play Areas.
- 9] Wildlife and Biodiversity.
- 10] Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice.
- 11] Green Infrastructure Plan.
- 12] Review, Performance and Monitoring.

A draft summary of the Policy Papers content is outlined in Section 7

**Preamble**

The Open Space Strategy accords with other MKC adopted policies including the Playing Pitch Strategy for Outdoor Sports Facilities (June 2003), The Local Plan [adopted 2001], Walking and Cycling, MK Landscape Character Study (1999), The Landscape Character Assessment [2007], The Community Strategy and the Play Strategy.

The New City of Milton Keynes has a well founded reputation for its open spaces, most of which have been provided through development for over 35 years and by a variety of agencies including the former Milton Keynes Development Corporation and Commission for the New Towns, [both of which are now succeeded by English Partnerships] and Milton Keynes Council. The management and maintenance of open spaces within the City is undertaken mainly by Milton Keynes Council and the Parks Trust. An open space “hierarchy” was established by MKDC and which remains as the principle guide to the provision of new open spaces as development proceeds. The concept of “Green Infrastructure” [GI] is becoming recognised as the collective term for the whole open space estate and accessible countryside and will be used in that context throughout the strategy.

The Strategy recommends guidance for the future delivery, management and direction of both the existing open space estate and new open spaces and the means to achieve and sustain improvements and benefits for the Milton Keynes community.

There are a number of issues to be addressed within the Strategy of which the more prominent are:

- Management and Maintenance.

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- Improvements Programme
- Resources and best value.
- Delivery of Open Space
- Stakeholders and Involvement
- Community Engagement and Benefits
- Assessment of the condition of all open spaces in order to determine capacity/capability and opportunities for the future.
- The promotion and support of active community involvement in open spaces and their management
- To ensure that open space provision, maintenance and management matches local community needs and expectations.
- To ensure that new open spaces are designed and implemented to a high standard, are multi-functional and have “future proofing”.
- To ensure that the resources necessary to manage the whole “estate” is adequate and sustainable.
- To work with partners and stakeholders in securing the best value and open space performance on behalf of the community.
- Ensure appropriate responsibility and accountability is in place.

Each of the above will be actively promoted and pursued through the Open Space Strategy.

#### The Open Space Strategy Group

Milton Keynes Council set up an Open Space Strategy Group comprised of representatives of the Council, the Parks Trust and English Partnerships to advise and guide the development of the Strategy and provide a consultative platform. Initial consultation was undertaken and a further round has taken place among key stakeholders, Parish and Town Councils and MK Council Members on the Consultation Draft prior to completion of the Strategy in Autumn 2007. The intended format is for a Strategy Document which outlines the thinking, the issues, the drivers and broad recommendations. The Strategy Document is in turn supported by the series of topic based Policy Papers which set out in more detail the background, the issues, analysis, operational guidance, the management options, performance and monitoring arrangements.

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**1.0 Introduction:**

**1.01** Milton Keynes is a “New City”, strategically located in the South East Region, 50 miles north of London. The underlying landscape of the area however is more typical of the Midlands and East Anglian regions and this provides the landscape influence and character background for the Borough. The Countryside Agency’s “Character of England” map puts most of Milton Keynes in the Bedfordshire/Cambridgeshire Claylands with its broad and gently undulating landscape. The northern part of the Borough bordering Northamptonshire however is within the “Yardley - Whittlewood Ridge” of limestone scenery and the south has an area of the “Greensand Ridge” with its own special character. Although primarily a new city and having grown rapidly from around 50,000 in 1970 to over 228,000 in 2007, around 65% of the Borough area is a distinctly rural landscape of farmland and villages. The term “City” refers to the “Designated Area” established under the New Towns Act and originally developed under the direction of the Development Corporation.

**1.02** This Strategy will seek to guide the thinking and direction of open space provision, management and use for the next 20 years and perhaps beyond to 25 - 30 years during which Milton Keynes Borough is expected to grow to a population in excess of 370,000. The way in which growth is planned and managed is very important and optimisation of the “natural assets” should be at the core of expansion and the provision of open spaces.

**1.03** Integration of the built form and open space is an essential component of development both within the areas to be developed and the relationship with the rural hinterland outside those areas. This Strategy will therefore focus not only on the open spaces within development but examine the whole Green Infrastructure [GI]. Through this approach it is intended that not only will potentially adverse impacts of growth be reduced but also the range and quality of outdoor recreational opportunities and access are increased.

**1.04** Open space falls into a variety of types and ownerships, both public and private and that distinction will be maintained. It is important however to recognise that opportunities exist regardless of ownership or managing agency and that many parties have a role to play in open space and its future in Milton Keynes. This Strategy will examine and make recommendations for the future of the whole Green Infrastructure of Milton Keynes. The specific topic related guidance will be provided through a series of Policy Papers attached to the Strategy. Open Space has been planned, guided and implemented through the use of standards determined largely by the former Milton Keynes Development Corporation [MKDC]. An integral element of the planning that guided the City’s growth has been a clear recognition that a good quality outdoor environment is necessary to the success of the City as a place to live, work and play. The modern reputation of Milton Keynes is to a large extent founded on that early forward thinking which has provided a considerable legacy of open spaces for which the city is well known both within the UK and abroad.

**1.05** Residents of Milton Keynes clearly benefit from the extensive planned open space estate and frequently cite open spaces as a key feature in the

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overall attractiveness of the City. It should be recognised however that in order to achieve the open spaces, a substantial investment has been made for over 35 years in both provision and management. Ensuring the continuity of investment in open spaces is essential as the City expands in order to build upon the success of the first 35 years and meet the changing demands of a much larger and diverse population. The bulk of current investment is not unexpectedly on the provision and management of a range of new open spaces associated with continuing [and accelerating] growth. This Strategy however places an equal importance on the existing open space estate and will seek to address the many issues and challenges to ensure it also meets the demands and expectations of the communities it serves.



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## 2.0 Open Space in Milton Keynes

**2.01** Open space within the city of Milton Keynes currently covers approximately 7150 acres [2895Ha] over 20% of the total City area, placing it among the highest local authorities in terms of open space per resident.

Open Space in Figures [whole Borough]:-

- 565 play areas
- 1200 hectares open space [MKC]
- 1800 hectares open space [Parks Trust]
- 550 km public rights of way
- 225 km redways
- 250 hectares accessible woodland
- 60km rivers and streams
- 200km grid road corridors
- 21 km canal and towpath

**2.02** Milton Keynes Development Corporation provided open space and to a large extent determined the type, location and content through a hierarchical “formula” based on prescribed needs from the local neighbourhood to the city wide level. That early visionary approach to open space provision through development has been largely retained, subsequently became a Milton Keynes Local Plan standard, which has been reaffirmed on adoption of the Local Plan in December 2005. Central Government have clearly indicated the importance of open space through Planning Policy Guidance 17 [PPG17] which categorises open space types on a national basis [as outlined in 4.03]. The Milton Keynes range of open spaces and the areas they serve within the existing hierarchy are:-

- Incidental open space : [ typically in residential areas and of immediate community or neighbourhood interest]
- Play Areas : Neighbourhood and Local
- Local Parks : [serving part of or a whole grid square]
- District Parks : [serving a number of grid squares]
- Linear Parks : [typically centred on the river valleys and flood plains, serving adjacent grid squares and sometimes beyond]
- Country Parks : [a much wider catchment and outside the scope of the original MKDC open space hierarchy]

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- There are exceptions to the “standard” such as The Willen Lakes area where a considerably wider range of managed indoor and outdoor recreational attractions, give the area a City wide appeal. Campbell Park also is an exception in that it is intended to serve both local needs and be the main “City Park”.

**2.03** The categorisation of open spaces into one of the above types should give a reasonable indication of the size, facilities and features expected within the space. This assertion is correct in general terms but the variety which may be found within a single open space category is such that an over reliance on a “standard” could be misleading. Although useful as background information, it is more appropriate to consider each space as individual, particularly in the context of the community it is intended to serve. It is very important also to consider the evolving needs of the whole community and how open spaces might contribute towards those needs in the future.

#### 2.04 The Open Space Legacy of Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes is well known for its city landscape of parks, woods, lakes, waterways and wildlife sites which have been either retained and conserved or consciously provided and evolved for up to 35 years. It was and remains a feature of open space development in Milton Keynes that they frequently benefit from the utilisation of the “natural assets” within new spaces whether they are local open spaces or larger District and Linear Parks. It is however not widely known that almost 65% of the Borough remains typically rural with villages, farmland and woodland, available for use through an extensive network of public footpaths, bridleways and roads. Collectively, the urban open spaces and the countryside provide a rich and accessible outdoor environment which is “free” and contributes enormously to health and social well being, economic activity and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

**2.05** The open space of Milton Keynes is predominantly “green space” and the common perception is that the City has sufficient, so why do we need a “strategy”? The apparent abundance of green and pleasant open space, seemingly free from threats and problems can hide underlying issues and lead to complacency among both the community it serves and the agencies responsible for maintaining and managing those open spaces. Complacency can in turn lead to under-valuing the asset rather than recognising the importance of open space and the substantial contribution it can and should make to the quality of life for all residents of Milton Keynes. The contribution made by open spaces to the quality of peoples lives can be summarised by the following:-

- Basic life support, maintaining air, soils, water, climate control and limiting the adverse effects of flooding and pollution.
- An attractive outdoor environment in which to live, work, exercise and play.
- An inspiring environment, enabling creative and imaginative activities.

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- Excitement and stimulation, a feeling of well being to support physical and mental health.
- An informal environment in which to learn and gain experience.
- An environment able to contribute to the well being of all ages and abilities.
- Havens for wildlife conservation and ecological interest [biodiversity on the doorstep].
- Conservation of historical and natural heritage and landscape features.
- An essential resource for jobs and support to the local economy.



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**3.0 The Need for an Open Space Strategy**

**3.01** The need for an Open Space Strategy may not be immediately apparent since Milton Keynes is considered to have open space in abundance, designed into the structure of the City and is which is not generally felt to be under threat of loss or abandonment. The open spaces are an accepted and expected feature of the City and although appreciated are largely “taken for granted”.

**3.02** Over 30 years of rapid development have produced a substantial open space estate of varying types and maturity, required to meet a large diversity of uses and demands, some of which today may differ considerably from the original design objectives. In order to develop a strategy for the future of open spaces, it is necessary to examine the attributes of open spaces, their contribution to modern lifestyles, the networks and systems that have been established to manage them over the lifetime of the New City. They may be summarised as :-

- Strategic planning which utilized existing natural assets such as river corridors, woodlands, hedgerows and trees.
- A deliberate and well-resourced “strategy” based on the Milton Keynes Masterplan to create open spaces as an integral component of the city. - a “city of trees”.
- A stated objective to create a network of linked open spaces and wildlife corridors. - “strings and beads”
- Large open spaces which also serve to manage surface water drainage and flood control. – wet and dry balancing lakes.
- Milton Keynes Council and the Parks Trust each have a substantial management stake in the open spaces of the city.
- Milton Keynes Council working with Parish/Town Councils and other organisations.
- Active voluntary groups and individuals with interest in open spaces, the monitoring and promotion of wildlife conservation.
- Active management of the Rights of Way network and countryside management initiatives by Milton Keynes Council.
- The development of environmental education by Milton Keynes Council.

**3.03 The Challenges for Milton Keynes Open Spaces**

Although much has undoubtedly been achieved, and many examples of good practice exist, it has to be acknowledged that when dealing with a dynamic and evolving environment, to simply maintain a position of “status quo” is by default to decline. The landscape by its nature is an evolving asset that requires constant re-evaluation and appropriate flexible stewardship to ensure the optimum benefits are achieved and

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sustained on behalf of the community. It should be further recognised that competition for resources is always strong and there are no grounds for complacency where competing priorities for expenditure may affect [and reduce] the resources available for open spaces. The Open Space Strategy will emphasise the importance of both the tangible and intangible benefits of open spaces to the people of Milton Keynes and the need for ensuring appropriate resources and continuing investment is made.

### 3.04 To ensure open spaces enhance the quality of life for today's residents and future generations the following issues need to be addressed:-

- Better delivery of national and local open space and biodiversity targets.
- More effective use of the planning system and Local Plan policies to support open spaces.
- A strategic approach to applying Local Plan standards.
- Inclusive and multi-purpose design objectives for open spaces.
- Improved co-operation and clarification of roles among the leading players and stakeholders [MKC; PT, EP/MKP and Parish/Town Councils]
- Adequate and secure funding for open space provision and management.
- Promote wider recognition of the open space benefits for local communities.
- Engage and actively involve local people in their neighbourhood open spaces.
- Manage conflicting interests of different user groups at both neighbourhood and wider levels.
- Adopt and evolve best practice in open space design and flexible management.
- Develop a robust system for strategic monitoring and effective performance review.

### Who provides open spaces?

**3.05** Milton Keynes has developed for 35 years without an "Open Space Strategy" although under the jurisdiction of MKDC, open space was provided directly through Agreements attached to specific developments or alternatively through collective contributions towards open space provision and adoption. The Commission for the New Towns [CNT] from 1992 continued to require the provision of open space through

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development under a variety of schemes and latterly English Partnerships [EP] have continued the process in a modified form.

- 3.06** The role of Milton Keynes Council [MKC] over the same period has increased incrementally from inauguration in 1972 with the adoption of open space and the assumption of limited powers as the Planning Authority. MKC as the Local Planning Authority has included open space standards within the Milton Keynes Local Plan and more development has become subject to the council's planning powers. In 1992 the Milton Keynes Development Corporation was wound up and a substantial estate of housing related open space and District Parks were transferred to MKC's responsibility.
- 3.07** At the same time, the Milton Keynes Parks Trust was set up by the outgoing Development Corporation to manage the network of "linear parks" with the benefit of a substantial endowment and property portfolio intended to generate revenue to manage those parklands. MKC has increased its responsibilities since 1992 and the Parks Trust also continues to "adopt" and manage linear parks under a long lease arrangement from MKC.
- 3.08** In 1997 Milton Keynes Council became a Unitary Authority and took on additional powers and responsibilities. Highways, Public Rights of Way and associated greenspace became part of the MKC estate although substantial areas of the grid road transport corridors continued to be managed by the Parks Trust.
- 3.09** 2004 saw the establishment of the Milton Keynes Partnership [MKP], as the "Local Delivery Vehicle" created to manage both the current planned growth and the forthcoming phases of major growth which will add an estimated further 70,000 homes by 2030. Although continued growth has been a feature of Milton Keynes since the early seventies the intention is for much more growth and at an accelerated rate. Clearly an Open Space Strategy is needed firstly to address the many issues arising from the existing open space estate and secondly to determine and oversee the guidelines for the provision and management of the future open space estate as the city expands beyond its present and planned limits.



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## 4.0 Scope and Strategic Guidance

**4.01** In seeking to develop a meaningful and widely acceptable Open Space Strategy it is necessary to use a format which is capable of addressing both “generic” open space issues and those which are considered peculiar to Milton Keynes, present and future. The Strategy must also appeal to a wide audience and become a “working guide” with long term relevance rather than simply a current position statement. A number of “guides” have been published in recent years and the Open Space Strategy Group has adopted The Green Space Strategies “**Good Practice Guide**” published by CABI Space [Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment] 2003 as a background guiding document for this Strategy. The CABI Space Guide is becoming widely regarded as “the industry standard” by many Local Authorities and its recommendations are, with some adaptation suitable for Milton Keynes and its particular open space issues.

### 4.02 Planning Policy Guidance 17 [PPG 17]

Sets out Central Government’s broad position on the level of provision and standards of management for recreational open spaces and provides a nationally recognised open space “typology”. PPG17 is becoming the principle source of guidance for open space provision, particularly in relation to Planning and a brief summary of that guidance is set out below:-

Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation [2002]  
PPG17 advises all Local Planning Authorities to undertake:

- Robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities.
- Audits of existing open space, sports and recreational facilities.

PPG17 stresses the importance of quality open space to enable Local Planning Authorities [LPAs] to identify the potential for “increased use through better design, management and maintenance” and :-

- Support an urban renaissance
- Support a rural renewal
- Promote social inclusion and community cohesion
- Promote health and well being
- Promote more sustainable development

The Milton Keynes Open Space Strategy will aim to be PPG17 compliant and adopt the typology of open space defined therein as it relates to the context of Milton Keynes:-

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**4.03 PPG17 Open Space Typology : The Milton Keynes context**

- 1] "Parks and Public Gardens": *[linear parks, district parks, local parks]*.
- 2] "Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces": *[woodlands, urban forestry, commons, meadows, wetlands, open and running water, wildlife corridors, nature reserves]*.
- 3] "Green Corridors": *[rivers, canals, footpaths, linear parks, grid road corridors]*
- 4] "Outdoor Sports Facilities": *[playing fields, sports pitches, tennis courts, bowling greens, golf courses, athletics tracks, school and other institutional playing fields]*
- 5] "Amenity Greenspaces": *[informal spaces, incidental spaces, village greens, domestic gardens, private/commercial open space]*
- 6] "Provision for Children and Teenagers": *[play areas, skateboard/BMX areas, casual sports, informal areas]*
- 7] "Community Space": *[allotments, community gardens/orchards]*
- 8] "Cemeteries and Churchyards: in use and closed.
- 9] "Accessible Countryside and Urban Fringe": *[public rights of way, permissive routes, access land, common land, country parks]*
- 10] "Civic Spaces": *[town squares, market squares, hard surfaced spaces, pedestrian space]*

The PPG17 typology recognises that distinctions may overlap and that "parks and public gardens" for example may include other space types within their boundaries. Country Parks are not specifically listed although clearly will have an increasing role in an expanding Milton Keynes.

**4.04 Beacon Council Initiative**

The third round of Beacon Council themes included "Improving Urban Greenspaces" and focuses on innovative and effective approaches to planning, design and management of greenspace. The Milton Keynes Council Streetcare Department has declared its intention to achieve Beacon Status by 2010 and is actively working towards that objective. The improvement of existing open spaces and delivery of sustainable high quality new open spaces is a key component of the drive towards Beacon Council status.

**4.05 The Green Paper - Planning : Delivering a fundamental change**

Sets out the Governments recommendations for reforming the planning system to promote sustainable development, encourage economic prosperity and regeneration, conserve Greenfield and re-use Brownfield land and value the countryside and heritage.

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**4.06 Sustainable Communities Plan**

The plan from the former ODPM to develop the “liveability” agenda and allocate targeted central funding. The Plan encourages partnerships, community involvement and joint working to deliver integrated services, resulting in a public realm and neighbourhoods of which we can all be proud.

**4.07 Biodiversity Action Plans**

The United Nations Environment and Development Conference – Earth Summit – Rio de Janeiro in 1992 at which 179 world leaders signed up to what became known as “Agenda 21”. It is recognised that action is needed at local level to halt the loss of species and habitats and encourage sustainability and that each country has a responsibility to conserve and enhance its own biodiversity. Biodiversity and Species Protection has been strengthened in the planning process through PPG9 and a more recent amendment. The imperative to act falls upon a number of agencies, including Local Government.



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## 5.0 OPEN SPACE: Drivers and Guiding Principles: Central Government View

**5.01** The national movement towards the improvement of open spaces in recent times has its origins in the *Parklife* report by Comedia/Demos in 1995. The profile of greenspace has gradually risen up the national agenda and produced the *Town and Country Parks Inquiry* led by a House of Commons Select Committee. The Government has since publication of this report recognised the contribution that good quality open spaces make to communities.

### 5.02 The Local Government Act 2000

The Act placed a duty on Local Authorities and vested the power to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of the community and required the formation of Local Strategic Partnerships and the development of a Community Strategy.

### 5.03 The Urban White Paper - Our Towns and Cities - The Future

This initiative brought greenspace and open spaces into the heart of the government change agenda, a key contributor to urban renaissance, community regeneration, social inclusion, crime reduction, health promotion and lifelong learning. The paper also put forward the appointment of a ministerial Urban Green Spaces Task Force and proposed the “**Green Flag Award**” as a national standard in park management.

**The main objectives of the Urban White Paper’s vision for urban areas are:**

- People shaping the future of their community, supported by strong and truly representative local leaders;
- People living in attractive, well-kept towns and cities which use space and buildings well;
- Good design and planning which makes it practical to live in a more environmentally sustainable way, with less noise, pollution and traffic congestion;
- Towns and cities able to create and share prosperity, investing to help all their citizens reach their full potential; and
- Good quality services health, education, housing, transport, finance, shopping, leisure and protection from crime that meet the needs of people and businesses wherever they are.

### 5.04 Modernisation and Best Value

The need for local authorities to take into account the cross cutting value of parks and open spaces and to ensure Best Value is being grasped to deliver sustainable improvements for the public. Going much further than the increasingly obsolete CCT [Compulsory Competitive Tendering], this

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requires local authorities to provide services which challenge, compare, consult and compete.

**5.05** The open space scenario in Milton Keynes, although in some ways unique is also symptomatic and representative of the national picture. Central Government recognised both the open spaces “problem” and the potential for improvement and established a national movement with the aim of improving open spaces. The movement gained considerable credence in July 1999 by the Lord Rogers’ Report of the Urban Task Force “**Towards an Urban Renaissance**”. This Report claimed that the state of parks and open spaces in the UK generally was in decline. The Report further outlined the requirement for a substantial and very welcome emphasis on the need to manage and invest in our parks and green spaces much better than had been the case in the past. The Lord Rogers Report then led to the setting up by Central Government of the “**Urban Green Spaces Taskforce**” which in 2003 produced its final report entitled “**Green Spaces, Better Places**”. The Report is regarded as the “blueprint” for the future and key recommendations are summarised below in four parts:-

### 5.06 Parks Green Spaces and Urban Life:

Emphasise the benefits of urban parks and green spaces in the enrichment of people’s lives, their neighbourhoods and cities. “They make an important contribution to wide, long-term social, economic and environmental progress”. The report goes on to outline the many environmental and social benefits:-

- Urban regeneration and renewal: helping to improve the quality of projects, creating community enterprise and new jobs.
- Health: promoting healthy living and preventing illness, by providing places for physical activities, walking and cycling.
- Social cohesion: community development and citizenship; encouraging involvement and local pride by giving people the chance to become involved in design, management and care of open spaces.
- Education and lifelong learning: providing a valuable resource for learning about the natural world and the local environment.
- Environmental sustainability: countering the pollution which can make cities unhealthy and unsustainable, helping to promote ecologically sensitive towns and cities.
- Heritage and culture: parks and green spaces are reservoirs of collective memory and experience and provide venues for local festivals and civic celebrations.

### 5.07 Challenges and Responses:

Considers some of the problems affecting urban parks and green spaces and how they might be overcome.

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- **Marginalised groups:**  
Parks and green spaces are needed to serve the whole community, especially children, the elderly, those with disabilities, minorities and people in disadvantaged areas.
- **Investment:**  
It is suggested that at least £100 million of capital funding will be needed in each of the next 5 years to reverse the decline of urban parks and green spaces and to create good quality new ones. The Report suggests that funding sources other than local authorities could help to deliver “new resources”. Investment in parks and green spaces is of direct benefit to other key policy areas for both local and central government.
- **Additional capital and revenue funding:**  
Needs to be supported by a range of non-financial improvements, such as training and skills for managers, staff, local groups and volunteers. Partnership working as a way forward and sustainable community involvement, with better information systems, examination of new styles of management and administrative body is suggested.
- **Partnership:**  
Types of partnership and community involvement are reviewed. The report outlines how more could be done to enlist the private sector and local businesses into partnerships and to promote greater mutual understanding between all parties.
- **Information systems:**  
Often fragmented and incomplete, create barriers to good decision making. The report proposes short and long term actions for the development and spreading of good practice.

### 5.08 Creating Green Space Networks:

Outline of recommendations for good practice including:

- Planners to take better account of the benefits of urban parks and green spaces and the needs of local communities.
- Design reviews to enhance and revive urban green spaces.
- Development of management plans, service models and flexible maintenance contracts.
- Adoption of performance indicators, quality standards and reviews. [The report refers to the AGMA Parks and Open Spaces benchmarking Group as an example of good practice].
- Eliminate misuse: Taking better account of the local community needs by designers, planners and managers and creating a positive image for open spaces.

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**5.09 Making it happen:**

Sets out how and why the recommendations in parts 2 and 3 can help to deliver a wider vision of “liveable”, sustainable, modern towns and cities.

- Strong civic and local pride and responsibility are necessary to achieve this vision, reinforced by a widely adopted and successful Open Space Strategy.
- There is a need for common criteria to measure standards of care and quality. Each site should be seen as part of a network of green spaces which benefit the locality and ultimately the whole nation.
- Roles and Responsibilities:  
Set out the roles of the main interest groups involved: local and national government, the business community, the voluntary sector and local interests. Strong co-ordinated leadership is needed at local level and sustained support at national level.
- Funding schemes:  
The report calls for a scheme to enable both current funders and potential funders to work with local groups, businesses, users and local authorities to help spread good practice, create partnerships and vehicles for improving local green spaces.



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**6.0 Aims and Objectives of the Open Space Strategy**

**6.01** Under the broad recommendations of PPG17 and the Good Practice Guide 2003 [CABE], the aims and objectives of the Open Space Strategy will need to satisfy the requirements of stakeholders and address those requirements in a holistic and co-ordinated manner.

**6.02 Purpose of the Open Space Strategy**

The purpose of the Open Space Strategy is, in broad terms to:

- Maximise the quality, performance and benefits of existing open spaces for the communities they serve.
- Create and develop a framework for ensuring high quality, sustainable, and appropriately resourced open spaces are an integral element of the Milton Keynes growth agenda.
- Ensure local accountability at all levels for the development and management of open space with an active community involvement.

**6.03** The broad aims could be considered separately since different routes and techniques would be used to achieve those aims. However, the fundamentals of good quality, inclusive design; local community Involvement, appropriate, sustainable management and efficient use of resources are issues common to both existing and new open spaces. Additionally, much may be learnt through the evaluation of existing open spaces, both their good points and deficiencies which may assist in establishing the comprehensive standards that will determine future provision and inform the management of all open spaces.

**6.04 What do we need to achieve**

Open space as an integral component of the outdoor environment is important to the lives of all who live, work, play and visit Milton Keynes. It is considered appropriate therefore within the Strategy to examine the issues holistically as well as separate aspects of open space outside the strategic “umbrella”. This approach requires consideration of the following aims and objectives, putting considerable emphasis on the inter-relationship of those aims as important collectively to the open space issue and to the success of the Strategy to:-

- Develop a vision shared by politicians, officers, key partners, stakeholders and local communities.
- Generate and sustain political, inter-departmental and inter-organisational support for open spaces and clear lines of responsibility.
- Establish key operational links with other council strategies to ensure consistency and integration with corporate objectives.
- Define the role and contribution of open spaces in meeting corporate and community objectives.

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- Provide the framework for resource generation and allocation, seeking funding opportunities from all potential sources.
- Ensure that open space is an integral and fully acknowledged element of the “growth agenda”.
- Establish a robust policy for the provision and funding of open spaces through planning agreements, adoption and management.
- Develop holistic and appropriate open space management which is cost effective, achieves strategic and local outcomes and best value targets.
- Promote and optimise opportunities for the whole Borough open space and public access network to contribute to the well being of the community.
- Develop a framework for the enhancement, community safety, full use and accessibility of existing open spaces.
- Actively involve local communities in enhancing the potential of open spaces to improve quality of life, ownership, civic pride, bio-diversity and social inclusion.
- Create a sustainable framework to enable active local involvement in open space management and use.
- Provide guidance on the provision, distribution and quality of open spaces, identify surplus and/or deficiencies.
- Ensure open spaces meet both present and future needs of local people through quality design, implementation and management.
- Develop holistic and flexible management plans for key sites in conjunction with stakeholders, local communities and parish/town councils.
- Establish a “critical” strategic overview to monitor progress, scrutinise cost effectiveness and steer the development of the Strategy.

### 6.05 Delivering the Service

The strategic approach to the provision, management, maintenance and development of Milton Keynes’ open spaces will be implemented with the aim of creating clean, safe, attractive, varied, welcoming and interesting environments. To achieve these aims, we will do the following:-

- Undertake a comprehensive survey and evaluation of open spaces to determine “condition and status” using the Milton Keynes Open Space Evaluation methodology.
- Encourage a sense of ownership and pride by promoting the benefits and use of open spaces among local communities and inviting a meaningful involvement.

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- Develop and integrate the MK Streetcare Service with a high profile presence and easy recognition through appropriate service image, staff deployment and livery.
- Develop individual site based Management Plans which seek to optimise the physical characteristics and community benefits of open spaces.
- Develop and sustain a dialogue with local communities to engender involvement and inform the development of Management Plans and ongoing interest.
- Develop integrated “estate management” within Streetcare Service Plans that include landscape/open space; highways; cleansing and community liaison.
- Maximise the opportunities to use and enhance the intrinsic qualities of open spaces to achieve community benefits.
- Review and improve Service Charters to compliment the “Beacon Service” 2010 objective and “Green Flag Parks Quality Standard” for all major parks and open spaces.
- Develop and sustain a proactive Tree and Woodland management policy.
- Actively involve stakeholders in the management of open spaces to develop best value and maximise community benefits.

### 6.06 Outcomes of the Open Space Strategy

To address the above Aims and Objectives the following outcomes will be sought through the Open Space Strategy:-

- Establish the principles of locally appropriate, sustainable and cost effective management of open spaces.
- Secure high quality design and low cost maintenance in new open spaces.
- Establish and use an open space evaluation technique to enable consistent and objective assessment of open space performance and provide a qualitative and quantitative audit of existing open spaces costs: benefits.
- Involve and engage local communities in the use and management of open spaces, developing a scheme of sustainable “local ownership”.
- Develop and promote social inclusion and the “access for all” principles to enable open space benefits for the whole community.
- Integrate, promote and optimise the bio-diversity potential of open spaces, networks and the wider countryside.

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- Establish a close working relationship with Crime and Community Unit and address crime and community safety issues as barriers to use of open spaces. [see paragraph 6.7]
- Recognise and cater for the needs of all age groups in design and management of open spaces.
- Provide and develop with partners, “best practice” guidance for the management of open spaces.
- Develop and promote cost effective, “environment friendly” flexible and sustainable maintenance over the whole open space estate.
- Develop, utilize and support Supplementary Planning Guidance [SPG] and Tariff arrangements for the provision of open space through development.
- Establish and agree the open space adoption protocol with Partners for all new development.
- Establish a protocol for sharing expertise and working with partner organisations on open space provision, adoption and management issues.
- Develop the potential of open spaces as a learning environment.
- Develop and promote the health and fitness benefits of open spaces.
- Generate a revenue stream and framework for the continuous investment and improvement of open spaces.
- Seek and secure funding from all potential sources to improve quality and manage open spaces.

### Consultation

Initial consultation has taken place to date through the Environment Policy Development Committee [EPDC] March 2005, The Parishes Assembly and with West Bletchley Town Council [on request] and individual contributions. The Open Space Strategy Group is comprised of officers from Environment, Learning and Development, Neighbourhood Services and Chief Executives Department, plus Parks Trust and English Partnerships. The feedback from that early round of consultation has raised a number of issues which the Strategy will attempt to address, through the adoption of recommendations on key issues.

Further and wider consultation has taken place at 1<sup>st</sup> Draft stage.

### 6.07 Resources to meet the Strategy objectives

It is well understood that resources are limited and significantly below the sums required to guarantee the management and maintenance of a high quality open space estate throughout Milton Keynes. The resources of the Parks Trust are devoted solely to the property for which they are directly responsible under their lease. In order to make optimum use of both the

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existing resource and attract additional resources it is necessary to undertake the following:

- Establish a “Strategic Support/Development Unit” with partners/stakeholders for open spaces to ensure effective overview and coordination of service delivery/development, capital investment, performance monitoring and review, asset/estate management, community liaison and best value.
- Prepare a flexible management and operational structure to provide an integrated service delivery for open spaces within the context of Streetcare Estate Management.
- Develop an effective and coordinated approach to the management of operations and service delivery between MKC and Parks Trust for both “in house” and private contractors.
- Revise contract documentation, specification, management procedures and operational practice to meet the objectives of integrated estate management.
- Establish an effective and focused performance management, monitoring and review system to ensure cost effectiveness, best value and sustained improvement through Strategic Support/Development unit.
- Seek additional funds through use of The Big Lottery, Heritage Lottery, DCLG [GAF], Countryside Agency and other external agencies as appropriate.
- Maximise sponsorship opportunities and develop creative commercial relationships where appropriate.
- Maximise funding opportunities through new development and S106 agreement initiatives to support and improve existing open spaces and develop new open spaces.
- Ensure that effective and sustainable service coordination takes place with partner organisations to ensure delivery to a common and agreed standard in all aspects of the service.

### 6.08 Safer Communities

In order for open spaces to provide the optimum benefits for the community, the perception of safety for all users has to be high. The perception of safety is dependent on being able to claim, justify and promote a safe open space environment. That claim has to be supported by design and management which seeks to minimize activities which might jeopardise the perception. A number of factors are considered essential in order to achieve a perception [and the reality] of community safety in open spaces:

- Design [and re-design] open spaces to enable maximum use and interest among the local community.

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- Seek opportunities for improving the “natural surveillance” of open spaces by regular use, frequent pedestrian movements through the spaces and opportunities for surveillance by the resident community.
- Maximise the presence of all maintenance staff through integrated working practices and frequent contact and liaison with the local community.
- Engage and involve local communities in the management of open spaces and provide the support to sustain their involvement in the longer term.
- Maintain a regular assessment of crime and disorder and actively address any issues through the appropriate service planning channels and consultation.
- Take a proactive dual approach to dogs and dog fouling through the provision of disposal facilities and enforcement of penalties on offenders.

**6.09 The Principle Stakeholders are:**The Providers:

Developers; Milton Keynes Council [MKC]; Parks Trust [PT]; English Partnerships/Milton Keynes Partnership [MKP]; Parish/Town Councils and Private.

The Land Managers:

MKC; PT; Parish/Town Councils and Private;

Political:

MKC; Milton Keynes Partnership [MKP]; Parish/Town Councils.

Community:

MKC; Parish/Town Councils, Voluntary Sector Organisations and Local Communities and Residents.

The success of the Strategy will depend substantially on “sign up” and adoption by all stakeholders and a sustained commitment to pursue the objectives.



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**7.0 Policy Papers**

The delivery of the broad objectives of the Strategy will be through the series of Policy Papers, each of which address the more specific issues and the requirements of 6.4 to 6.8 and the Actions outlined in Section 8. The Policy Papers approach is considered the most appropriate format for close examination and developing recommendations for those topic areas.

The 12 Policy Papers are:-

- Community Involvement
- Open Space Provision and Adoption
- Partners/Stakeholders/Responsibilities
- Design and Standards
- Landscape Maintenance
- Country Parks/Rural Networks
- Growth and Open Spaces
- Play Areas
- Wildlife and Bio-diversity
- Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice
- Green Infrastructure Plan
- Strategy Review, Performance and Monitoring

**The Policy Papers are being prepared and summary content of each is outlined below:**

**7.01 Community Involvement**

The policy paper on Community Involvement shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- Establish the key principle and practice of Parish/Town Council and active community involvement and accountability in the management of open spaces and the delivery of identifiable benefits.
- Develop and sustain a sense of community ownership for local open spaces and initiatives such as “wildlife on the doorstep”.
- Develop and sustain a programme of Green Flag Award initiatives with local communities.

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- Establish and sustain community involvement, empowerment, support and active representation [including that of young people] on local open space / play area forums.
- Establish working partnerships among Parish/Town councils; local communities, Milton Keynes Council and Parks Trust in the management, use and improvement of open spaces.
- Support local initiatives and enterprises such as “Friends Groups” to improve open spaces and sustain community use.
- Establish and support active involvement in Management/Steering Groups for “strategic” open spaces.
- Support for Parishes and local communities in the seeking of grants and additional funding for the improvement and use local open spaces.
- Develop environmental learning opportunities with local communities and schools.
- Other Community Involvement considerations where relevant.

## 7.02 Open Space Provision and Adoption

The policy paper on Open Space Provision and Adoption shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- Ensure the continued provision of best possible design of good quality, accessible and safe open spaces are delivered through development, supported through the approvals process and the MKP Business Plan for delivery of open spaces.
- Ensure the open space adoption process is upheld and supported by MKP in development agreements and throughout all stages of development.
- Ensure the continuity of the payment of appropriate commuted sums for adoption and maintenance of open space to MKC and/or nominee organisations.
- Ensure that the design of new open space is to the MKC approved standard, relevant to the needs of the whole community (e.g. young families, seniors, special needs groups).
- Encourage clear delineation between private and public open spaces through design, boundaries, paths, roads etc and wherever possible ensure that residential development has an active frontage with open space.
- Ensure that Milton Keynes Council, its nominee organisation or the Parks Trust only adopt and manage new public open spaces in accordance with Council Policy.

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- Involve local communities, Parishes and representatives in the open space delivery process.
- Ensure agreement on a maintenance policy is reached by affected parties prior to Milton Keynes Council (or its nominee organisation) taking over management of open space.
- Ensure that appropriate resources for long term maintenance are secured through the adoption process prior to transfer of responsibility.
- MKC to maintain a close working relationship with Milton Keynes Partnership through established channels in the negotiations relating to management and the provision of open space throughout the development process.
- Maintain and support the Milton Keynes Partnership Business Plan for the provision and management of open space within the growth areas.
- Continue to promote the provision of open space as a necessary and an integral element of the development process with the support of planning agreements.
- Maintain a close working relationship with developers and their agents to ensure the provision and adoption of quality open space.
- Use and develop the Local Plan as the basis for the provision of open spaces in planning agreements.
- Other Open Space Provision and Adoption considerations where relevant.

### 7.03 Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities

The policy paper on Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- Develop a common understanding, a clarity of roles and responsibilities and a cooperative approach among appropriate parties over the provision and management of open spaces.
- Establish a Borough wide Stakeholder Forum to share knowledge, information, best practice and ensure coordination of activities.
- Ensure that Milton Keynes Council, the Parks Trust and other agencies recognise their respective roles and work in a co-ordinated, co-operative and efficient manner for the benefit of the whole Milton Keynes Community.
- Support Parish and Town Councils, where they are prepared to take on the devolved responsibility for maintenance and management of open spaces in accordance with a suitable agreement that recognises their capacity and capability to add value to open spaces.

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- Other Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities considerations where relevant.

**7.04 Design and Standards**

The policy paper on Design and Standards shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- Ensure high professional standards of design and implementation in the provision of open spaces and provision of adequate resources for lifetime costs.
- Undertake a comprehensive audit and survey of open spaces condition and usage to determine and guide future investment priorities.
- Prepare and adopt an Open Space Standards manual to guide Milton Keynes Council, Milton Keynes Partnership, Parks Trust, stakeholders and Developers on open space design requirements
- Ensure adherence to principles of multi-use and optimum spatial benefits in design.
- Encourage the inclusion and use of existing landscape assets within new design where able to provide benefits to the open space estate.
- Ensure integration and a complimentary relationship between the built and open space environments.
- Facilitate the provision of passive surveillance by ensuring that residential properties address open space through orientation and footpaths/links provide good visual opportunities over open spaces.
- Intelligent use of the principles of “secured by design” and community safety into design of new open spaces and the re-design of existing spaces where necessary.
- Full consideration and integration of the principles of “access for all” and requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act throughout the open spaces network.
- Ensure good quality provision of pedestrian, cyclist and equestrian routes within growth areas and links to the wider network.
- Preparation of both general and site specific management briefs and guidance for the maintenance of open spaces.
- Other Design and Standards considerations where relevant

**7.05 Landscape Maintenance**

The policy paper on Landscape Maintenance shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

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- Developing best practice on flexible, coordinated, economic and sustainable maintenance to meet the design objectives, customer expectations and the varying needs of evolving landscapes.
- Adoption of flexible and wider service based maintenance contracts to respond to local community and estate management needs.
- Development of robust and sustainable review process for landscape maintenance and management practices.
- Develop an understanding of multiple design objectives and appropriate landscape maintenance techniques to support.
- Encourage, guide and support local community forums to engage with open space maintenance issues.
- Develop wide understanding of design objectives and evolving landscapes.
- MKC and PT seek achievement of and sustain “Green Flag” awards on 5 or more key open spaces by 2010 and to an agreed programme subsequently.
- Develop and sustain local community involvement in landscape maintenance, management and related issues through a variety of initiatives.
- Seek opportunities for the use of tree, shrub and woodland waste as a carbon neutral and renewable bio-fuel material.
- Develop and sustain the MKC Environment “Streetcare” approach to integrated landscape maintenance and estate management
- Other Landscape Maintenance considerations where relevant.

### 7.06 Country Parks and Rural Networks

The policy paper on Country Parks and Rural Networks shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- Development of a series of country parks to improve countryside recreation and access opportunities in conjunction with urban / rural links to optimise use of the wider green infrastructure and rural networks.
- Provide guidance on the creation of new country parks (in particular Stanton Low and Blue Lagoon / Newton Leys), using experience and successful procedures adapted from Emberton Country Park and Blue Lagoon District Park - Local Nature Reserve.
- Develop Hanson Environmental Study Centre as the principle venue for the delivery of the MKC Forest Schools programme and structured environmental education.

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- Implement the key elements of the Business Development Plan for Emberton Country Park.
- Identification and development of existing and proposed rural networks and opportunities for enhancement, working with the MK Local Access Forum and landowners.
- Preparation, promotion and delivery of the MK Green Infrastructure Plan with key partners in Milton Keynes and adjoining Authorities.
- Integration of countryside access / rights of way issues with Local Access Forum activities and Rights of Way Improvement Plan [ROWIP]
- Establish and support Management Steering Groups to direct and guide management of Country Parks and strategic landscapes.
- Develop and support active community involvement through appropriate channels.
- Consider opportunities for local renewable energy installations of a scale appropriate to the locality. [wind, solar, hydro and biomass]
- Other Country Parks and Rural Networks considerations where relevant.

### 7.07 Growth and Open Spaces

The policy paper on Growth and Open Spaces shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- Adopt the guidance of PPG17 and MK Local Plan as the baseline for the provision of open spaces within growth areas.
- Provide guidance and direction on the open space hierarchy and community needs in the delivery of open space through the MKP Business Plan.
- Support and develop the MKP Business Plan and the MKC/EP adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance [SPG] and Tariff funding arrangements for open space delivery.
- Work closely with MKP and developers throughout all stages of the MKP Business Plan for open space delivery.
- Ensure the appropriate resources are secured for lifetime management of open spaces.
- Promote, awareness, interest and active engagement among local communities.
- Ensure public open space maintenance and management resides with MKC, its nominee organisation or Parks Trust in accordance with Council Policy.

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**7.08 Play Areas**

The policy paper on Play Areas shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- Other Growth and Open Spaces considerations where relevant.
- Develop appropriate and sustainable good quality outdoor play facilities in all residential areas of the Borough.
- Prepare appropriate play area evaluation methodology as a means of determining condition, usage and future opportunities.
- Undertake comprehensive condition and usage surveys of all play areas within the Borough, including local community involvement.
- Work with the community and Parish / Town Councils to identify both play areas where improvement and investment is warranted and desirable and those sites which are considered no longer able to serve the intended recreational needs of children and the local community.
- Extend and support play initiatives and informal recreation opportunities throughout the wider open space environment.
- Promote the use of play areas and informal recreation as “free to use” facilities in supporting the inclusive, health and social agendas.
- Ensure the continued delivery of play areas within growth areas and appropriate resources for lifetime maintenance costs.
- Develop and support the strategic objectives of PlayMK as they relate to the open space/play area environment.
- Work closely with Learning & Development Directorate to develop adopted Play Strategy initiatives and projects.
- Engage with and seek the support of the wider children and young people’s professional bodies in developing objectives.
- Provide guidance on the refurbishment or improvements of existing play areas where continued use is considered appropriate.
- Achieve improvements and investment through a variety of funding sources, working with community partners.
- Use and develop Local Plan guidance to achieve appropriate play facilities while minimising costs and maintenance demands for the future.
- Work with parish and town councils to develop local involvement, ownership and responsibility.

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- Seek and support opportunities for the devolution of maintenance responsibilities where Parish/Town Councils have the inclination, the capacity and capability to take on responsibility.
- Seek and support opportunities for “adding value” to the play area service through engagement with parish/town councils.
- Other Play Area considerations where relevant.

### 7.09 Wildlife Conservation and Biodiversity

The policy paper on Wildlife Conservation and Biodiversity shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- Ensure wildlife conservation and biodiversity is supported, enhanced and managed as a key component of existing and new open spaces.
- Secure and sustain appropriate wildlife conservation opportunities through Local Plan policies [NE1, NE2, NE3 and Central Government’s PPG9].
- Identify opportunities to create and manage Local Nature Reserves with active Parish/Town Council and communities involvement – e.g. Railway Walk, Blue Lagoon District Park and Ouse Valley Park [Stony Stratford].
- Actively promote and manage wildlife conservation on all appropriate sites, supporting a range of community benefits.
- Adopt and implement nationally prescribed guidance for wildlife, biodiversity and habitat conservation – PPG9.
- Ensure the recognition and adoption of national directives, guidance and best practice in relation to wildlife conservation.
- Optimise biodiversity opportunities throughout the open space estate by appropriate management techniques.
- Introduce flexible maintenance regimes to support wildlife conservation.
- Support and promote opportunities for community involvement in habitat creation and management through biodiversity awareness and a city wide series of “wildlife on the doorstep” initiatives.
- Ensure robust and sustainable measures for “protected species” conservation and appropriate licensing where required.
- Other Wildlife and Biodiversity considerations where relevant.

### 7.10 Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice

The policy paper on Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

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- Consideration of opportunities to improve current procedures, deliver efficiencies and quality in open space maintenance, including the emerging guidance from “Systems Thinking” in Environment Streetcare.
- Make guidance and advice from “Systems Thinking” available to partner organisations involved with open space maintenance and management.
- Identify and secure resources for implementation of the Open Space Strategy objectives and actions.
- Continue to participate and maintain familiarity with current best practice principles and guidance in landscape management.
- The seeking of resources from all possible internal and external sources to improve the open space estate and delivery of benefits.
- Other Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice considerations where relevant.

### 7.11 Green Infrastructure Plan

The policy paper on Green Infrastructure shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- To be determined by the Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure Group, reporting in September 2007.

### 7.12 Strategy Review, Performance and Monitoring

The policy paper on Strategy Review, Performance and Monitoring shall include detail and guidance on the following matters:

- The review of the Open Space Strategy progress to be undertaken annually and at 5 year intervals after the adoption of this strategy with emphasis on performance and delivery of the Actions.
- Establish and support performance measurement and accountability for delivery of actions over the whole sphere of activity and among all stakeholders.
- Develop key indicators to assist in measuring performance of the strategy, the delivery of open new spaces, impact upon open spaces and communities.
- Set up a structure for monitoring the costs, performance, effectiveness and progress of the strategy in terms of its vision, objectives and actions.
- Other Strategy Review, Performance and Monitoring considerations where relevant.

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**8.0 The Actions**

A series of Actions have been prepared for delivery through implementation of the relevant Policy Papers and the main stakeholder involvement identified:-

**Action 1 Undertake Surveys of Open Space Use**

Undertake periodic, representative and repeatable surveys of use of open spaces throughout the Borough to measure level of usage, inclusive use, local opinion and performance and value. (Refer to Policy Papers No.1 Community Involvement, No.8 – Play Areas and No. 12 – Review, Performance and Monitoring) (**MKC, PT, PMK**)

**Action 2 Survey Condition and Status of Open Space**

Undertake a comprehensive survey and evaluation of open spaces to determine “condition and status” using the appropriate Milton Keynes Open Space Evaluation methodology. This will include an “access statement” to support the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act. The survey will be repeated periodically to monitor condition and supported by the Council’s revised inspection and maintenance schedules. (Refer to Policy Papers No.1 Community Involvement, No. 4 – Design and Standards; No. 5 – Landscape Maintenance and No. 8 – Play Areas) (**MKC, PT**)

**Action 3 Improve Open Space Management**

Develop a holistic, flexible and appropriate open space management process which is sustainable, cost effective, achieves strategic and local outcomes and has best value targets based upon best practice. Utilize the opportunities under “whole estate management” and “Systems Thinking” to seek best value. Assess maintenance systems, performance and costs from land managing stakeholders to seek best practice. (Refer to Policy Papers No.5 – Landscape Maintenance and No.10 – Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice) (**MKC, PT, EP**)

**Action 4 Keep Open Space Provision a Priority**

Ensure that not less than 20% of the built up area (including new areas) is developed and maintained as publicly accessible good quality open space as an integral and fully acknowledged and funded element of the “growth agenda”. Refer to Policy Papers No. 4 Design and Standards, No. 7 Growth and Open Spaces (**MKC, MKP**)

**Action 5 Increase Environmental Education**

Promote open spaces as a learning environment through formal and informal activities including, environmental educational and youth activities, signage, guided walks for all levels and abilities, and improvements to the websites of Milton Keynes Council and Parks Trust. Extend and improve the Hanson Environmental Study Centre as the principle base for environmental education and further development of the “Forest Schools Initiative”. Develop complimentary working between Hanson Environmental Study Centre, City Discovery Centre [Bradwell Abbey and the Caldecotte Centre. (Refer to Policy Paper No.1- Community Involvement, No. 6 – Country Parks and Rural Networks) (**MKC, PT**)

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**Action 6 Encourage a Healthier Community**

Promote health, fitness and well being of residents and visitors through the active use of Milton Keynes open space and public access networks. Work with the Primary Care Trust to develop health orientated incentive schemes such as referrals from General Practitioners to walk and cycle etc, walking/cycling networks and supported activities. Promote and support active community involvement in open spaces such as “Community Orchards” and a range of structured physical activities. Refer to Policy Papers No.1 Community Involvement, No. 8 Play Areas, No.9 Wildlife and Biodiversity (MKC, PCT, PT)

**Action 7 Create a Sense of Community Ownership of Open Space**

Engage local communities in the enhancement of open space to improve quality of life, civic pride, biodiversity and social inclusion wherever possible. This should be supported by sustainable area or site based management plans to enable active local involvement and a feeling of ownership in open space management and use. This may include tidy up days, planting days, workshops on open space design options, Play Area events, Watching Wildlife days, Friends of open space groups etc. Green Flag will be encouraged where appropriate. Refer to Policy Paper No. 1- Community Involvement, No8 Play Areas (MKC, PMK, PT)

**Action 8 Seek Community Input into Open Space Proposals**

Engage the community and partners in the process for implementation of the following specific and general major open space proposals:

- Blue Lagoon / Newton Leys Country Park;
- Stanton Low Country Park;
- Provision of open space in the Western Expansion Area and extension of North Bucks Way;
- Provision of open space in the Eastern Expansion Area;
- The Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure Plan.
- Urban and Rural recreational and conservation links such as the following examples:
  - CMK to North Crawley to Bedfordshire boundary.
  - North Crawley to Emberton Country Park and Olney.
  - The proposed Bedford – Milton Keynes Waterway
  - South Milton Keynes to Blue Lagoon and Ousel Valley
  - Ouse Valley Way and tributary routes
  - Ousel Valley to Newport Pagnell
  - The Milton Keynes Boundary Walk.
  - Village based circular walks.

(Refer to Policy Papers No. 1- Community Involvement, No. 6 - Country Parks and Rural Networks, No. 11 Green Infrastructure Plan)

Refer to Map 1 – Open Space Strategy – The Strategic Network (MKC, PMK, PT)

**Action 9 Improve Safety and Reduce Crime**

Improve safety and reduce crime in open spaces and, in particular, make redways work as safe, useable cycle/pedestrian links between open space, residential areas, and places of employment. This shall include efforts to reduce crime and perceived fear of crime in redway corridors to

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make them attractive for all users by ensuring good signage, visibility, accessibility, lighting and increased surveillance. (Refer to Policy Papers No. 1 Community Involvement, No. 3 Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities, No. 4 – Design and Standards) (MKC, PT,CCU, PMK, TVP, MKP)

**Action 10 Improve Play Areas**

Undertake a review and the preparation of guidance on the sighting, integration, design, development and management of play areas to inform managers, developers and other agencies in the provision of good quality, sustainable play areas for all age groups. Coordination through Environment and Learning and Development Directorates, working to develop the MKC Play Strategy and a range of structured outdoor based recreational activities for young people. (Refer to Policy Paper No.8 - Play Areas, No. 10 Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice). (MKC, PMK, MKP, EP, PD)

**Action 11 Improve Planning across Council Boundaries**

Establish a clear line of communication and develop policy and operational links for existing and proposed open space and public routes near or on the boundary of the Borough of Milton Keynes and neighbouring Councils. Ensure that neighbouring council's strategies are consistent and integrated with this strategy and the MK Green Infrastructure Plan is fully supported by Stakeholders.. (Refer to Policy Papers No. 3 – Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities and No. 11 - Green Infrastructure Plan) (MKC, BCC, BED, BUC, MKP, PT, MBDC, SBDC, AVDC, SNDC, BCW, BBC)

**Action 12 Protect and Enhance the River Great Ouse Valley**

Retain, protect and enhance the River Great Ouse Valley as a key open space corridor through the Borough and into adjoining Districts. This will also function as a transitional zone and natural border between the Milton Keynes urban environment and adjacent rural areas to the north. The Ouse Valley has the potential to become the focus of significant Green Infrastructure investment, reflecting the River Nene Regional Park in Northants. (Refer to Policy Paper No. 6 – Country Parks and Rural Networks) (MKC, EP, MKP, PT, BCC, PMK)

**Action 13 Improve Emberton Country Park**

Improve the current activities at Emberton Country Park by enhancing its countryside based specific attractions and introduce new recommendations of the Business Development Plan recommendations and activities such as environmental education. Actions to include creation of a countryside centre, continued camping, caravanning, day visits, walking, wildlife conservation, youth activities, visitor accommodation and appropriate commercial opportunities, while maintaining the “countryside ethos” in decision making. Consider the acquisition of additional land to accommodate growing demand and facilities. (Refer to Policy Paper No. 6 – Country Parks and Rural Networks) (MKC, PMK)

**Action 14 Create Stanton Low Country Park**

Progress the establishment of Stanton Low Country Park (proposed for 2007/2011). To delivery the requirements of the Stantonbury Park Farm S106 agreement and the promotion of wide ranging activities including

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environmental education, youth activities, leisure visits, walking/cycling/horse riding, wildlife conservation, historical and natural heritage, passive countryside recreation, community involvement and renewable energy initiatives. Establish and support a Country Park Management Steering Group to direct and guide Country Park development and management. Consider the development of a Countryside Visitor Centre and an expanded estate for future country park use and wider links (Refer to Policy Paper No. 6 – Country Parks and Rural Networks) ( PT, MKC, PMK, BWB)

**Action 15 Plan for Blue Lagoon / Newton Leys Country Park**

Progress planning and opportunities to create Blue Lagoon/Newton Leys Country Park and countryside centre. Focus particular emphasis on, community involvement, youth activities, wildlife conservation, environmental education and renewable energy initiatives. Optimise the use of existing natural characteristics and landscape assets. (Refer to Policy Paper No 6 – Country Parks/Rural Networks) (MKC, PT, PMK)

**Action 16 Connect Open Spaces**

Ensure that redways, footpaths, bridleways and other important public routes (including the Grand Union Canal towpath), provide safe and attractive routes for all users; connect key open spaces and support the LTP [Local Transport Plan] objectives in:-

- Existing urban areas of Milton Keynes
- New Growth Areas
- Rural areas of the Borough
- Urban / Rural links

This should include:

- Opportunities for residents and visitors to recreate and utilise alternative modes of transport for leisure/work such as cycling, walking and horse riding.
- Mapping and promotion of walks and cycling routes within MK offering a range of distances and walking ability, recreational opportunities and connections to places of interest.
- Work with the MK Local Access Forum on improving countryside access.
- Opportunities for visitors to engage in recreational pursuits such as walking, cycling and horse riding throughout the Borough.
- The provision of a cycle-way from Lavendon to the new school at Olney, The National Cycle Routes [Sustrans] and other strategic links.
- An extension of the North Bucks Way to Calverton and Ouse Valley Way.
- Key public routes improved to provide off-road access and links to a number of major open space areas and village destinations in Milton Keynes and beyond such as:
- Development and delivery of the MK Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
  - River Nene Regional Park
  - Salcey Forest

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- Brickhill Woods (with Aspley Woods Access Area / Woburn Estate)
- Marston Vale Community Forest
- Harrold & Odell CP (Ouse Valley Way)
- Stockgrove Country Park
- Villages within and beyond the Borough

(Refer to Policy Paper No. 6 – Country Parks and Rural Networks)  
Refer to Map 1 Open Space Strategy – The Strategic Network (MKC, BWB, MKGIG, MKLAF)

### **Action 17 Promote Tourism and Heritage on Open Spaces**

Use open space within the Borough to promote the area's historical and natural heritage with particular focus on the heritage associated with key open spaces such as Bradwell Abbey, Stanton Low Country Park, Hanson Environmental Study Centre, Wolverton, Great Linford, Newport Pagnell, Blue Lagoon, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and ancient woodlands. Enhance and promote key recreational sites such as Willen Lakes and linear parks (**MKC, PT**)

### **Action 18 Improve Open Space through the Development Process**

Guide and manage the provision, distribution and quality of open spaces through the development process and S106 agreements (utilising relevant planning policy statements and guidance) to ensure standards of open space are continually improved. Ensure new and existing open spaces meet both present and future generation's needs through quality design (to meet the needs of all age groups), protection of biodiversity, access, implementation and management.

Landscaping and open space infrastructure in new areas will be designed and provided to the satisfaction of Milton Keynes Council, including appropriate funding for ongoing maintenance, prior to adoption by the Council or its nominee, where relevant. (Refer to Policy Papers No. 4 – Design and Standards; No. 5 – Landscape Maintenance; No. 6 – Country Parks and Rural Networks and No. 7 – Growth and Open Spaces) (**MKC, MKP, PT, PD, PMK**)

### **Action 19 Establish Clear Guidance for Open Space Development**

Establish a robust policy for the provision and funding of open spaces through planning agreements (including Section 106 Agreements), the Growth Area "tariff" arrangements, adoption and management with the agreement of relevant partners. Prepare an Open Space Design Standards Manual. (Refer to Policy Paper No. 2 – Open Space Adoption) (**MKC, MKP, EP, PT**)

### **Action 20 Improve Open Space through Regeneration**

Ensure that accessible, well-designed, locally appropriate, funded and maintained open space is an integral component in regeneration projects throughout Milton Keynes. (Refer to Policy Papers No. 3 – Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities and No. 4 – Design and Standards) (**MKC, MKP, EP, PMK**)

### **Action 21 Clarify Open Space Responsibilities**

Develop a sustainable framework, shared and supported by key partners and local communities, to support open space objectives and establish clear lines of responsibility for long term improvement, maintenance and management. (Refer to Policy Paper No.2 Open Space Provision and

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Adoption, No. 3 – Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities) (**MKC, PT, MKP, EP, PMK**)

**Action 22 Seek Revenue and Capital Funding Opportunities**

Use the Strategy to produce a framework for revenue and capital generation and allocation and where appropriate explore funding opportunities from all potential sources to ensure continual investment and improvement of open spaces through a strategic coordinated programme. (Refer to Policy Paper No. 10 – Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice) (**MKC, PMK, PT**)

**Action 23 A Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Policy**

Develop and support a proactive Tree and Woodland management policy to manage trees as a principle landscape asset, ensure public safety, best practice for arboricultural and biodiversity objectives, investigate and develop the potential for bio-fuel production. Establish a “Veteran Trees and Trees of Special Interest Register (Refer to Policy Paper No. 5 – Landscape Maintenance) (**MKC, PT**)

**Action 24 Create Site Specific Management Plans**

Develop individual site based Management Plans, which seek to optimise the physical characteristics, intrinsic qualities, community benefits and operational efficiencies of open spaces. Pursue Green Flag Award scheme with community involvement where appropriate (Refer to Policy Papers No. 5 – Landscape Maintenance and No. 1 - Community Involvement) (**MKC, PT**)

**Action 25 Improve STREETCARE Service and Awareness**

Develop the MKC STREETCARE Service with a high profile presence and easy recognition through appropriate service image, Council and contractor staff deployment, service delivery, local contact and “accountability”. Develop the STREETCARE website as a primary means of communication along with direct local contact and engagement. Seek improvement in all forms of communication and customer access. (Refer to Policy Paper No. 3 – Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities) (**MKC**)

**Action 26 Develop Estate Management Services**

Develop integrated “estate management” and accountable management systems within STREETCARE Service Plans that include landscape/open space; highways; cleansing and active community liaison. Improve service delivery through structured customer contact and adoption of “Systems Thinking” innovation. (Refer to Policy Paper No. 3 – Partners/Stakeholders Responsibilities) (**MKC**)

**Action 27 Improve Service Charters**

Review and improve Service Charters to compliment and support the “Beacon Service” 2010 objective and “Green Flag Parks Quality Standard” for all major parks and open spaces. Seek active and sustainable community input to Service Charters and agreement on service standards and expectations. (Refer to Policy Paper No. 10 – Opportunities, Resources and Best Practice) (**MKC, PT**)

**Action 28 Monitor, Review and Audit Open Space Strategy**

Establish a strategic review process to monitor and audit progress, with appropriate performance indicators, examine cost effectiveness and

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implementation of the Strategy's objectives and Action Plan. Reporting on a structured annual basis against agreed service performance levels. (Refer to Policy Paper No. 12 – Review, Performance and Monitoring) **(MKC, PT)**



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## 9.0 Highlighted Key Issues

### 9.01 Reserve Sites

Reserve Sites are a common feature of Milton Keynes where space is retained for the provision of facilities such as Health Centres, Sheltered Accommodation or Commercial sites etc. The time lag between the allocation of Reserve Site land and its eventual development may be many years and the site is seen locally as “vacant”. The Reserve Site may become used informally as “open space”, forming part of the local recreation estate such that its ultimate use for the reserved purpose is perceived as a loss. Additionally, undeveloped sites often become “reservoirs of biodiversity” and valued for that unplanned but equally important role.

The “loss” of a Reserve Site, irrespective of the benefits derived from its eventual use, is a locally important issue which needs to be considered carefully within the context of local open space. Recognising that the availability of additional or replacement open space within the same locality is usually very limited the opportunity to enhance other open spaces which serve the same locality could be considered through a contribution from the development of the Reserve Site.

### 9.02 Pressure from Building Density Increases

The former ODPM and now the DLTR is driving the agenda for increased residential density through PPG3, to promote greater “sustainability” of developments. Higher density is to be achieved both within the existing urban area and expansion areas. Higher residential density means that open space is at a “premium”, serving the requirements of more people per unit of area than has generally been the case in the past. In order to meet the increased demands it will be necessary to ensure that open spaces perform to a high standard through high quality design, sensitive integration and the principles of multi-use, supported by appropriate and sustained management. This may be seen as contrasting with the typically lower housing densities, correspondingly less structured design and reactive style of management of open space on much of the earlier Milton Keynes developments. In order to achieve the higher performance standards the Local Plan standard of 20% open space within developments should be regarded as the baseline.

Within the existing City areas of open space are and may continue to be viewed as “surplus”, particularly where for a variety of reasons the open space has not provided the intended benefits for local people. The Milton Keynes Local Plan contains policies for protection for open space and a presumption against disposal for other purposes. Additionally, the protection will through the Open Space Strategy be supported by the inclusion of an objective “Open Space Evaluation Methodology” which has been extensively field tested. The methodology has been adapted to suit the Milton Keynes situation and is based on “**Key Attributes of Open Space and Sport and Recreation Provision**” as defined in “Assessing Needs and opportunities” *A Companion Guide to PPG17 [ODPM 2002]*

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Clearly, where commercial pressures for development are strong, open space may be seen as having a substantial value as developable land. Land proposed for development can be easily given a market value and in contrast to open space which does not have a comparable and tangible cash value. The priority of this Strategy however is to improve and sustain open space which is “valued” by all through the immensely varied contribution it makes to the welfare, quality of life and well-being of local people. The open space evaluation methodology seeks to objectively “quantify” those less tangible qualities and attribute a performance level to the open space.

There may be instances where the evaluation of an open space indicates that its performance level is both low and that it cannot be raised to a satisfactory level by re-design and investment alone. Although requisition of open space for development is not an objective of this Strategy, it is recognised that there may be exceptions where it is considered appropriate to recommend a re-examination of the future of an open space and enable the proposing of new uses which may better serve the community. Key worker housing, local needs or accommodation for the elderly might be considered a more appropriate use of such spaces. However, it must be acknowledged that the loss of open space, irrespective of its low contribution to the locality, is a permanent loss and remaining open space, by default has to make up for that loss. The increased contribution to local needs demanded of remaining open space may require improvement through re-investing a portion of the proceeds from development on open space. The aim is to provide an objective analysis and reduce the potential for “speculative tension” in regard to open spaces through the adoption and application of the evaluation methodology.

### 9.03 Expansion Areas and Open Space

The Local Plan Inquiry was completed in June 2004 and the Inspectors Report largely supported the “preferred” sites for expansion on the western and eastern flanks and a number of smaller development sites. The emphasis on higher residential density in expansion areas places a corresponding emphasis on the need for good quality of open space and adequate areas. The 20% standard has proved to be successful during the development of Milton Keynes to date. The same 20% should remain as the minimum basic yardstick in expansion areas in the knowledge that open spaces will have a significantly higher level of public use and wider demand placed upon them. The 20% minimum is the baseline open space need across the whole range of open spaces comprising incidental open space to larger structural open spaces.

Higher residential density normally means less private garden space which further adds to the demands on public open space. The aim in design terms should be to create open spaces which respond to the demands of inclusive and multi-purpose uses and which also enable the satisfactory co-existence of potentially conflicting uses. A particular difficulty arises with “infill” development which increases housing density but frequently provides no additional open space. Under such circumstances it is very important that SPG is fully utilized to improve the quality and capacity of nearby open spaces and/or assist the creation of new open spaces where this can be achieved and sustained.

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**9.04 Relationship with Other Council Strategies**

The Open Space Strategy covers a very wide topic area and has a natural working affinity with a number of other council strategies, the Community Strategy, the Playing Pitches Strategy and Play Strategy being most prominent.

- The Community Strategy contains a number of objectives to which a significant contribution will be made by the Open Space Strategy, particularly in relation to delivery on environmental issues, biodiversity and community involvement.
- Playing pitches and sports areas although primarily for specific recreational uses are a significant component of the open space portfolio. The Open Space Strategy will support the Playing Fields Strategy objectives through recommendations on location and integration of facilities within the open space infrastructure in expansion areas.
- The 560+ play areas of Milton Keynes are acknowledged as key features of the outdoor play environment, providing the focus of interaction, enjoyment, exercise, stimulus and entertainment for children within the wider open space infrastructure. The Play Strategy recognises the value of play areas and need for continued support and investment on behalf of young people in Milton Keynes. The Play Areas Policy Paper will address the issue in greater detail.



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**10.00 The Delivery Programme**

The Strategy attempts to cover the whole range of issues associated with a growing city and its open space needs. It is clear that an ambitious programme of improvements to existing open spaces, a sustained active community involvement and the delivery of new open space has both time and resource issues to consider. The Strategy programme therefore will seek to deliver on all three fronts in as timely and efficient manner as possible within the resources available on a year by year basis. Targets will be established and performance indicators adopted to assess progress towards those targets. It is further recognised that flexibility in the delivery programme is essential in order to respond to changes in needs and to seize “opportunities” as they arrive. For example – a Central Government funded initiative targeted towards regeneration of the DCLG GAF3 funding for greenspace projects.

A number of the Actions have already been initiated and progress made including:-

- 1] Survey of Open Spaces Use
- 2] Open Space condition survey
- 3] Improve Open Space Management
- 5] Environmental Education
- 9] Improve safety and Reduce Crime
- 10] Improve Play Areas
- 11] Improve Planning Across Council Boundaries
- 13] Improve Emberton Country Park
- 24] Site Specific Management Plans
- 25] Improve Streetcare Service and Awareness
- 27] Improve Service Charters

The full Delivery Programme relies to a considerable extent on the commitment and involvement of stakeholders. The programme will therefore be outlined in the respective Policy Papers in consultation with stakeholders and partners.

A Strategy Newsletter will be available for wider circulation and updated annually to publicise progress and achievement among all partners and Stakeholders and invite public comment.



Milton Keynes Open Space Strategy September 2007

