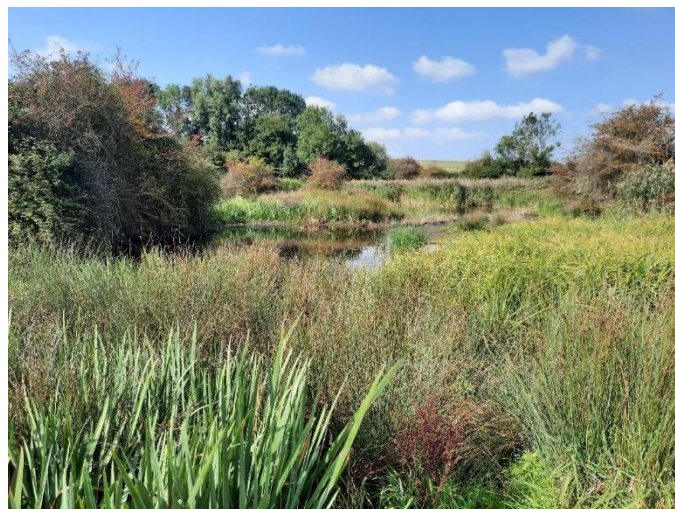
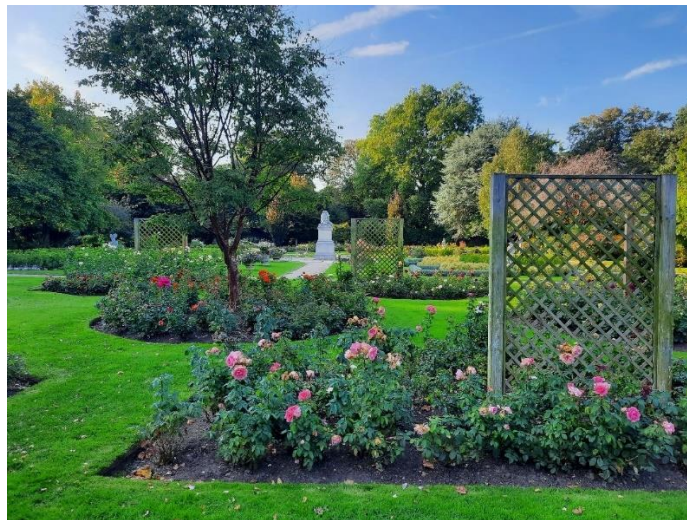


2025-2035

**Open Spaces and Biodiversity
Strategy**

For

Spelthorne Borough Council



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1. Executive Summary

With a global climate crisis and the lessons learned from the recent pandemic the importance of our parks and open spaces has never been greater. Parks and Open spaces make very significant contributions to the environment and biodiversity, they are essential to health, well-being, social cohesion and a sustainable economy; this is particularly the case when they are well-used and maintained and contribute to the quality of life of the community they serve. Conversely when they are not well maintained or used, they often detract from these objectives.

Our vision for our parks and open spaces is summarised as follows:

“Provide high quality, accessible open space and associated facilities for the use of the Borough’s residents and visitors, for a variety of purposes, taking into account the resources which are available to provide and maintain these open spaces.”

Key to achieving this will be:

- Investing in infrastructure and the skill base of the staff that manage and maintain them.
- Understanding service needs and responding to our communities.
- Effectively and efficiently utilising our resources and as resources permit enhancing our parks and open spaces.
- Setting aside parts of the council’s parks and open spaces for wildlife-friendly management as these areas will act as the habitats, corridors and stepping stones necessary for wildlife to thrive within Spelthorne.
- Sustainable management.
- Maintaining infrastructure and the natural environment well.

Crucial to achieving high quality parks and open spaces that are valued is taking a realistic, proactive, strategic approach to the provision and care of parks and open spaces resulting in raising their profile and usage and ensuring they meet the needs of the community.

This Parks and Biodiversity Strategy will achieve this by developing a clear and shared vision amongst its variety of stakeholders that demonstrates the contribution that open spaces of all categories make to the wider health, social and environmental agendas. The strategy will also focus on promoting a sense of community whilst maximising the outcomes from existing resources and spending, and through leveraging-in external funding via parks and community groups.

At the core of this strategy are the Action Plans, which combines a series of recommendations, and targeted enhancements to existing Parks and Open Spaces.

2. Introduction

2.1 Scope of the Strategy

2.1.1 This strategy supersedes the previous one and sets out Spelthorne Borough Council's approach to preserving, managing, and enhancing parks and open spaces for the local community and visitors alike.

This strategy covers parks and open spaces but excludes:

- allotments
- burial grounds
- the nursery

This is due to the fact that they provide a different function (mostly statutory) for residents in the borough.

2.1.2 It is recognised that these areas provide important open spaces for major activities, however there are over 80 dedicated parks and open spaces within Spelthorne, and it is on these that this strategy focuses.

2.1.4 The Spelthorne Parks and Open Space Strategy 2025 builds on previous strategies and seeks to integrate it within a local, regional and national context which defines the value and role of parks and open space within Spelthorne and sets out a framework for the borough's future approach to the management and development of parks and open spaces. Importantly, this strategy provides a concise action plan and operationally affordable solutions to current dilemmas of resource availability and operational capability within the context of a flexible strategic approach.

2.2 The Purpose of this Parks and Open Space Strategy

2.2.1 The purpose of this strategy is to:

- Establish a clear overall approach to the provision of adequate parks & open spaces to meet the current and future needs of the community.
- Provide a basis for consultation with stakeholders.
- Identify issues and problems and seek to resolve them.
- Ensure that the delivery of parks and open space services achieve corporate and community needs.
- Create a policy framework for the enhancement, accessibility and use of parks and open spaces.
- Determine priorities for action and the resources and timescale necessary for implementation.

2.2.2 The strategy will guide the council's policy and operational work by:

- Providing a clear and shared vision between the community, and other stakeholders and setting out a clear reference point.

- Establishing the value of parks and open spaces in achieving corporate, strategic, community and stakeholders' objectives.
- Enhancing the quality of life of local communities and the environment by promoting a sense of civic pride in their parks and open spaces.
- Setting out priority actions including the development of biodiversity and park action plans.
- Maximising and prioritising outputs from existing resources including capital and revenue budgets
- Provide a basis on which to respond to spatial planning policy.

2.3 Definitions, Typology and hierarchy of Open Space

2.3.1 Best practice promotes definitions of different typologies of open spaces and an associated hierarchy. It is clear that:

“All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity”.

There are no statutory requirements for the provision of open space and no legally enforced minimum levels of provision. Traditionally, levels of provision have been based on a target area of open space per capita. This gives a very broad picture for a whole town and does not take account of local variations within a town or city.

Whilst the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standard relates open space provision to population and recommends that there should be a minimum 2.43 hectares of outdoor playing/recreational space per 1000 people. It is best practice is to develop local hierarchies and standards.

Spelthorne has 179 hectares of operational parks/recreation grounds, 72 hectares of additional land leased out, together with 144 hectares of common land, a total of 395 hectares.

This equates to 3.83 hectares per 1000 population. This is greater than the recommended level and shows that the Borough is well-provided for, but it should be noted that it does not take into consideration the distribution of open space, the quality of it, people's access to it or non-recreational roles and uses of open space.

A hierarchy of the different types (Typology) specific to Spelthorne has been developed and is summarised in **Appendix A**.

Effective catchment distances

It is important to understand the catchment distances for each typology of open space and these are as defined in **Appendix A**.

They relate to the typical effective catchment area for each park type. The effective catchment area represents the area from which 70-80% of park users are likely to be drawn from. There are a number of factors considered in this assessment.

Mapping

All parks and open spaces are currently mapped on GIS, including common land. These designations currently need to be updated to the new classifications.

Outdoor Sports Facilities

Compared with best practice, Spelthorne has sufficient outdoor sports facilities. Generally, the quality, usage and accessibility of sites of this type are good throughout the Borough.

Local Indicators for supply

National standards have been developed for a number of open space typologies, including play areas and sports.

However, best practice is that local authorities should develop their own open space classification to reflect local characteristics, demographics, existing facilities and the recreational and non-recreational functions of open spaces. An understanding of the types of open space, in these contexts, will provide a more rigorous basis for analysing the results of the site audits and enable an assessment of whether the range and types of open space functions in the local area meet the needs of local people.

In Spelthorne, this is **Destination, local and neighbourhood parks**.

When developing these local standards, the council has considered amongst other aspects child densities that provide an indication of the need for children's play provision within the Borough and is a useful indicator of a changing need across the demographic age profile.

3 WHERE ARE WE NOW

3.1 Strategic Context

3.1.1 Geography

The borough of Spelthorne is situated in the north of Surrey, bordering two other Surrey boroughs, three London boroughs and two Berkshire unitary councils. Located 15 miles south-west of central London, Spelthorne is a compact urban area covering 51 square kilometres, bordered by the M25 to the west, the River Thames to the south and west, the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames to the east and Heathrow Airport to the north. The major population centres are Ashford, Shepperton, Stanwell, Sunbury and Staines all having their own distinctive characteristics with no physical boundaries between them.

The River Thames runs through Spelthorne Borough and provides a focal point for visitors to the area. Many of Spelthorne's attractive parks and open spaces are situated beside the river, and include:

- Lammas Recreation Ground, Staines
- Laleham Park, Laleham
- Shepperton Tow Path, Shepperton
- Manor Park, Shepperton
- Riverside walks in Sunbury

- Bronze field, Ashford
- Ash Link Local Nature Reserve, Charlton
- Studios Walk, Shepperton
-

Spelthorne is a relatively small borough with 65% of the area being designated green belt. The remainder of the Borough is designated as urban landscape. A high proportion of the surface of the Borough is occupied by water and this geography intensifies the concentration of the population in the borough, which is the second most densely populated in Surrey.

3.1.2 Economy

A relatively high proportion of the population is “economically active” (either in work or seeking work). In the 2021 census the unemployment rate was 4%, slightly below the national average. There are some relatively small areas of deprivation in parts of Stanwell and Sunbury Common. For these small pockets of deprivation, the main issues are low income, lack of or poor employment, poor education and skills and crime and disorder.

3.1.3 Demographics

Data from the 2021 Census shows that:

- The overall population of Spelthorne was 103,000, an increase of 7.7% in the last decade
- Population density is high and in the top 30% for England
- Age demographics are average with a good spread in each age range, however a rise in the older demographics is expected
- There is diverse ethnicity in the borough with 78.7% white British, 3.8% Indian and 3% from Eastern Europe. 1.6% are from black ethnic groups.
- Whilst the majority identify as Christians many have no belief and there are significant numbers of Buddhists and Hindus
- Unemployment was 3.1% but this represented the 3rd largest comparative rise in England
- Almost half have very good health, those in good health was around a third with fair to very bad making up the rest
- Those with significant disabilities was 5.7% with a further 8.7% with limited disabilities

This information is collated from the information that was available in the 2021 Census. In terms of this strategy, it means that open space is particularly important given the population density and increase, together with the impact of open space on improving health. Care needs to be taken in terms of catering for ethnic and religious diversity.

3.2 Policy framework

3.2.1 The Spelthorne Corporate Plan

The corporate plan has been recently revised to set out the vision, aims and objectives and priority actions for the borough.

Three out of the 5 priorities directly relate to parks and open spaces, namely Resilience, Environment and Services. Many of the actions relate specifically to parks and open spaces and several more will have contributions through them. These priorities are summarised below:

- The protection of areas that our communities love
- Responding to climate change with the environment being intrinsic to everything we do
- Keeping the council's premises clean, tidy, safe, well-signed and welcoming
- Healthier communities
- Effective management and investment in assets
- Promoting the borough and supporting the economy
- Managing our open spaces, tree planting, minimising flooding
- Protecting and enhancing the environment, including biodiversity
- Promoting and assisting environmental groups

Details of how parks and open spaces contribute to the community and corporate values and priorities is shown in section 3.4.

3.3 Policies relating to open spaces

National and Local Planning Policy Framework

There are a number of both national and local policies that set out the framework for parks and open spaces. These are summarised below and further information where not shown below is provided in **Appendix B**.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

This sets out the best practice policy framework and is the most comprehensive approach to date. This is the framework adopted for this strategy.

It sets out:

- Quantity, proximity and spatial and to a degree quality requirements across Sports provision, play and young persons facilities, and a variety of types of open spaces (Typology)
- It recommends that planning authorities should regularly assess the provision of each typology and facility against community needs and the standards set out by the NPPF.

- Spelthorne Borough Council has undertaken this in order to develop this strategy. This may be accessed with the following link [Open Space Assessment](#)

Local Policies

Policy Objectives

The Council recognises that two of the most pressing challenges to be addressed at all scales in the 21st century are climate change and the loss of biodiversity. Addressing these challenges, as well as supporting development which delivers health and wellbeing benefits for our community lies at the heart of achieving sustainable development. The natural environment plays a key role in meeting these objectives and as such the protection and enhancement of the Borough's natural environment is fundamental to securing a sustainable future for Spelthorne. Spelthorne benefits from a diverse natural environment, highly valued by our communities and offering a wide range of benefits; our natural environment plays a key role in making the Borough an attractive place to live and work. Within our parks and open spaces, we will seek to protect, maintain and enhance existing open spaces and areas for recreation and encourage quality and accessibility improvements. Priority will be given to areas where specific deficiencies in access or quality have been identified.

Biodiversity

Within the context of the 2021 Environment Act, Spelthorne has developed a number of policies in relation to biodiversity. These are summarised below:

Spelthorne's open spaces incorporate a variety of habitats, from amenity grassland and woodland to meadows, wetlands, ponds and rivers. Much of the common land within the Borough is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) meaning these are recognised as areas of national importance in the conservation of biodiversity. The parks and open spaces within the Borough are integral to our provision of green and blue infrastructure, they assist in efforts to combat climate change, provide flood relief benefits and help to combat biodiversity loss. The introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through the Environment Act 2021 introduces a potential funding stream for the enhancement of existing greenspaces to benefit wildlife which will also improve the visual appeal of open spaces and provide other benefits to residents and the environment. A policy and process to gain funding is required and it must be noted that BNG is a competitive process.

Spelthorne has a well-developed policy of creating, maintaining and enhancing habitats, however in some areas whilst significant recent improvements in the area, the policy with regards to some areas is less developed, in particular set aside grass areas.

Trees

The tree equity score (sets a national standard in each UK country to help make the case for investment in areas with greatest need) for Spelthorne is 84 and lower than the Surrey average. This is mainly due to the urbanisation of the borough compared to the rest of Surrey.

Woodland and amenity trees soften and enhance the environment and have significant value to biodiversity and sustainability. We have developed the following policy:

We will further engage in tree planting programmes where appropriate, but following the “Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason” principles which recognise that other habitats have their own intrinsic value which may outweigh the benefits of additional trees. For example, species-rich grassland supports valuable populations of wildlife which would not persist in woodland. Requests for tree planting within parks and open spaces will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Selecting the appropriate species for a location is critical, with the predicted impacts of climate change and disease meaning that some tree species are unlikely to survive to maturity.

Wild flora

In 2022, from a total estate of approximately 180 hectares, 0.7 ha (0.4%) was set aside for wildflower planting. By Summer 2024, the wildflower planting within parks was extended to 6.06 hectares.

We have developed the following policy if agreed by Committee:

Wildflower planting in parks and open spaces will be encouraged where appropriate and where this will not have an overly deleterious impact on the provision of other recreational benefits within the area. Wildflower planting will be native and predominantly perennial species mixes which are better suited to the management of open spaces. These perennial meadows are more sustainable than annual wildflower meadows as they do not require annual rotovating of the soil which damages soil structure, beneficial organisms and spreads weeds. Where species-rich grassland is already present, the planting of additional species will not be appropriate.

Urban Areas

There is great potential to increase biodiversity and wildlife value in urban areas of Spelthorne. Heightened interest in the natural environment has led to a growth in the number of community groups being actively involved in its protection and enhancement. The Council seeks to support the uptake of schemes such as the Blue scheme which look to improve the biodiversity of spaces under the control of other public bodies, and where resources permit and is appropriate will seek to offer advice to community groups looking to undertake biodiversity projects within the borough.

Local Planning Policies

A range of local planning policies are set out in the Local Plan (A strategic framework for the future development of the borough).

In summary they provide for:

- The protection and enhancement of open spaces and biodiversity
- The provision of a range of typologies of open space from play areas to sports facilities to areas for biodiversity etc.
- A hierarchy of open spaces

- Setting out the open space requirements for developers, including provision on and off-site and financial contributions
- Biodiversity Net Gain requirement

3.4 The Value of Parks and Open Spaces

Parks and open spaces make very significant contributions to community aims and objectives and the council's core values, from physical and mental health benefits to social cohesion and environmental, few services that the council provides have such a wide range of benefits across the sphere.

The following lists these benefits with more information provided in **Appendix C**

3.4.1 Health and Wellbeing value of parks and open spaces

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Mental health
- Education and development

3.4.2 The Social value of parks and open spaces

- Social cohesion
- Social history
- Community engagement
- Resolving social issues

3.4.3 The Economic value of parks and open spaces

- The local economy
- Tourism
- Individual economic benefits

3.4.4 Environmental value

- Biodiversity
- Climate change mitigation
- Access to nature
- Sensitively designed and managed open areas also support services such as flood regulation, air quality improvements and carbon sequestration and provide opportunities for education and training

3.4.5 Stakeholder and public views

The site assessments completed for the quality assessments included talking to members of the public whilst they were using the open space and asking them what they valued about parks and open spaces. More than 100 people were asked their views on site. The following summarises some of their responses as to why they value their park:

- A place to relax, walk and meet others
- Play sports
- Volunteer
- See nature
- Take the children out
- Walk the dog
- Run and use the fitness trail and several other activities
- They are a green lung for the borough
- They make the city green and a nice place to live
- I volunteer here and meet other people
- I go to events in parks, they are really good
- I love the meadows it makes me feel I am in the countryside

Stakeholders at the consultation forums identified the following value of parks and open spaces:

- Its space for me as I do not have my own
- A great place to meet others

3.4.6 The link between quality and value

The quality of open spaces is intrinsically linked to the level of its value. Where parks and open spaces are in poor condition, not only will this reduce the value of their contribution to wider objectives in many cases the benefits that should be obtained may be reversed.

An open space that is devalued by litter, poor maintenance, graffiti and poor infrastructure and facilities often becomes an area where initial anti-social behavior escalates into crimes, drug dealing and significant social issues.

Furthermore, there is a correlation between the facilities and activities within open spaces and value. Whilst open spaces attract people and communities from diverse backgrounds, this does not necessarily in itself bring them together. As such the value of activities and events that encourage people to share experiences together cannot be underestimated and are essential to open spaces achieving the maximum contribution to community cohesion.

3.5 Standards and Quality Assessments for Parks and Open Spaces

3.5.1 Service delivery

The service is delivered directly by the council through their Grounds Maintenance section based within Neighbourhood Services.

An options appraisal for future delivery was completed as part of developing this strategy. This concluded that the delivery model is effective and when compared with other councils of a similar nature delivers value for money.

The national benchmark standard for parks and open spaces is the Green Flag Awards. This sets out criterion for the site and its management. This standard however cannot be applied to all typologies and so a revised best practice version primarily based upon the green flag criteria was developed for site assessments and utilised to look at more strategic issues. This has for example more emphasis on infrastructure and play and young person's facilities.

Standards of provision have been developed for the following typologies of open space where it is important that local needs are provided for locally on a consistent basis:

- Parks and Open Spaces.
- Provision for children and teenagers.
- Outdoor sports fields and playing field needs.
- Natural or semi-natural greenspace.

Appendix D shows the details and the status of each park listed in the Borough.

3.5.2 Current performance and achievements

The site visits and recent awards demonstrate that Spelthorne Parks and open spaces are, when compared with other similar authorities well managed. Grounds Maintenance is well executed across all sites inspected with only minor issues identified. This assessment is supported by the comments of the public who were asked for their views when the site assessments were completed.

The assessments identified, the following issues to address:

- Continue to review the management regime for set aside habit areas in particular grass areas.
- Carry on assessing areas in order to eradicate pernicious weeds and introduce native flora of local provenance

3.5.3 Recent achievements include:

- Sunbury Walled Garden achieving the Green Flag Award for the past 5 years
- South and South East in Bloom achieving the coveted gold standard for the past 10 years
- Significant increases to the set-aside areas across the estate to improve biodiversity

- A comprehensive programme of gym equipment being installed
- Refurbishment programme for all play areas

The above demonstrates a high level of commitment and skills from the council and those responsible for managing its open spaces.

3.6 Assets and Funding

Assets

The parks and open spaces network in Spelthorne are a total of 179 hectares of operational parks/recreation grounds, 72 hectares of additional land leased out, together with 144 hectares of common land, a total of 395 hectares.

This includes:

- Destination Parks
- Local and Neighbourhood Parks
- Large tracts of land set-aside for biodiversity and nature
- 8 multi-use games areas
- 25 tennis courts, 4 bowling greens, 2 outdoor basketball courts
- 11 football pitches
- 9 pavilions and a wide range of other buildings
- Playgrounds, skateboard parks and BMX facilities, youth shelters and a Splash Park.

Funding

The overall revenue is currently commensurate with the scale of the estate and the intricacies of the diverse services offered. Reductions to the level of funding would have both a detrimental effect on the services provided and the contributions that parks and open spaces make to community and corporate aims and priorities.

External sources of funding include, developer contributions and applications for grants etc. These must continue to be sourced however cannot be relied on to sustain the service over the longer term. Opportunities from Biodiversity Net Gain should be maximised but again cannot be relied on in a competitive environment for these funds.

There are significant pressures to capital budgets for example:

The play improvement budget is comparatively healthy when compared with other authorities of a similar nature, however when shown as a percentage of the capital value of the equipment, over a longer period of time this may need to be reviewed.

Site assessments identified issues with older pieces of equipment that will need to be addressed.

The open spaces provide some of the most beautiful and desirable locations within the borough. Accepting that the balance between community provision, consideration for further income

generation and potential commercial activity will create a more sustainable funding model.

3.7 Themed Areas

3.7.1 Provision for children and young people

The council has made a very significant commitment to this. For example, within its current corporate plan 5 play areas are to be developed and refurbished. Already 3 of these are complete. A number of community outdoor gyms have also been installed.

Children's play areas

Ashford

Clockhouse Lane and Rosary Gardens, TW15 2HH - playground including inclusive play equipment, MUGA, Outdoor gym, tennis courts, football.

Hengrove Park Station Crescent, TW15 3HN - playground, MUGA, outdoor gym

The Wickets, off Woodthorpe Road, TW15 2RR – playground

Woodthorpe Road, TW15 3LQ – playground

Alexandra Road play area, TW15 1TP – playground and Basketball court

Feltham Hill Road play area, TW15 1LN – playground and outdoor gym

Charlton Village

Hetherington Road, Charlton Village, TW17 0SW – playground, MUGA

Laleham

Thames side, TW18 1SS – playground, outdoor gym.

Shepperton Road, TW18 1SJ – playground

Greenfield Park, Middle Green, TW18 1QX – playground, outdoor gym

Shepperton

Bishop Duppas Park, Walton Bridge Road/Russell Road, TW17 8NR – playground, tennis courts and football.

Littleton Recreation Ground, Laleham Road, TW17 0JS – playground, MUGA, football

Shepperton Recreation Ground, Glebeland Gardens/Grove Road, TW17 9DH – playground, outdoor gym, football, table tennis.

Donkey Meadow, Gaston Bridge Road, TW17 8HA – playground

Halliford Park, Upper Halliford Road, TW17 8SN – playground

Studios Road play area, Studios Road, TW17 0QW – playground

Staines-Upon-Thames

Lammas Recreation Ground, Wraysbury Road, TW18 4XZ - playground, spray ground, outdoor gym, BMX/skatepark, tennis.

Staines Park, Commercial Road/Knowle Green, TW18 2QJ – playground, basketball court, football, outdoor gym, tennis courts.

Moormede Play area, Waters Drive, TW18 4RN – playground

Stanwell

Long Lane Recreation Ground, Long Lane/Cordelia Gardens/Cranford Avenue, TW19 7ER – Playground, basketball, BMX/Skate Park, football, mini tennis.

Stanwell Recreation Ground, Oaks Road, TW19 7LL – playground, tennis.

Nuthatch Close play area, Nuthatch Close, TW19 7BN – playground

Lauser Road, /Town Lane, TW19 7PT – BMX ramps, basketball

Village Park, Hadfield Road, TW19 7JQ – playground

Stanwell Moor Recreation Ground, Horton Road, TW19 6AQ – playground, outdoor gym

Victory Close play area, Victory Close, TW19 7BU – playground

Sunbury

Cedars Recreation Ground, Green Street, TW16 6QQ – playground, outdoor gym, tennis, football.

Groveley Road Recreation Ground, Groveley Road, TW16 7NW – playground

Kenyngton Manor Recreation Ground, Bryony Close, TW16 7RH – playground, MUGA/basketball courts, BMX Ramps, football, outdoor gym.

Spelthorne Grove, Staines Road West, TW16 7DB – playground

Sunbury Park/Orchard Meadow, TW16 6AB – natural play area.

Old Bathing Station, Fordbridge Road, TW16 6AW – playground

Multi-use games areas (MUGAs - containing facilities for basketball, football and cricket) and informal kick-about areas.

Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAPs)

- These areas cater for children eight years and older, with at least eight types of play area. There should be opportunities for ball games or wheeled activities. Ideally, they should be located no more than 1500m away from all homes.

Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAPs)

- These areas cater for children between the ages of 4 and 8 years old. Ideally, there should be at least 5 types of play area, and that provision matches the demographic requirements as set out above ensuring that all play spaces and facilities are safe to use and maintained to the necessary standard.

Open space provides an important opportunity for children's play needs. It is widely acknowledged that the importance of children's play extends far beyond the activity itself by contributing towards the child's development through the application of a range of physical, social and emotional outlets.

The key issues relating to children's play are the nature, extent, challenge and location of play provision. It is also acknowledged that age, gender, safety and risk issues are of importance. The actual location of play provision has the most immediate and lasting influence on its use and adoption by the community.

Spelthorne Borough Council provides a range of play facilities in parks, open spaces and on housing estates. These include playgrounds, skateboard parks and BMX facilities, youth shelters and a Splash Park.

3.7.2 Biodiversity

Biodiversity is essential to the fabric of human life. We rely heavily on this fragile yet so important network of life. This is fundamental to the extent that without, for example, pollinators our food production would collapse leading to wide-spread famine and economic disaster.

Areas that are more biodiverse contribute more to the mitigation of global warming and to our mental health, indeed biodiversity is intrinsic to all we do and our survival.

The UK is one of the least biodiverse nations on the planet having lost many of our natural habitats, for example, some 97% of wildflower meadows have disappeared, much of our forests and woodland together with a myriad of other habitats in very significant decline.

With the 2021 Environment Act, this has been recognised nationally with a number of mechanisms put in place to seek to reverse this decline. Legally binding targets such as halting the decline in species abundance by the end of 2030, increasing species abundance by the end of 2042 with interim targets set and reducing the risk of species extinction are now set. Nonetheless with large population increases predicted and apparent within Spelthorne (7.7% in the last decade alone) the pressures that adversely affect biodiversity continues to intensify.

The impact of any proposals to extend Heathrow Airport will also need to be assessed, particularly in terms of noise, air and light pollution.

Our parks and open spaces make essential contributions to biodiversity. Appropriate management regimes and set-aside areas together with the careful management of areas for biodiversity are key to addressing these intensified pressures.

The council manages its parks and open spaces appropriately and differently according to the primary purposes of each site. It has gained protective status such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) for a number of its sites and manages these in accordance with the requirements for these designations. It has designated a number of sites where the primary purpose is to protect and enhance biodiversity:

- Ash Link (LNR), Charlton TW17 0RQ
- Staines Moor (SSSI), Staines-upon-Thames TW19 6EQ
- Dumsey Meadow (SSSI), Laleham TW17 9PB
- Sunbury Park/Orchard Meadow (SNCI), Sunbury-on-Thames TW16

Other sites that are not specifically designated for biodiversity include:

- Bronzefield, Ashford TW15 3JZ
- Studios Walk, Shepperton TW17 0JZ
- Hawke Park (aka TP26), Sunbury-on-Thames TW16 6HQ

Natural and Semi-natural urban green spaces

Natural and semi-natural green spaces, such as woodlands, grasslands, and wetlands form part of the natural biodiversity of the borough. The council seeks to balance the opportunities for recreation and biodiversity on these sites.

This will also involve local communities and partners in the management and promotion of these areas.

Amenity Grassland (maintained grass)

There are many opportunities to create areas set-aside for biodiversity without damaging the potential for community use. Large areas for biodiversity have already been created, however appropriate management regimes to clear invasive plants and create the conditions for native flora and fauna to thrive need to be developed and implemented

The council has made very significant improvements to biodiversity in the past few years including:

- Setting aside large areas of grassland for ecological management
- Managing its areas specifically set aside for biodiversity well and in doing so increased biodiversity at the majority of these sites
- Contributing to the emerging nature recovery strategy
- Working with Colne Valley Regional Park to secure a wide-range of projects to improve biodiversity, access to them and appropriate interpretation
- The current corporate plan has several specific targets relating to improving biodiversity these are reflected in the action plan of this strategy.

Spelthorne Borough Council does not act alone in its efforts to protect and improve biodiversity. Its key partners include:

Surrey County Council

The county council are in the process of developing the county-wide local nature recovery strategy: *Surrey Nature Recovery*. Whilst currently in development, the strategy aims to:

- Set a biodiversity vision for the county
- Evaluate, prioritise, protect and enhance areas of biodiversity
- Prioritise making these areas better, bigger and joined with a hierarchy of actions
- Create new sites where possible

- Look at the wider environment to create buffer zones around areas of particular importance
- Consider the impact of climate change on biodiversity
- Increase the protection available to sites and biodiversity in general
- Identify and maximise funding opportunities, i.e. BNG, Flood management funds and grants

This strategy identifies the following areas in Spelthorne as particularly important for biodiversity

- Staines Moor and surrounds
- Areas around and including Laleham Park
- Sunbury Park

It will be essential to work in partnership to influence the pending strategy and implement actions to improve biodiversity as improvement depends on connectivity and other wider factors such as pollution as well as individual areas.

Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT)

The Trust operates both within the county and wider, however do not have any specific sites they manage within the borough of Spelthorne. SWT have undertaken over the years significant project work within Spelthorne however nothing of particularly significant note in the last year or so.

SWT have no current strategy however have developed a work plan. This work plan is in its draft stage. There are no specific impacts within Spelthorne. SWT represent a useful resource and in particular to develop funding opportunities from BNG.

Colne Valley Partnership

This local charity is involved in biodiversity themed projects both within Spelthorne and along the Colne Valley

The Colne Valley Regional Park (CVRP) aims to protect and enhance the 43 square miles of countryside to the west of London, covering parts of Spelthorne, 21% of Spelthorne is within the Colne Valley Park. The CVRP holds significant geographic importance in Spelthorne due to its proximity to Staines and its accessibility from across the northern part of the Borough.

Over recent years, various schemes have been implemented in Spelthorne to improve parts of the River Ash to enhance its flow and shape to be of greater benefit for local people, through establishing more opportunities for accessible walks. They have also secured funding and completed a wide variety of projects in Spelthorne.

They continue to deliver biodiversity improvement projects utilising predominantly external funding.

In 2023/24 over £9.45 of projects were delivered for every £1 invested into the park by Local Authorities and Corporate Supporters. The CVRP also carries significant lobbying weight within both the private sector and in central Government and access to this can be of benefit.

Their 6 objectives are:

- **Landscape:** maintain and enhance the landscape, historic environment and waterscape
- **Countryside:** safeguard our countryside from inappropriate development
- **Biodiversity:** conserve and enhance biodiversity
- **Recreation:** provide opportunities for countryside recreation, accessible to all
- **Rural Economy:** achieve a vibrant and sustainable rural economy, including farming and forestry
- **Community Participation:** encourage community participation by volunteering and environmental education, and promote health and social benefits of access to high quality green space

Thames Water

They have identified the following objectives:

- Creation of new habitats and improvement in management of 12 of their Sites of Special Scientific Interest, this includes Staines Moor.
- Scrub management on the following sites: • Staines Moor SSSI (King George VI RES & Staines N&S RES) Maintain support for conservation grazing & Public access – manage & monitor bonehead ditch & continue scrub removal.

4 WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE

4.1 Our Vision

The council's vision is to:

“Provide high quality, accessible open space and associated facilities for the use of the Borough's residents and visitors, for a variety of purposes, taking into account the resources which are available to provide and maintain these open spaces.”

4.2 Our aims and objectives are summarised as:

- Investing in infrastructure and the skill base of the staff that manage and maintain them.
- Understanding service needs and responding to our communities.
- Effectively and efficiently utilising our resources and as resources permit enhancing our parks and open spaces.
- Enhancing biodiversity by better management, bigger areas set aside and connecting wherever possible our sites and links to others.
- Sustainable management.
- Maintaining infrastructure and the natural environment well.

4.3 Consultation

The council wants to engage our communities to understand what they need and actively empower them to participate in improving our parks and open spaces. Engagement with local residents' associations, users and supporters' groups, for example Friends of Sunbury Park, Civic Pride and Spelthorne Natural History Society and other identified stakeholders is key to keeping the community involved.

The recent corporate plan has identified that Our residents want:

- ✓ Access to green spaces and clean streets
- ✓ Effective services that we all use
- ✓ A Council that wants to tackle climate change
- ✓ Sensible management of Council finances

This strategy seeks to take on board what our residents want

4.4 Partnership Working

The council aims to work in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors to manage and enhance parks and open spaces, and where feasible engage with them as volunteers. Developing strong relationships with external people and organisations to develop a range of expertise that will develop and enhance this service, is a vital step in the implementation of this Parks and Open Space Strategy. Given this the action plan has specific actions and performance targets in relation to this.

4.5 Branding and Marketing the Service

An essential component of an effective Parks and Biodiversity Strategy is the marketing and promotion of the services and the amenities provided via the Communications Team, again the action plan reflects this.

5 HOW WILL WE GET THERE

In order to ensure that we achieve our vision and aims and objectives we have developed a strategic action plan.

These actions will be phased over the 10-year period of the strategy.

Action deadlines are categorised as:

Short term-within the first 2 years of the strategy

Medium term- within years 3 to 6 of the strategy

Long term-within the final period of the strategy

5.1 Strategic Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Resources	Target completion	Performance indicator
Biodiversity Theme				
Remove invasive weeds on set-aside areas			Short-term	Habitat conditions created where native flora and fauna thrive
Review maintenance regimes on set-aside grass areas			Short-term	Habitat conditions created where native flora and fauna thrive
Introduce appropriate native flora into set-aside areas			Short to medium term	Increased habitats and pollinators
Complete ecological surveys of sites that are set-aside for biodiversity			Short-term	Biodiversity on-site understood and opportunities for improvement maximised
Develop site specific biodiversity plans for key sites			Medium-term	Plans establish actions required to improve biodiversity on specific sites
Implement emerging biodiversity action plan			Throughout the strategy	Phased improvements in accordance with plan
Establish potential sites for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) funding			Short-term	Understanding of developer sites and potential for off-site funding for council land Partnership working with SWT
Develop prioritised sites and plans for BNG funding			Short-term	Sites prioritised according to criteria i.e. proximity to developments, improvements and costs etc
Implement biodiversity improvements with BNG funding			Medium to long terms	Subject to sites and funding 30-year management plans required
Develop partnership working with Surrey Wildlife Trust			Throughout the strategy	Projects delivered in Spelthorne and land adjacent to BNG potential explored
Contribute to the emerging county-wide Nature Recovery Strategy			Short-term	Contributions ensure that sites for biodiversity in Spelthorne are included in the strategy and appropriate actions and allocation of resources are made
Prioritise habitats according to the Nature Recovery Strategy and local needs			Medium-term	Efforts are focussed on the most important habitats

Implement the actions from the Nature Recovery Strategy			Medium to long-term	Dependent on the emerging SCC strategy
Continue to work in partnership with Colne Valley River Park			Throughout the strategy	Regular liaison with Projects delivered with
Develop partnership working with Thames Water			Throughout the strategy	Sites owned by Thames Water are protected and appropriately managed
Consider additional protective designations			Throughout the strategy	Research appropriate designations for each site and gain where appropriate and possible
Consider the impact of the proposed extension to Heathrow Airport			Long-term	Dependant on what is proposed and happens Biodiversity is protected and pollution minimised
Contribute corporately and to partners and Surrey County Council in developing a climate change and resilience plan			Short-term	Mitigation measures i.e. increasing the size and connectivity of sites are put in place as resources permit
Implement measures from the climate change and resilience plan			Medium to long-term	Climate change mitigation measures in force, i.e. flood alleviation diverting waters to open spaces where appropriate
Identify habitats with high biological carbon sequestration potential and planting species which can adapt to future environmental changes			Throughout the strategy	Climate mitigation measures in place to protect biodiversity
Develop Arboricultural strategy			Medium to long-term	Tree management and planting policies and procedures embedded. Climate change mitigation, stock resilience etc Tree planting opportunities maximised; mini forests established Plants and trees utilised to reduce flooding risk
Provision for Children and Young People Theme				
Complete installation of 2 additional play areas	Parks Officer	S106	Short-term	Additional range of play equipment to meet LAP/LEAP/NEAP standard
Establish capital program for repairs/replacement of safety surfaces	DHG NS	Officer Time	Short-term	Play areas are maintained in a safe condition
Seek resources to further improve facilities for play areas	Parks Officer	External funding	Medium-term	Resources secured including developer contributions and external funding where possible Developer contributions maximised
Update existing children and young person's facilities and where possible create new facilities	Parks Officer	External Funding	Long-term	Community needs fulfilled as resources permit

General Parks and Open Spaces				
Identify Park specific budgets	DGH NS	Officer Time	Short-term	Understanding of costs for each main site
Secure external funding for improvements	Parks Officer	Officer Time	Throughout the strategy	Resources in place to establish funding potential and bids Developer funding maximised Funding secured Improvements implemented
Ensure appropriate developer funding for new sites and where appropriate improvements to the network	Planning	S106 Officer	Throughout the strategy	Planning guidance, and legal agreements in place that maximise developer contributions
Review signage	Parks Officer	Officer Time	Short to medium-term	Corporate style and approach. Green Flag standards met where appropriate to site
Develop a marketing strategy for the service	Communications + Parks Officer	Bulletin	Medium-term	Strategy considers audience, community needs, mode of communication (including electronic, website) etc.
Promote and assist the development of community environmental groups across the Borough	Biodiversity Officer	Officer Time	Throughout the strategy	Community groups develop environmental initiatives and enhance biodiversity in our parks and open spaces, supporting the Climate Change Strategy Local groups enhance biodiversity through planting wildflower meadows in suitable locations
Review maintenance fleet	Grounds Maintenance	Parks Team	Medium-term	Electric vehicles are considered, carbon imprint reduced
Review plant and equipment	Grounds Maintenance	Parks Team	Medium-term	Modern cost-effective methods continued, and carbon imprint reduced
Develop and implement Continued Professional Development Plan	NS Team	All staff	Throughout the strategy	Gap analysis identifies needs that are fulfilled Staff enabled to perform at highest level

6.MONITORING AND REVIEW MECHANISMS

- To ensure that the strategy is delivered the following monitoring and review mechanisms shall be deployed:
- Individual officers will be assigned to lead on specific actions and their progress will be monitored and managed in appropriate reviews with their line manager.
- A formal review of the strategy will be undertaken in year 3 and year 7, this review will consider any significant changes that are required to policies and actions.

- At each report stage any delays will be discussed and appropriate remedial action will be determined.