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## A Vision for Open Space in South Staffordshire

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## Background

1.0 Good quality open spaces are essential elements of the places where people live and make a significant contribution to quality of life within communities. An Open Space Strategy enables the Council to plan for and manage open spaces strategically in order to fully realise their economic, social and environmental benefits and maximise the value of capital investment and revenue expenditure.

1.1 South Staffordshire is a predominantly rural District located on the north western edge of the West Midlands conurbation and as such is privileged to contain and be in close proximity to large expanses of publicly accessible open space. These open spaces serve an important function benefiting both local communities in the district along with communities and residents of the neighbouring Local Authorities.

1.2 Following extensive research and consultation with local communities undertaken for the Open Space Audit for South Staffordshire, the Council has prepared this Open Space Strategy. The strategy is the Council's response to the findings of the Open Space Audit, Play Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy, and has been produced in accordance with CABE Space guidance outlined in *Green Space Strategies: A Good Practice Guide*.

1.3 The Open Space Strategy seeks to establish a vision for the provision and enhancement of open spaces in South Staffordshire by clearly setting out how the Council will improve open spaces in terms of their quantity, quality and accessibility. This vision will be implemented through means of an Action Plan that is supported by the Council, key partners and local communities. As well as working at this operational level, the Strategy will also be a strategic document and therefore needs to be fully integrated with other key Council Policies



Shropshire Union Canal, Wheaton Aston



Wom Brook Walk, Wombourne

and Strategies. This is explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

1.4 The Open Space Strategy will act as a vehicle for real improvement and increased provision through supporting the Council's Corporate Aims and Objectives and the Sustainable Community Strategy as well as informing the preparation of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF).

1.5 The strategy is termed an 'Open Space Strategy' as opposed to a 'Green Space Strategy' for the simple reason that it incorporates civic spaces in addition to green spaces.

## Why Develop an Open Space Strategy?

1.6 Open spaces have an important role to play in every community, as "...attractive, safe and accessible parks and green spaces contribute positive social, economic and environmental benefits, improving public health, well-being and quality of life" (CABE Space, 2004). The aesthetic value of larger open spaces such as historic parklands and gardens is particularly important in South Staffordshire. Efforts should be made to protect and enhance open spaces, and the purpose of the strategy is to deliver positive and lasting change to the District's wide variety of open spaces.

1.7 The main reasons for developing an Open Space Strategy are:

- To improve the management and maximise the benefits of open spaces
- To protect and enhance levels of biodiversity and ecological habitats
- To help create sustainable communities
- To co-ordinate action and develop partnership working
- To support national, regional and local policy objectives
- To contribute to wider Council objectives including health, biodiversity and education improvements
- To access more funding opportunities
- To promote open space investment as a policy priority

1.8 Nationally, the government is encouraging local authorities to develop open space strategies as part of the drive to create sustainable communities. Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) recommends that local authorities undertake needs and opportunity assessments and it is against this background that this Open Space Strategy has been prepared. The Commission for Architecture and the Built



Skatepark, Bishops Wood

Environment (CABE) recognises the importance of open spaces in creating successful and attractive places.

## Scope of the Open Space Strategy

1.9 This Strategy sets out mechanisms and an Action Plan for addressing the main issues identified in the Open Space Audit Report in order to promote open spaces in the District and help them achieve their potential. It provides a framework for achieving these objectives over a ten-year period. The recommendations contained within the Strategy are based on the findings of the Open Space Audit and consultation.

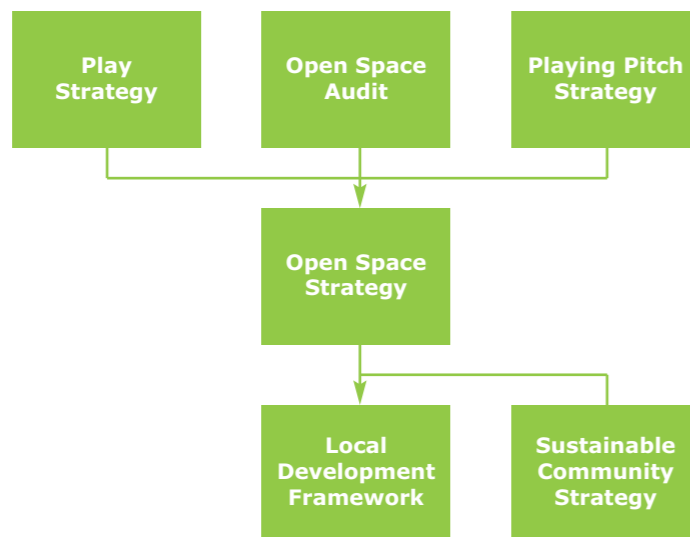
1.10 The Open Space Strategy exists alongside the Playing Pitch Strategy and Play Strategy for South Staffordshire, which together produce an overall strategy and vision for the improvement of all areas of open space throughout the District. The Open Space Strategy is informed by the results of the Open Space Audit as outlined in the Open Space Audit Report.

1.11 The Open Space Strategy incorporates and develops the results and recommendations from these other strategies in order to produce an Action Plan setting out an agreed activity programme with clear lines of responsibility,

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timescales, delivery agents and potential funding sources. This Action Plan can be the basis of an investment strategy for open space for the next ten years.

**Fig.1 How the Different Documents Interrelate**



## Strategy Outline

1.12 The preparation of an Open Space Strategy involves the following stages:

### Stage 1: Developing a Strategy Vision

The vision has been carefully developed by the Council following public and stakeholder consultation and summarises what the Strategy seeks to achieve over the next ten years.

### Stage 2: Open Space Audit

The Open Space Audit, essentially, forms the first part of the Open Space Strategy in terms of document production and was conducted in order to establish the current state of open spaces in the District in terms of the quantity, quality and accessibility of provision. Public and stakeholder consultation also formed an important

part of this section of research. Detailed results from this audit and consultation are contained within the Open Space Audit Report and accompanying GIS database (DVD). A summary of these results is contained within Chapter Two of this document.

### Stage 3: Establishment of a Policy Framework

This section of the Strategy builds upon the findings of the Open Space Audit and consultation in order to produce a series of policy objectives and actions, which will support the achievement of the Strategy vision. This will also take account of other related strategies in order to ensure that the Open Space Strategy presents informed and realistic objectives that are embedded within a corporate policy framework.

### Stage 4: Preparing an Action Plan

An action plan describes in detail the steps, personnel and timescale for achieving the policy objectives and the overall vision of the Open Space Strategy. This section also recommends the monitoring and review procedures for the Strategy's implementation.

## Strategy Purpose and Vision

1.13 The Strategy sets out a vision for the provision, enhancement and management of publicly accessible open spaces within South Staffordshire for the next ten years and will be used to:

- Provide the framework in which to strike an appropriate balance between new open space provision and the enhancement of existing provision in meeting the needs of local people, now and in the future. Consideration will be given to the protection and management of sites that are close to their landscape and/or nature conservation capacity
- Guide and inform policy development through the LDF process in relation to the protection, enhancement and accessibility to open spaces
- Provide the mechanism for identifying new sites and assessing the suitability of previously designated sites
- Define the value and role of open space in meeting corporate aims and objectives and in supporting the Sustainable Community Strategy
- Provide clarity and reasonable certainty for developers and landowners in respect of the requirements and expectations in relation to open space provision and contributions associated with the development of land

- Provide for resource allocation that maximises funding to support improvements from internal revenue and capital budgets and external funding streams

- Provide ways for voluntary and community groups to participate in open space provision and management

- Provide for greater coordination and partnership working between the District Council, Parish Councils, Staffordshire County Council, South Staffordshire Housing Association and other land management agencies in the management of land based on locally appropriate standards

1.14 The broad aim of this strategy is to provide a means through which the following open space vision for the District can be achieved.

## The Vision for Open Space in South Staffordshire

**The Council aims to provide networks of accessible, high quality open spaces, sport and recreational facilities, which meet local needs including those of outdoor play.**

**The Council will ensure as far as possible that open spaces are fit for purpose, clean, safe and well maintained, take account of landscape character, landscape capacity, nature conservation and biodiversity issues.**

**If achieving these aspects of our vision, open spaces should become economically and environmentally sustainable and be valued by all sections of the community and visitors.**