

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2023 - 2028



Mansfield
District Council

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Introduction




Making Mansfield: Towards 2030 sets out the key ambitions and priorities for Mansfield District Council (MDC) to underpin the work and direction of the council over a ten-year period. Within the plan, there are a number of key themes: Growth, Aspiration, Wellbeing and Place, with individual delivery plans for each theme.

Both Place and Wellbeing themes incorporate objectives which directly relate to the effective management and operation of our parks and open spaces, including:

- To preserve, enhance and promote our natural environment and physical assets across the district
- To create a positive cultural and leisure experience for residents and visitors to the area
- To create a clean, green infrastructure that supports and enhances the quality of life for residents
- To create an environment where people lead safe, healthy lifestyles and can be physically active

Our parks and open spaces are key assets that deliver a huge range of benefits for the district and the people that live and work here. These benefits reflect many of the ambitions we have established for the economic success of the district, the health of our residents and the quality of the environment with which they interact daily.

The environment around us is more important than ever. Now, more than ever, we are all taking more notice of the changes to our climate, the impact of our actions, and what the future may hold. Our parks and open spaces provide an essential ecosystem service that regulates our immediate environment and helps protect us from the effects of climate change.



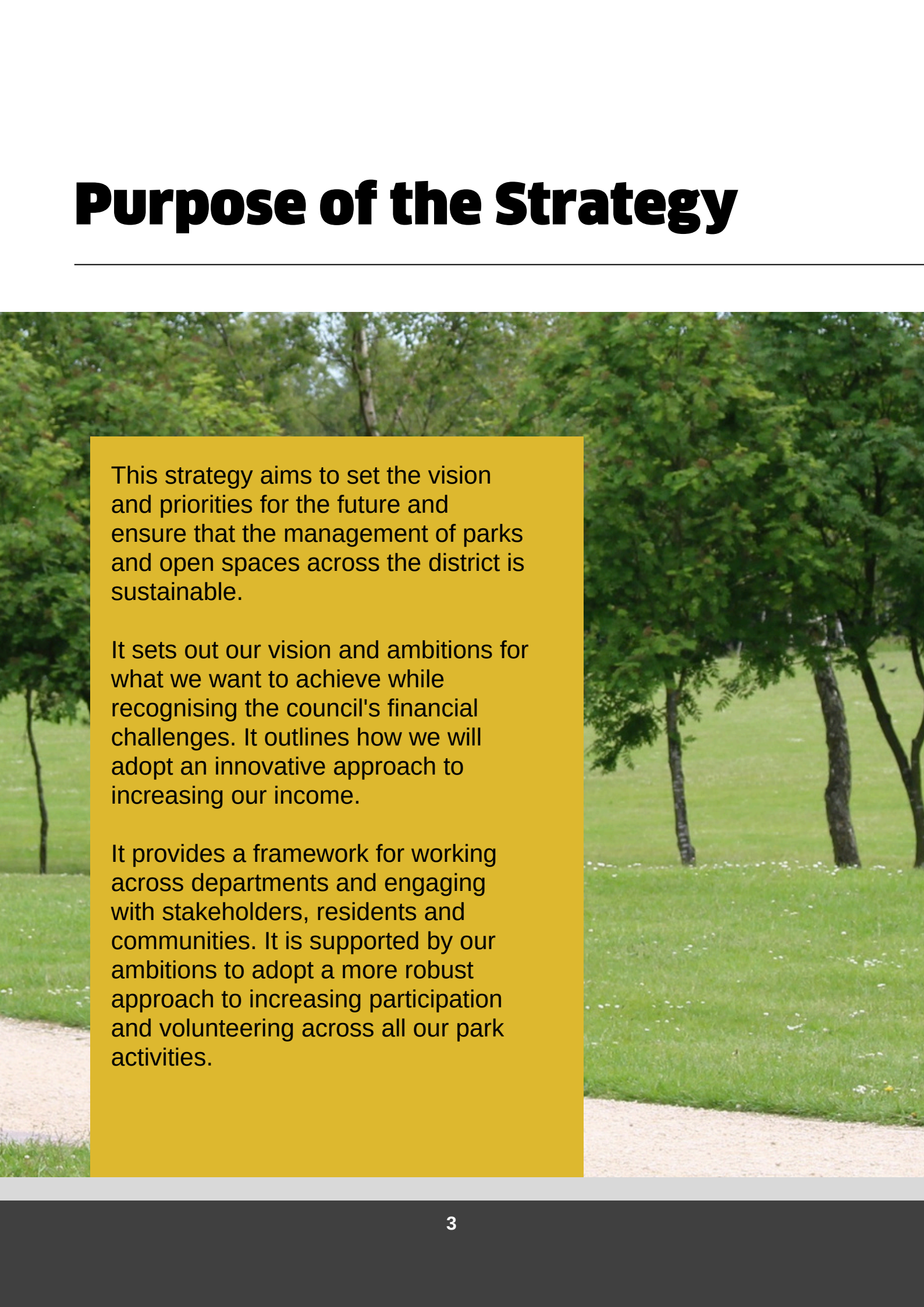
A growing body of evidence demonstrates that parks and open spaces can have a positive impact beyond traditional ecological and environmental outcomes. They can make a broader contribution towards promoting economic and health benefits as well as improving quality of life and significantly benefit the health and wellbeing of local communities.

Moreover, through their use, they can further social cohesion and engagement, inspire community spirit and even provide opportunities for individuals to overcome loneliness and regain purpose in their lives. This was increasingly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the use of our parks and open spaces increased and has remained high, particularly for parks with additional facilities like cafes and quality play/gym equipment.

This strategy aims to provide a framework for action that will transform our parks and open spaces and position them to be at the centre of delivering positive environmental, economic, health and social outcomes for our residents and communities.

Our ambitions are set against a backdrop of financial challenges, and to deliver the strategy, we will need to work in new and innovative ways. As we deliver the details of our plans, we will seek to develop a financial model that will not only pursue grants and funding but also welcome other income streams.

Purpose of the Strategy



This strategy aims to set the vision and priorities for the future and ensure that the management of parks and open spaces across the district is sustainable.

It sets out our vision and ambitions for what we want to achieve while recognising the council's financial challenges. It outlines how we will adopt an innovative approach to increasing our income.

It provides a framework for working across departments and engaging with stakeholders, residents and communities. It is supported by our ambitions to adopt a more robust approach to increasing participation and volunteering across all our park activities.

Mansfield Context

Records of parks and open spaces date back to the 19th century, providing people with areas to restore their health and wellbeing and to encourage social cohesion, where all members of society could visit and enjoy. For example, the public has used Titchfield Park as a recreational open space since 1880.

Although the provision of parks and open spaces is not a statutory requirement, it is recognised that they are a key asset that we can use to support the delivery of many of the council's key strategic objectives contained in but not limited to:



The contribution that good quality, safe and accessible parks and open spaces can make to the overall quality of life within a community is well documented.

Parks and open spaces contribute to economies, to communities and to the environment. These contributions are both tangible (because they are based on buildings, land and infrastructure that have financial value) and intangible (because they are benefits related to health, educational, cultural, environmental and social outcomes).

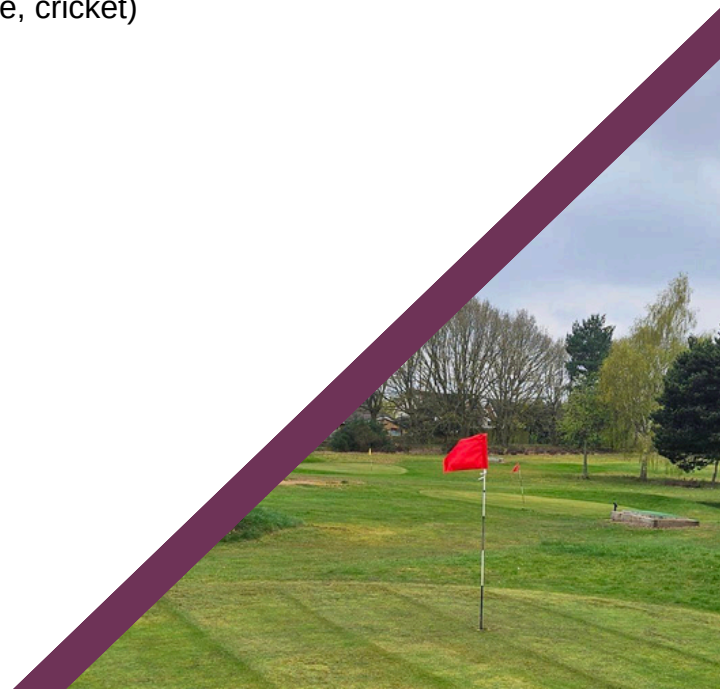
Benefits accruing from good quality parks and open spaces can be grouped into three main categories.

Social	Economic	Environmental
Develops people and communities	One of the districts most important asset	Protects the biodiversity networks
Health / wellbeing / increased life expectancy	High-quality public realm attracts investment and tourism	Buffer against climate change, flood mitigation, aqua greens and sustainable drainage systems
Communities actively participating	Add value to homes and neighbourhoods	Cooling effect of open space
Increased satisfaction with the local area	Conserving and enhancing local townscapes	Local food production
Play and recreation is important for child development both physical and cognitive	Opportunities to boost the local economy by investing in the environment	Provision of habitat for specific wildlife
Social inclusion	Improving tourism and the visitor economy	Improved air quality
Educational resource	Contributes to regeneration	Reduces light and noise pollution
Heritage and cultural identity	Creates a sense of place which is vital to community spirit and attracts visitors	Short to medium-term carbon reduction

Scope of the Strategy

This Parks and Open Space Strategy focuses on land that falls within the current Parks Team's management responsibility. This includes:

- Parks and recreation grounds
- Play areas
- Allotment sites
- Local nature reserves
- Outdoor gyms
- Cemeteries
- Parkour facility
- Pitch and putt course including disc golf (and foot golf in the future)
- Skate plaza
- Sport pitches (football, tennis, bowls, petanque, cricket)
- Memorial gardens
- Pavilions and parks buildings



Our Parks and Open Spaces

Our parks and open spaces are listed in Appendix 1 and shown on the map in Appendix 2, classified under the following categories:

Destination parks – These parks cater to the local community they serve but also attract residents and visitors from afield.

District parks and recreation grounds - These are established green spaces that generally, but not always, provide a landscape setting with various facilities and features, including outdoor sports facilities, play areas and informal recreation, or the space offers at least one unique facility or experience of wider district importance.

Local parks and recreation ground - These include green spaces with formal sports and/or play provisions and are limited to no more than two facilities. These are generally of local (neighbourhood) importance and include, but are not limited to, the following facilities: seating areas and paths, play areas, sports pitches, etc. They often lack formalised planting areas and features such as pavilions etc.

Large and connected natural areas - These include large areas of natural green space over two hectares (ha) in size. These are typically outside of the urban area or areas within the urban area, such as green corridors and local nature reserves. These generally give the impression of being in the countryside; these areas allow for walking and quiet contemplation. Larger areas of open countryside are not generally included. Exceptions to this include publicly accessible woodlands, restored collieries and other accessible areas of naturalised brownfield land.



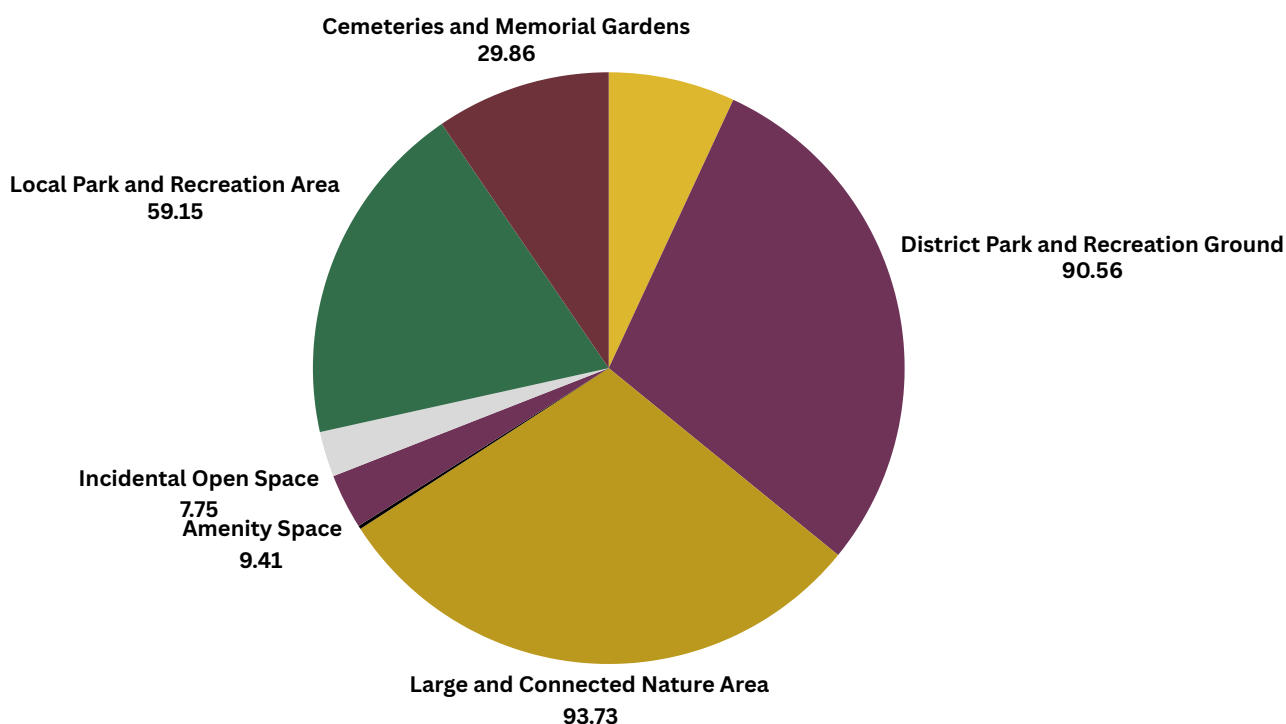
Amenity space - Areas for informal recreation, for example: walking, sitting etc. These spaces are formally maintained i.e., mown and typically open in appearance, though they may have small, planted areas. These are sites greater than 0.4 hectares.

Small natural areas – These include small areas of natural green space that are two hectares (ha) in size or less. Some connect to other natural green spaces. They are primarily managed for their wildlife/habitat value, although they are open to the public. Some may be 'naturalised' brownfield land, including restored mineral sites now publicly accessible.

Incidental open spaces - Small areas of amenity space used for passive recreation or play which sometimes have seating. These spaces are generally mown, open areas but may have some landscaping features. These are sites which are 0.4 hectares or less.

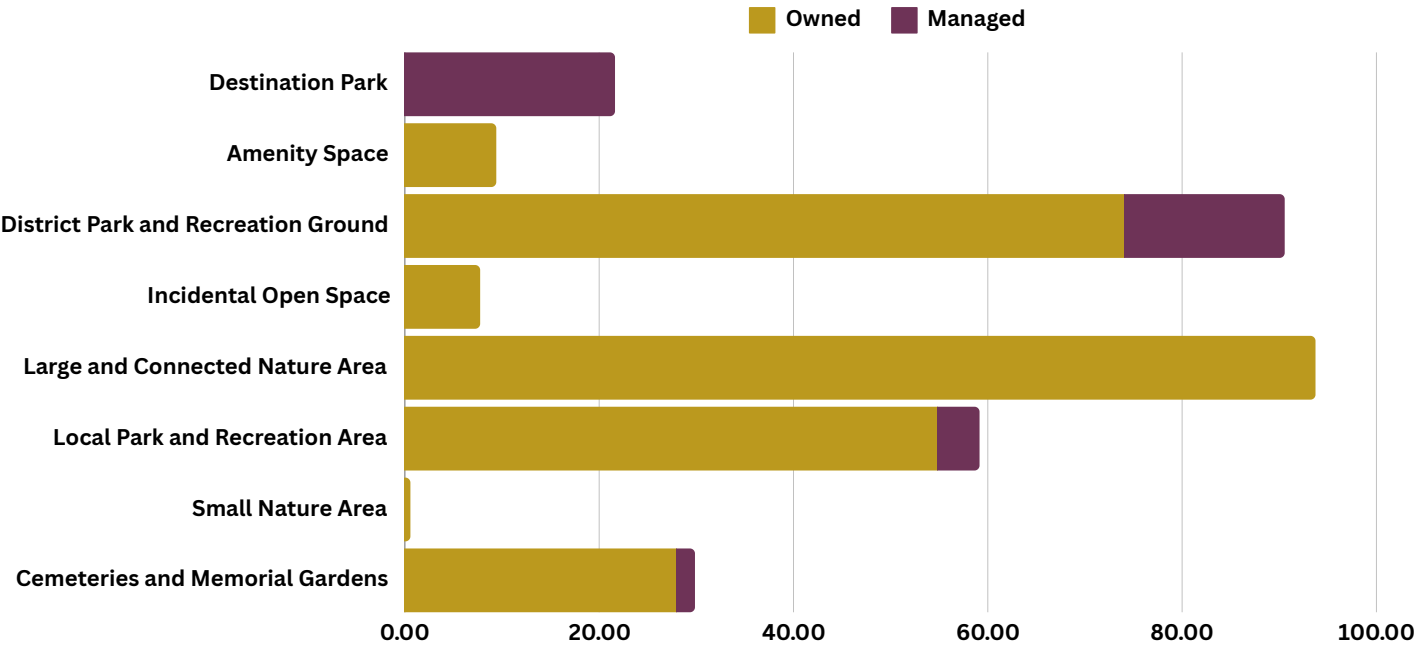
Memorial and burial areas – these include four operating cemeteries (Mansfield, Mansfield Woodhouse, Pleasley and Warsop), the grounds of Mansfield and District Crematorium, the Memorial Gardens in the Town Centre and Ladybrook and several closed churchyards around the district.

Current records show that Mansfield District Council owns or is responsible for managing over 312 ha of parks and open space, split into the different types of space, which can be seen in Chart 1 below:



Mansfield District Council are responsible for several parks and open spaces not owned outright by the council but where the authority takes on responsibility for the maintenance and management of specific sites, as detailed in Chart 2.

In addition to the land identified in Appendix 1, the team also undertake grounds maintenance work for Mansfield District Council’s Housing department, primarily on communal areas and landscaping, for which an annual recharge is payable to Parks. The team is also contracted to carry out grounds maintenance work on behalf of Nottinghamshire County Council for grass verges across the district, along with some hedge cutting and shrub maintenance on county council-owned land, which is reviewed on an annual basis and attracts a fee to cover the cost of the additional resources required to complete this work.



Standard of our Parks and Open Spaces

The Green Flag Award scheme represents the only recognised national standard for assessing the quality of parks and open spaces across the UK. Only the best, most well-managed sites can achieve the standard. As of 2023, Mansfield has seven Green Flag spaces. The full Green Flag scoring criteria can be found at www.greenflagaward.org.

However, assessing all parks and open spaces against the detailed Green Flag criteria, which are designed to measure an exceptionally high standard of site, would not be appropriate for the majority of the council's parks and open space areas.

Instead, an informal standard has been created to inform the management of the remaining parks and open spaces across the district.

The council will seek to ensure that green space provision meets the following requirements:

- Designed to be accessible for all
- Safe and secure design principles
- Support for social interaction through design and available facilities
- Improve access to nature and natural play areas
- Contribute to place shaping
- Meet the need of local communities served by the green space



Key achievements since the 2017 strategy

The previous strategy set out key actions to deliver quality parks and open space provision across the district and has delivered a great volume of work, despite cost pressures during that period, seeing funding for local government reduced significantly over the period.

Some of the achievements include:

- ✓ Secured Towns Fund grant of £2.94million to develop Berry Hill Park into a destination facility
- ✓ Increased the number of parks and open spaces achieving the Green Flag standard from five to seven
- ✓ Secured a permanent hospitality provision on Tichfield Park and Racecourse Park, alongside concessions for temporary provision on a further three sites
- ✓ Worked in partnership to secure funds to refurbish the running track and associated lighting on Berry Hill Park
- ✓ Enhanced the existing Pitch and Putt facility to create a Disc Golf course, to increase footfall and encourage national competition usage, along with a card payment system
- ✓ Supported four members of the Parks team to complete horticultural qualifications
- ✓ Supported 12 Friends' groups
- ✓ Held annual Summer Festivals and events on parks across the district
- ✓ 97% of allotment plots are currently let out

- ✓ Installation of five trim trails and outdoor gyms across the district
- ✓ Installed or refurbished/enhanced five play areas across the district, including accessible equipment on each.
- ✓ Installed one multi-use games area (MUGA) across the district
- ✓ Worked with community allotment groups to support wellbeing initiatives on seven sites
- ✓ Improved access, footpaths and car park surfacing across the district
- ✓ Worked with Ashfield District Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund to refurbish the viaduct and upgrade the footpath access from Kings Mill Reservoir to The Hermitage nature reserve
- ✓ Carried out maintenance work in parks and open spaces with Community Payback and The Prince's Trust
- ✓ Worked in partnership with the Sherwood Forest Trust to deliver tree planting projects, heath land remediation and conservation work district wide
- ✓ Created over 15.7 Ha of biodiverse meadow flower meadows and wildlife corridors across the district
- ✓ New roof on Manor Park pavilion
- ✓ Improved signage and interpretation boards
- ✓ Successfully delivered 28 S106-funded projects across the district

In order to continue and build further on these achievements, this revised strategy has been prepared, to update the local context and to align the priorities with the wider aspirations of the council.

Future Challenges

Priorities

Resources for parks and open spaces

Council budgets for managing and improving parks and open space are limited, so careful consideration must be given to ensure that any works carried out are affordable and sustainable in the long term. We will need to work innovatively, embracing the opportunities to work with partners and volunteers and pursue alternative funding sources and income generation activities.

Developing and enhancing partnerships

To realise the potential of our parks and open spaces, it is important to build and maintain strong relationships with partners and the local community, including Friends groups (A list of existing Friends Groups can be found in Appendix 3), sports clubs, charitable organisations, customer and residents' groups. The Parks team also have regular catch-ups with the in-house Crematorium and Leisure teams to ensure mutual benefits can be achieved through shared goals and initiatives.

Population growth

In Mansfield, the population size has increased by 5.8%, from around 104,500 in 2011 to 110,500 in 2021. As of 2021, Mansfield is the seventh most densely populated of the East Midlands' 35 local authority areas, with around 10 people living on each football pitch-sized area of land. This increase and potential future increases in population will place additional pressure on the district's existing parks and existing spaces.

Health and wellbeing

According to the most up-to-date Public Health England's health profile report for Mansfield district (2016), the health of residents is generally worse than national levels. This is based on key health indicators such as deaths from heart disease, obesity levels, diabetes and life expectancy. Access to good-quality, well-maintained public spaces can help improve physical and mental health by encouraging us to walk more, play sports, or enjoy a green and natural environment. Our parks and open spaces must be safe and feel safe for people to maximise the benefits they offer. This is achieved through working with partners such as council Neighbourhood Wardens and Anti-Social Behaviour Officers, the Police, residents and Friends groups.

Climate change

Climate change is an ongoing and evolving threat, and we are all experiencing extreme weather fluctuations, such as heat waves and severe flooding. Our parks and open spaces are already being affected by these changes but also play a crucial role in reducing the adverse effects of climate change. As climate change intensifies, our parks and green spaces will have a more significant role in flood management, tree planting, and sustainable fuel.

Mansfield's parks service

In order to meet the council's savings targets and sustain the investment needed to maintain and improve our parks and open spaces, we need to make the delivery of the parks service more effective. This may mean considering a number of options for new approaches to the funding and future management of our parks and open spaces.

Public expectations

Our residents have used their local parks and open spaces much more heavily during Covid-19 and, as a result, are more aware of the facilities on offer in local green spaces, leading to some concerns about the inequality across the district about play equipment. Some sites have allocated S106 funds to facilitate enhancements to play areas, but not all, which creates further funding pressure on the service.

Funding

Given the number of parks and open spaces within the district, there is a sizeable funding commitment to ensure they are adequately maintained to be safe and attractive for users. In order to continue this work alongside the reducing budgets within the council, the opportunity for commercial arrangements must be considered. This has primarily applied to park buildings to date where food and drink operators have leased premises in the parks to operate a business, e.g. Racecourse Park, Tichfield Park and Berry Hill Park, to generate a small income for the service. With this in mind, further reviews are in progress to explore the commercial potential of other under/unused buildings across the district, including The Carrs and Manor Park, and working with existing and supporting new/emerging partners to secure external funding.

Our Vision and Priorities

Our Vision:

To provide high-quality, accessible and sustainable parks and open spaces that improve the lives of our communities and visitors and create a unique sense of place.



Each of the identified priorities has been developed with further detail around individual actions which are set out below:

Infrastructure and Facilities

- Enhance the facilities within our parks and develop a plan for proactive maintenance
- Improve accessibility to parks and equipment by embedding this as part of all improvement work to parking areas, footpaths, play equipment and street furniture
- Support the provision of additional facilities in parks through commercial arrangements e.g., food and drink, toilets.

Health and Wellbeing

- Maximise opportunities for physical activity
- Work with local sports clubs to provide advice and support where needed to safeguard their club and signpost for potential funding opportunities
- Work with the council's leisure contractor to provide additional activities in open spaces across the district to enhance the existing provision in leisure centres
- Maximise opportunities for residents to access good quality, safe, open spaces and enjoy the outdoors to promote the benefits of being outdoors and gentle exercise
- Work with community allotment providers to provide opportunities for residents to take part in activities with a social element as well as physical.

Ecology and environment

- Increase the biodiversity within our parks and open spaces with a greater appreciation for developing appropriate habitats for plants, birds, and other wildlife
- Increase the sustainability of our parks and open spaces by encouraging environmental practices
- Work with Friends groups and charitable organisations to support environmental projects such as tree planting, wetland recovery and repairing fire damage
- Ensure regular inspections and maintenance is carried out on the extensive number of trees within our parks and open spaces to ensure they are healthy and continue to enhance the environment.

Volunteering and Community

- Develop our relationships with local communities and community groups to encourage greater participation and visitor diversity
- Increase the range of volunteer opportunities to build skills, create social cohesion and instil a sense of pride and ownership

Education and learning

- Develop strong links with Mansfield schools and academies to work together to support learning
- Encourage participation in environmental activities of all abilities

Finance and Funding

- Pursue external funding sources and support community groups/partners to secure funding
- Increase our commercial activities
- Obtain sponsorship for events and activities by working in partnership with local businesses

Culture and Heritage

- Enhance and safeguard historical assets situated in our parks and open spaces
- Support a programme of events in parks and open spaces across the district, including those delivered by MDC directly and those by friends and commercial organisations
- Develop and promote an increased range of opportunities for people to enjoy cultural experiences and activities through working with partners



Funding and Investment

The delivery of the strategy will be reliant on future funding and investment. The current funding arrangements for parks and open space fall into the categories below:

- Revenue expenditure
- Capital expenditure
- Section 106 based funding
- Towns Fund for Destination Parks
- Commercial income
- External funding through partners and stakeholders

Given the financial position of local authorities across the UK, investing significantly in our parks and open spaces has been challenging over the last few years. This has meant that revenue funding (money to cover the cost of day-to-day services and maintenance) is primarily committed to grass and shrub cutting, playground maintenance and safety checks, and basic maintenance of trees and street furniture. Alongside revenue, there is also capital funding, which would cover the cost of major projects, but as funds are tight, it is currently only realistic to allocate council funds for safety-related works, for example, fire safety and electrical work in the pavilions and repairs to footpath surfacing.

With this in mind, the team works hard to secure funds through other sources, including Section 106 agreements, negotiated with developers seeking planning permission for a residential site. Where a development cannot incorporate its own public open space provision on site, the developer can contribute to other nearby facilities to enhance their offer for the benefit of their future residents. This is a beneficial source of funds for the team; however, it is restricted to be used only in the neighbouring area to the development site, is often only payable on completion of the whole site, and is time-limited, so if works are not delivered in time, the funds are then repaid back to the developer.

In recent years, the Section 106 funds management has been extremely effective, with improvements delivered to several parks for play areas, games areas and footpath surfacing. However, given the geographic restrictions on using this funding, some parks are unlikely to benefit from this type of funding allocation.

The £11.7m Towns Fund allocation was secured as part of a much larger funding submission to deliver major change projects across the district, with a relatively small allocation of £2.94million to support the enhancement of Berry Hill Park to create a destination attraction to encourage visitors from further afield. At the time the funding was announced, the council had recently taken on responsibility for Berry Hill Park and was aware it needed significant investment to bring it up to standard, which is why this site was put forward for funding. An element of the project is to improve the linkages between the park and Bellamy Estate via the adjacent King George V park to encourage using these free facilities for residents in the priority neighbourhoods.

Commercial income is funding paid to the Parks team by customers, businesses and community groups paying for using our assets, including leasing buildings, hiring open space for events, using sports pitches and paying for activities like Pitch and Putt. A review is underway to increase the use of any under/unused pavilions on our parks and explore opportunities for leasing some sports facilities to specific clubs.

External funding is often restricted to applications from Friends groups rather than local authorities, but some groups have benefited from significant grants for works on their parks, which the council are keen to support. Some other partner organisations can support park initiatives through their funding, including the Lawn Tennis Association and Football Foundation, with discussions underway to develop suitable projects.

A lease arrangement with a sports club may also be appropriate for some of the sports facilities to guarantee they are regularly used and enjoyed by club members, and potential maintenance funding can be sought outside what is available to local authorities. This has been the case with the Berry Hill running track, but further approaches have been received from local football clubs seeking to secure a 'home' ground.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Parks team regularly works with the existing 12 Friends Groups of our parks and open spaces and seeks to enhance this by creating additional groups at Mansfield Cemetery and Crematorium and Carr Lane. The Parks Development Officer regularly attends meetings of each group, which enables feedback from local representatives to feed into plans for the park and information and advice around funding opportunities to be fed into the groups.

Sports clubs are also in regular contact with the team to discuss their requirements and to provide feedback on any issues regarding the facilities requiring MDC input to resolve.

The Destination Parks proposals at Berry Hill have been developed following a significant public consultation exercise, receiving over 600 responses. The highlighted key elements included accessibility, play equipment, facilities on site (e.g. café and toilets) and parking.

All of the information above has been used to inform this strategy and the associated actions to align the strategic priorities with the aspirations of our residents.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The Action Plan included at Appendix 4 identifies key activities to deliver against the identified priorities set out in section 9 above. These actions will be added to the corporate project and performance management system, and allocated to officers to deliver against and provide regular updates.

This strategy will be reviewed annually, and fully updated in 2028.

