

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

Executive Forward

We are delighted to bring forward this strategy which draws together our ambitions alongside the hard work and contributions from a wide range of sources including those from 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 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 by working collaboratively together with community and interest groups so that our green spaces are future proofed to ensure that they serve the needs of our current residents and those of the future.

Having a Green Spaces Strategy will help the Council focus its internal resources to help attract 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.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank once again those who have contributed so positively and generously towards the development of this strategy and look forward to delivering our shared aspirations together in the years to come so that the Green Spaces across the Staffordshire Moorlands are better community spaces at the end of the strategy's implementation and will stand up to the future challenges that the 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**

VISION

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

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, that are central to the lives of their communities and enjoyed by visitors to the District for many different reasons. We are extremely proud of our green spaces and the value they bring to communities from a from a wide range of perspectives including biodiversity, economic, education, heritage, health and wellbeing. In developing this strategy, we wish to recognise these benefits and develop clear priorities which will protect and enhance them in the future.

When we talk about our green spaces we are referring to the collection of sites, which Staffordshire Moorlands District Council owns and manages, which also have free public access. Within the list of these sites are 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, a large area of lowland heath 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 local communities and the environment continue to be met.

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

Management Plans

A number of our sites will have individual management plans produced. Each management plan will include a bespoke action plan to identify where local improvements can be made and that recognise 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 contribute individually to the broad benefits already highlighted. They play an important 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 via maintenance regimes that are specific to each site.

As in many cases these spaces often contain their own natural features, have unique heritage value and in some cases, play facilities for children. Whilst they may not require detailed management plans, it is important to state that these are vitally important 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.

Why have a Green Spaces Strategy

Our green spaces have such 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 abilities to support and enhance our fauna and flora. The wide mix of sites offer 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 their management and ongoing development is 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 Councils 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.

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 also 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. (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 (2019)
- Staffordshire Moorlands “Plan for Nature” (2022 -2030)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy (2018)
- 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 everybody has access to quality green and other open spaces, irrespective of where they live.
- To ensure that these spaces are appropriately managed and meet the needs of the communities that they serve.
- To establish standards of good management.
- To promote and share good practice amongst the green space sector.
- To 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 or preventing

crime and antisocial behaviour. Links will be made to these through green space management plans in the delivery of their respective action plans.

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 ability and agreed plans in place, these local green spaces maybe 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 additionally see the important role our parks and open spaces can have on our communities across the whole of the Staffordshire Moorlands. We will therefore ensure that our communities have the opportunity to help decide how their local spaces are managed and 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 support 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 which 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 the formal voice for the community to bring forwards ideas, energy, and act as a mechanism to attract additional funding to protect, maintain or enhance aspects of the green spaces.

Vision

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

Key Priorities

1. Make investment in green spaces a priority, protecting our heritage.
2. Use resources effectively and sustainably, maintaining and improving our amenities.

3. Contribute to climate change and biodiversity targets and aims, through planting of trees and managing sites for wildlife whilst improving flora and fauna.
4. Increase the use and accessibility of green spaces for all, improving 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 or maintenance of our green spaces. The reason these principles have been developed is to make sure 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 good practice evidence 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. To 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

1. We will 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. We will ensure that infrastructure and heritage features are protected and well maintained, in accordance within the resources available to the Council. (Addresses priority 1 & 2)
3. We will 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 priority 1, 2, 4 & 5)

4. We will 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 priority 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 priority 2, 4 & 5)
6. Actively encourage community engagement and involvement in the protection, maintenance, development and positive environmental impacts of our green spaces. (Addresses priority 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 priority 1,2,3,4 and 5)
8. We will review management plans and their associated action plans annually to ensure these objectives are being delivered against effectively. (Addresses priority 1,2,3,4 and 5)
9. We will create a green spaces development fund to be used to make improvements to our green spaces. (Addresses priority 1,2,3,4, and 5)