

**Staffordshire Moorlands District
Council
Green Spaces Strategy
2024-2034**

VISION

Our green spaces will be vibrant, attractive, robust and actively maintained spaces for the whole community to enjoy. They will be future-proofed to provide climate resilience and enhanced biodiversity while supporting the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Executive Foreword

We are delighted to present this Green Spaces Strategy which draws together our ambitions for the Staffordshire Moorlands. This strategy has been developed to reflect the hard work and contributions of a wide range of partners, including our officer team, partner organisations, community groups and councillors, who each play such an important and valuable role in maintaining, developing and improving the amazing green spaces in the Staffordshire Moorlands.

The Staffordshire Moorlands is a beautiful place to live, with so many valuable green open spaces, parks and recreation areas on our doorstep. The challenge over the coming years is to protect, maintain and improve these wonderful assets to ensure they meet the current and future needs of our residents, whilst also delivering on some of the council's wider aspirations, such as ensuring our sites can respond to climate change and meet the needs of wildlife through improved biodiversity.

We are up for that challenge, and this strategy will be used as a framework to prioritise how we manage our parks and green spaces now and in the future. It will inform work with our service partners, be used as a reference point to guide discussions and help develop new initiatives in our green spaces through working collaboratively with community and interest groups. The aim is that our green spaces are future-proofed to ensure that they serve the needs of our communities.

This strategy will help the council focus its internal resources on attracting additional resources and funding to enhance our green spaces further and to deliver the projects detailed in the individual management plans which will accompany this strategy.

Thank you once again to those who have contributed so positively and generously towards the development of this strategy. We look forward to delivering our shared aspirations together in the years to come so that the green spaces across the Staffordshire Moorlands become better community spaces that stand up to the future challenges that this planet faces.

Photo SMDC Cabinet Member: Tourism and Leisure. Cllr. Matt Swindlehurst **Signature**

Photo SMDC Cabinet Member for Climate Change
and Environment. Cllr. Nigel Yates **Signature**

Introduction

Staffordshire Moorlands has a population of approximately 95,800 (census 2021) and covers an area of 222 square miles. The district has a fantastic array of green open spaces which are treasured assets, central to the lives of their communities and enjoyed by visitors for many reasons. We are extremely proud of our green spaces and the value they bring to communities, including biodiversity, economic, education, heritage, health and wellbeing. In developing this strategy, we recognise these benefits and present clear priorities which will protect and enhance them in the future.

When we talk about our green spaces, we are referring to the sites which Staffordshire Moorlands District Council owns and manages, which also have free public access. These sites include formal parks, recreation grounds, playing fields, general open spaces, play areas, closed churchyards and cemeteries.

These green spaces play fundamental roles in the provision of increased community cohesion, physical and mental health, and wellbeing. We aim to ensure that these spaces will serve the communities of the future, as well as those of today. In doing so, we will provide opportunities that are sustainable, help improve biodiversity, contribute to climate change mitigation, encourage tourism, help grow the local economy, conserve the heritage and cultural offer in the Moorlands and contribute to education.

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council also owns a number of sites which are now managed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. These sites include two country parks (Biddulph Grange Country Park & Ladderedge Country Park), a large area of lowland heath common (Wetley Moor Common) as well as a number of smaller but no less distinctive open spaces. We will continue to work with the Trust to ensure that the needs of both the local communities and the environment continue to be met.

Additionally, we recognise that a large amount of green space which is available to residents and visitors within the district is owned and managed by others – including Staffordshire County Council, Peak District National Park Authority, local town and parish councils, community/charity organisations and private land owners – and that having a positive, open, and helpful collaboration with these organisations is the best way to achieve the aims set out within this strategy.

Why have a Green Spaces Strategy?

Our green spaces have a major part to play in community and family life. They are places for us to socialise, enjoy being active, connect with nature and wildlife, relax and reflect. Some green spaces contain heritage features which tell a story about the past. They can also play an important part in providing a more sustainable future, contributing towards climate change aspirations, and providing educational opportunities.

It is also important to see our green spaces in the context of their ability to support and enhance our fauna and flora. The wide mix of sites offers a diverse range of habitats which may already provide homes to many species, but with greater understanding could provide much more.

Because of their wide variety of uses and benefits, as well as the pressures on them, it is important that the management and ongoing development of these green spaces are recognised and prioritised in a way in which everyone can understand and support.

The purpose of developing this Green Spaces Strategy is to bring these key issues into focus and by doing so:

- Set the overarching context and direction for the management and development of our green spaces.
- Outline the approach for managing, protecting, and developing green spaces, which gives consideration to the council's resources, management and maintenance responsibilities, and the contributions from community and interest groups.
- Highlight a set of principles which will guide future maintenance, investment, community engagement decisions and actions regarding our green spaces.
- Agree a set of priorities which focus effort, resources and decision making, ensuring that our green spaces remain high quality spaces for everyone to enjoy.
- Help secure additional investment and external funding towards enhancing infrastructure, facilities and opportunities for the benefit of the community.

Management Plans

A number of our sites will have individual management plans produced. Each management plan will include a bespoke action plan which identifies local improvements which can be made and recognises the ongoing contribution of community groups and partners in delivering some of these actions with us.

Our remaining green spaces are extremely valuable assets and each contributes to the broad benefits already highlighted. They play a significant part in community life and are extremely important to the people that use them.

Each of our green spaces will be managed and developed using the guiding principles within this strategy and the maintenance regimes that are specific to each site.

Our green spaces often contain natural features, have unique heritage value, and in some cases, play facilities for children. Whilst they may not always require detailed management plans, it is important to state that these are cherished assets for local communities, and we are committed to improving these to ensure that they remain that way.

We want to ensure that all of our green spaces will stand up to future challenges: we therefore have a strong desire to improve biodiversity within these areas, manage the sites for the benefit of wildlife, provide more protection and shelter from the climate and reduce the impact of climate change.

Vision

Our green spaces will be vibrant, attractive, robust and actively maintained spaces for the whole community to enjoy. They will be future-proofed to provide climate resilience and enhanced biodiversity while supporting the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Key Strategic Priorities

1. Invest in green spaces as a priority, protecting our heritage.
2. Use resources effectively and sustainably, whilst maintaining and improving our amenities.
3. Contribute to climate change and biodiversity targets and aims, through planting trees and managing sites for wildlife whilst improving flora and fauna.
4. Increase the use and accessibility of green spaces for all, improving the health and wellbeing of our communities.
5. Work cooperatively with our communities and effectively with partners through positive community engagement.

Guiding principals

Guiding principles will be used when considering any changes that affect the current or future management and maintenance of our green spaces. These principles have been developed to ensure that any changes that are made to these spaces are appropriate, affordable, sustainable and deliver clearly against the aspirations of this strategy.

These guiding principles are:

1. Use key strategies and recognised evidence of good practice as a base to inform decision making so that any changes, improvements or projects are the right thing, in the right place and for the right reason.
2. Ensure that any projects to protect or enhance our green spaces are in keeping and proportionate with the overall purpose and heritage of our sites and deliver against one of the priorities listed in this strategy.
3. Any projects or improvements are developed with accessibility in mind, ensuring that wherever practical, our sites are accessible to all.
4. Any new projects which have an impact on the ongoing maintenance of our sites are both affordable and financially sustainable.
5. Any projects or improvements are developed with serious consideration as to how our green spaces will be used by our future generations, whilst looking to increase biodiversity and climate resilience.

Objectives

We will:

1. review maintenance regimes to ensure that our green spaces are maintained to a high standard, in an affordable and sustainable way, and make improvements to increase and enhance biodiversity. (Addresses priorities 1,2,3,4 & 5)
2. ensure that infrastructure and heritage features are protected and well maintained, in accordance within the resources available to the council. (Addresses priorities 1 & 2)
3. encourage and enable positive physical and mental well-being by developing strong partnerships with community groups, sports clubs and other stakeholder groups. Ensuring that our green spaces fulfil their potential for enabling healthy lifestyles for all ages, encouraging all residents to move more. (Addresses priorities 1, 2, 4 & 5)
4. plant more trees within our green spaces to help combat climate change (carbon storage) and increase canopy cover, providing future new habitats for wildlife and additional shade for our communities in periods of extreme heat. (Addresses priorities 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)
5. ensure our green spaces are safe, welcoming, and accessible places for all of our communities and that the highest possible standards of health and safety are maintained by our service providers, event organisers and when engaging the community in projects. (Addresses priorities 2, 4 & 5)
6. actively encourage community engagement and involvement in the protection, maintenance, development and positive environmental impacts of our green spaces. (Addresses priorities 1,2,3,4 and 5)
7. effectively manage internal budgets and attract external funding wherever possible towards the ongoing maintenance and the future development of our green spaces. (Addresses priorities 1,2,3,4 and 5)
8. review management plans and their associated action plans annually to ensure these objectives are being delivered effectively. (Addresses priorities 1,2,3,4 and 5)
9. create a green spaces development fund to make improvements to our green spaces. (Addresses priorities 1,2,3,4, and 5)

Strategic Context

For this strategy to focus on the future effectively, it is important that it is set within the framework of the key influencing documents and evidence base which frame the provision, protection, and development of our green spaces. It is equally important to understand the current context in which our green spaces are managed and maintained as this will play a part in decision making and the delivery of future projects. (Full details of the documents below can be found in Appendix 1).

Key Strategies and Documents

- Corporate Plan (2023-2027)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020 - 2033)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Open Space Study (2017)
- Move More Staffordshire Moorlands Strategy 2023 – 2033
- Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities (2022 – 2026)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Tree Strategy (2016)
- Climate Change Emergency Declaration (2019)
- Staffordshire Moorlands “Plan for Nature” (2022 -2030)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy (2018)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Tourism Strategy (2022 – 2027)
- Sport England: Uniting the Movement (2021- 2031)

Green Flag

The Green Flag Award scheme recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces. The council will continue to work towards the Green Flag criteria as a best practice guide to managing our green spaces.

The purpose and aims of the Green Flag Award is to:

- ensure that everybody has access to quality green and other open spaces, irrespective of where they live.
- ensure that these spaces are appropriately managed and meet the needs of the communities that they serve.
- establish standards of good management.
- promote and share good practice amongst the green space sector.
- recognise and reward the hard work of managers, staff and volunteers.

Other related priorities

In addition to the strategies and plans mentioned, green spaces contribute to many other priorities which the council, partners and communities share, including economic, regeneration, and preventing crime and antisocial behaviour. Links will be made through green space management plans in the delivery of the respective action plans of these plans and strategies.

Community Involvement

We are committed to working with local organisations who may wish to manage and maintain some of the smaller land assets within their locality, which are owned and currently maintained by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. With community support, financial backing and agreed plans in place, these local green spaces may be better suited to local management. We want to encourage dialogue between a range of local organisations, such as town and parish councils and the district council, that will lead to the management model that best serves the local community.

We also see the important role our parks and open spaces can have on our communities across the Staffordshire Moorlands. We will therefore ensure that our communities are able to help decide how their local spaces are managed and have the opportunity to contribute to their upkeep and future development.

Management Responsibilities

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council is responsible for the overall management of the sites listed in Appendix 2 as well as many more incidental parcels of land. In addition to having the overall management responsibility, we work proactively with service providers, partners, the community, and interest groups to develop and deliver projects that protect, maintain, or improve our green spaces.

Alliance Environmental Services (AES) is responsible for maintaining each of the council's green spaces across the district. Management plans and their associated action plans detail an agreed schedule of maintenance standards undertaken in each area. Where no management plan exists for a green space, pre-agreed maintenance schedules will be developed and adhered to. AES supports the council and community groups to deliver agreed projects that help protect and enhance green spaces for the benefit of the community.

Community and interest groups, including 'Friends of the Parks', are a vital and valued support network who play an important role in assisting the council and AES in undertaking specific maintenance tasks and development projects. These groups are also viewed by the council as a way for the community to bring forward ideas, energy, and act as a mechanism to attract additional funding to protect, maintain and enhance the green spaces.

Appendix 1. Strategic Context

For this strategy to focus on the future effectively, it is important to recognise the key influencing documents and evidence base which frame the provision, protection, and development of our green spaces. It is equally important for people to understand the current context in which our green spaces are managed and maintained as this will play a part in decision making and the delivery of future projects.

Corporate Plan (2023-2027)

The Corporate Plan sets out Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's commitments in the delivery of services and community leadership to the residents and businesses of Staffordshire Moorlands for the next four years.

The Green Spaces Strategy makes a positive contribution to the four main aims of the plan, as highlighted below:

Aim 1: To help create a safer and healthier environment for all communities to live and work.

Aim 2: Effective use of resources and provide value for money.

Aim 3: To help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages.

Aim 4: To protect and improve the environment.

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020 - 2033)

Local plans are documents which provide a framework for delivering development over a set period, including ensuring that councils deliver sustainable housing development. They should, as far as possible, reflect the aspirations of local communities and should strive to contribute towards their wider social, economic, and environmental objectives.

The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan was adopted in 2020 and sets out the council's vision and strategy for the district until 2033. The local plan identifies the main priorities on which the council will focus its resources.

The four aims below are taken from the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and the aspirations of this Green Spaces Strategy contributes towards a number of them:

Aim 1: Creating distinctive, sustainable, self-supporting settlements.

Aim 2: Meeting the needs of our communities.

Aim 3: Encourage a strong, prosperous, and diverse economy.

Aim 4: Maintaining a quality environment and special places.

Staffordshire Moorlands Open Space Study (2017)

The Staffordshire Moorlands Open Space Study provides an evidence base that is used to help protect parks and open spaces, inform the future provision of parks and open spaces, and helps to secure improvements to parks and open spaces. Using the evidence base contained in the study, the council can secure investment from housing developments via section 106 agreements, which is then used to provide new or enhance existing facilities locally.

Move More Staffordshire Moorlands Strategy (2023 – 2033)

A partner strategy, adopted by the council, and written by a wide range of partners across the Staffordshire Moorlands from a wide range of perspectives, including integrated health care, voluntary and community organisations, young people's services, education, wellbeing, sport, transport, housing, community safety and planning to name a few. The Move More strategy is fully supported by the council. The core value of the strategy is *"Together, our aim is everyone across the Staffordshire Moorlands to move more every day and to provide greater support to those that need it most."*

Friendly, accessible and well-managed green spaces which provide opportunities for all levels of physical activity play a vital part in the success of this strategy.

Our aspiration is for our green spaces to be places which contain a range of facilities, where there will be opportunities for people to be inspired to move more and realise the proven physical and mental benefits.

We will work in collaboration with local communities to identify their needs, having a positive open and helpful approach to delivering the Green Spaces Strategy. We recognise the value of working in partnership with residents, community groups, local ward councillors and will support it.

We will develop robust management plans for some of our green spaces, and these will build on the existing offering contained within those parks and green spaces. Facilities such as skate parks, pump tracks, tennis courts and multi-use games areas will be maintained to a safe standard. We will work with communities to enhance facilities, develop new facilities where appropriate and encourage activities within the parks and green spaces which attract people of all ages to be more active.

Play and Outdoor Sports Facilities.

Council play areas and outdoor sports facilities are important assets that help children, young people and adults keep active, build confidence, and improve physical literacy and social skills. We aspire to ensure that all facilities are fun, accessible and free, helping to make parks an inviting destination for recreation and family time.

It is important that these facilities are provided, maintained and developed effectively. To ensure that this happens, the open space study includes a quality assessment of all children's play provision across the district that is the responsibility of the council. This evidence base is used to identify where future improvements are required and will support the business case for investment.

Existing council play facilities are maintained and repaired by the council's service provider, Alliance Environmental Services (AES). The council leads in developing new play areas or the replacement of existing facilities. Projects to improve or develop play and outdoor sports facilities are included within park management plans and are specific to the needs locally.

Staffordshire Moorlands Tree Strategy (2016)

The Staffordshire Moorlands Tree Strategy sets out how the council will manage trees, both on its own land and private trees protected by legislation. The policy outlines the council's approach to tree management and is supported by detailed Good Practice Guides. These guides specify how tree works decisions are made and implemented and summarises how we manage risk and undertake the inspection of trees.

In situations where works to trees within our parks are required, or when projects are developed which propose to add new trees to our parks, the council's Arboriculture Officer will be consulted and their recommendations implemented accordingly.

Climate Change Declaration

In 2019, the council declared a climate change emergency and is committed to become carbon neutral in its internal operations on the service it delivers, by 2030. The environmental impacts of all planning and decision making relating to the delivery of this strategy will be considered, so that our parks and green spaces contribute towards the council's targets for zero carbon emissions.

Staffordshire Moorlands "Plan for Nature" (2022 -2030)

Developed in conjunction with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the Plan for Nature sets out to protect and restore priority species, restore natural processes and deliver nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change. We will work alongside numerous stakeholders including the Trust to try and achieve these objectives.

Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy (2018)

This strategy's aim is to develop a network of green corridors and green spaces in the Staffordshire Moorlands that:

Support access to green travel, promote health and wellbeing, develop ecological networks, improve flood water management, unlock economic development potential and value ecosystem services.

Staffordshire Moorlands Tourism Strategy (2022 – 2027)

Over the five years of this strategy Staffordshire Moorlands will become a stronger destination, unlocking its potential with an improved offer and a better reputation that results in more value from visitors.

Green and active experiences in an outstanding landscape are evident. Adding to these, expanding their appeal and joining them up as an integrated network will grow the destination's reputation and give visitors a reason to stay longer

Sport England: Uniting the Movement (2021- 2031)

This is a 10-year strategy to transform lives and communities through sports and physical activity.

Recognising the disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, this strategy reflects on how we need to collectively reimagine how we keep movement and sporting activities central to the lives of everyone. It supports initiatives such as "Join the Movement", which is about simple, fun and free ways to get active outdoors such as in our parks and green spaces.

Appendix 2. SMDC Site list.

Please note that this list does not include all of the incidental parcels of land SMDC owns.

Leek sites

Birch Gardens
Birchall Playing Fields
Brough Park
Buxton Road Cemetery
Cruso Street Play Area
Glebeville Play Area
Haregate Hall Play Area
Pickwood Recreation Ground
The Waste Open Space
Wallbridge Play Area & Open Space
Westwood Recreation Ground
Woodcroft Open Space

Biddulph sites

Biddulph Valley Park
Brown Lees Play Area
Church Road Recreation Ground
Halls Road Recreation Ground
Hawthorn Grove Play Area
Mill Hayes Playing Fields
Thames Drive Open Space
The Paddock Open Space

Cheadle sites

Glebe Road Open Space
South Moorlands Playing Fields

Stanfield Crescent Playing Fields

Thorley Drive Playing Fields

Rural sites

Bluetit Play Area, Blackshaw Moor

Horton Playing Fields, Horton

Hot Lane Playing Fields, Biddulph Moor