



Buckingham Town Council

Environment & Property Committee

Buckingham Parks Policy



Following the two park audits reported in updates 1 and 2, this report follows the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment's methodology for analysing and listing the key issues that should form the basis of the Town Council's parks policy. The headings used below are as suggested by this good practice guide.

This Proposal is the Buckingham Town Council Parks Vision and Policy. Subject to the approval of Council, the next stage will need to be a strategy review to see what policies are delegated to the Clerk, and what policies need to be developed into stand-alone projects with specific funding requirements.



The use of the word "park" in this document includes all green spaces, open areas and formal parks within the parish of Buckingham. Where land is not within the management of the Town Council, relevant landowners will be asked to consider the town's ambitions and desires in the management of those specific areas.

This proposed policy was reviewed by the Parks Policy Working Group on 13 and 15 March 2008. The working group included Cllrs Bloomfield, Hirons, Mordue (15/3) Isham, Stuchbury (13/3) and Whyte.

Access

Each park has different issues such as Bourton Park which has good physical access though no maps or identification of the various areas, to Chandos Park which is more concealed, with the main entrance via a sheltered housing driveway, one via Ford Street and one by the University bridge.

Park names and functions are not clear, signage is of a mixed design and routes incomplete, and all should include distances.

Policy A1: A disability and accessibility audit should be commissioned to see what, if any, works are required to improve access.

Policy A2: The council should improve mapping and signage to the parks to allow new users to use and identify the various different parks and the activities contained within, together with making sure relevant byelaws are posted.

A3: Improvements are needed to the main park entrances to make them more obvious, inviting and creating a sense of arrival.

A4: Access to the parks from the Cornwalls Meadow car park needs to be made safe for pedestrian access.



Landscape Quality

Buckingham is very fortunate to have a rich and stimulating green space running through most of the town, with a variety of river views, trees and hedgerows and scale of spaces.

L1: Make each park more understandable with a clear structure and identifiable focus and use, acknowledging some of the parks are formal and others informal.

L2: Care is needed for future planting to ensure appropriate species are encouraged and enhanced.

Facilities



The key-defining element of much of the park area is the river, and more use should be made of this central asset. Structured facilities are varied, reflecting the wide range of ownerships and policies over the years.

There was some concern that the facilities are not being used to their full extent such as the basket ball court and bridle way.

The park equipment is of a wide range of quality, style and state-of-repair, with little consistency between the various elements.

F1: Prepare a Buckingham specific specification for park furniture and ensure a more consistent approach to design and procurement.

F2: Permit the installation of dedicated benches with a fee structure for future maintenance, and to allow the dedication and sponsorship of existing benches and other elements within the park.

F3: Review locations of bins (both litter and dog waste) to ensure the correct locations and quantity, and to introduce recycling opportunities for paper, plastic and metal at park entrance and exits.

F4: Review dog policies (and byelaws) so that it is clear where off-lead exercise is appropriate and reinforce on-lead requirements in the general areas, including appropriate signage.

F5: Review cycle use in the parks and create proper cycleways that are pedestrian friendly and in keeping with being in a park setting.

F6: Cycle racks should be provided by key park facilities to encourage cycle use (i.e. tennis courts and playgrounds).

F7: Review the use of existing sport provisions and identify where facilities are under or over subscribed and prepare proposals for future structured sport provision – such as a new trim trail, additional tennis courts etc.

F8: Review provision and use of playgrounds, and identify any new requirements and provision required to encourage outdoor play for children of all ages.

F9: Provision of picnic tables should be improved, and consider providing shelters in the more distant parts of the parks.

F10: The structure of the Heartlands should be improved to allow more variety of use – including more formal planting, an event space, art etc – to create a more coherent sense of place rather than just a green space to walk through.

F11: Making use of the river needs to be improved, including looking at using some of the meadow areas for better flood control and water storage, and also opportunities to harness the power of the river by means of a new mill or other structure.

F12: Review car parking arrangements to ensure provision and signage is satisfactory, especially for those with disabilities and identify areas for improvement.

F13: Review the provision of toilet and changing facilities within the parks.

Maintenance & Management

After a number of years of “light-touch” maintenance by AVDC, it was considered that a more rigorous maintenance strategy is required, including reviewing the horticultural requirements and facility maintenance.



It was noted that the general grass cutting is satisfactory, but it is the attention to detail that is lacking such as weeding, painting, general repairs etc are not being carried out regularly enough. The lack of obvious ownership was a problem with residents not sure who to contact to report problems. There is a need for a definitive plan of all open and green spaces within the town, identifying ownership and assets.

M1: Responsibility and management/ownership authority needs to be made clear to park visitors with appropriate signage, including contact details for reporting problems.

M2: Long term ownership needs to be reviewed and agreed with AVDC, Bucks CC and other landowners such as the University, with a view to ensure the parks can be maintained and enhanced in a holistic way and with economies of scale.

M3: Shrub, hedge and tree maintenance needs to be reviewed to ensure minimal intervention where possible (for wildlife promotion), but to improve maintenance of key areas such as hedges by cycleways and decorative planting areas.

M4: Tree maintenance policy needs to be clarified so that ad-hoc tree-by-tree agreement is not required by the full committee.

M5: The possibility of park wardens should be reviewed and considered (perhaps on a part time or voluntary basis), this would make the responsible authority more visible and also improve the ability to respond to day-to-day issues more promptly. This could be by encouraging local volunteers or establishing “Friends of” arrangements where local residents can become more involved in the park’s development and maintenance.

M6: A periodic review of council contracts, machinery and staffing levels is required to ensure the resources are appropriate to meet the council’s policy.

M7: There should be a post-flood clear up policy to ensure the parks are returned to safe public use promptly and efficiently – such as path clearance, playground cleaning and debris removal. The council should have a budget set aside for the council to proceed with the policy without needing to wait for a council meeting to authorise.

M8: Long term funding issues need to be investigated, including reviewing precept, rental, events, grants, lottery, Section 106 and also any surplus land/asset sales. Long term revenue and capital budgets need to be reviewed to inform any future acquisitions.

M9: Dog fouling is a problem and needs rectifying to make the open green spaces more enjoyable and safer to use. This needs to be reviewed in conjunction with the dog lead policy.

M10: An asset register is required of all “fixtures and fittings”, together with annual and cyclical maintenance plans so that basic maintenance and repair budgets can be planned in advance.

M11: A register of public comments and complaints should be kept so that new issues or recurring incidents can be tracked and the relevant authorities advised of specific maintenance or public order/vandalism issues can be acted on.

M12: Staff and contractors working in the parks should display the contracting authority’s name to ensure residents know who is carrying out work on behalf of the town, and that the town’s own vehicles and staff should display the authority’s name.

Safety

The parks are considered generally safe and pleasant to use, but a number of specific issues hinder full enjoyment such as random acts of vandalism, isolated anti-social behaviour, inappropriate parking etc.

S1: Rigorous safety audits should be professionally carried out on all facilities to ensure equipment throughout the parks meet relevant requirements including river banks bridges, retaining fences/walls, play equipment, signage etc.

S2: Advice should be sought on river safety to ensure existing and future park developments meet satisfactory safety guidelines.

S3: Liability exemption and safety signage should be implemented for all car parks and other areas where appropriate.

Natural & Cultural Heritage



As noted in the Landscape Quality section, Buckingham is very fortunate in its natural heritage, but it underplays the park’s historic role in the development of the town – from the historic use as water meadows, farm land (hedging and ridge and furrow) and then its industrial usage such as the canal, railway and mills.

H1: Introduce more park interpretation material such as once provided for Chandos Park.

H2: Review the provision of more sustainable horticultural techniques such as composting, wood chip, water conservation etc, and to encourage traditional rural skills such as hedge laying.

H3: Introduce more contextual art, perhaps leading to a sculpture walk. Features could include local school designed paved areas, sculpture, large sundial, traditional sculpture etc.

Education & Health

The parks should be an obvious location for schools to use to support and extend the national curriculum, from geography and history to physical education, biology and art. The parks have the opportunity of being an outdoor class room, and the more children feel comfortable using the parks, the more they may use them in their own time.



E1: Encourage schools to use the parks more and become involved with future projects where they may derive an educational benefit.

E2: Encourage groups and associations to use the parks for guided walks, activities, events etc.

E3: Develop an event series to encourage residents to use the parks, and learn more about them.

E4: Create formal health facilities such as a new trim trail, and identify various running trails with different levels of difficulty/length.

P1: At regular intervals, the council should seek residents' comments on the use of the parks, the facilities, and improvements that would enhance the parks.

P2: Formal projects and proposals will be developed once the parks policy is agreed so that specific public comment can be sought on each project as relevant, and funding streams are identified.

P3: An action plan will be produced once the policy is agreed by Council, and this will indicate how and where consultation will be sought on relevant projects.

Warren Whyte.
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Public Response

It was agreed that the Parks Policy will need public involvement in the implementation stages, and to ensure that the various park users and non park users should be questioned to make sure as many sections of Buckingham's residents are able to inform the details of the potential projects.

