



Guidance and best practice on appropriate maintenance for open space

Introduction

Open space should be taken into account in planning for new development. Open space, which includes all open space of public value, can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks.

Provision of open space is an important consideration when considering development proposals, they not only provide benefits to the overall quality of housing developments but all offer ecological value, health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby.

The Council has other documentation which provides advice and guidance with regards to provision of open space, these include;

- Local Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document
- Open space, recreation and landscaping Supplementary Planning Document
- Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document

However, open spaces also need to be appropriately maintained and managed to ensure the benefits are maintained over the lifetime of the development. It is also not the sole responsibility of the Council to adopt and maintain open spaces.



Purpose

This document is intended to provide guidance and best practice to those looking to those community groups and organisation, including town and parish councils, who may be considering on maintenance responsibilities for public open space.

This will help to ensure that the quality of open spaces are maintained to appropriate standards and delivery quality landscape schemes, both for the residents of particular developments as well as the wider community.

Vision for open spaces

Open spaces should be suitable for a variety of activities this will include quiet relaxation, informal sports and more active play. Additionally the provision of green infrastructure and the potential for linkages to the wider green infrastructure network offer opportunities to enhance the ecological and biodiversity benefits to the local communities.

Open spaces should be clean, well maintained and safe. The Council is often the first point of contact where management responsibilities are below residents' expectations and community groups will need to fully understand whether there are already agreed maintenance and management arrangements in place to adhered to through planning conditions and/or approved documentation through the planning system.

With regards to a model of best practice, the Green Flag award scheme recognises and promotes well managed green spaces. The purpose & aims of the award scheme are set out below;

- To ensure that 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



Maintenance

Where a management company or other third party/community organisation is to provide long term maintenance of public open space, it will be necessary to ensure that the land remains in the agreed use and any agreed management/maintenance plan is fully adhered to ensure the public open space is appropriately maintained in perpetuity.

When establishing maintenance arrangements for landscaping schemes consideration should also be given to provision for watering arrangements and frequency which should form part of the management plan during the establishment period.

In some instances landscape management plans which including long term design objectives and management responsibilities/maintenance schedules may already have been agreed and established for areas of open space and these should be followed unless written agreement is otherwise reached

Typically the maintenance regime will be more involved over the first five years as the landscaping scheme establishes.

Where these are not in place or landscape management plans/maintenance schedules need revisiting appendix 1 of this guidance provides a broad indication of an expected maintenance regime. However, the final details of any landscape management plan will need to be fully informed by the landscape design approach, species mix and intended usage of the open space.

It is recommended that all maintenance will be undertaken by a competent landscape contractor, ideally registered with the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) and/or the British Agrochemical Standards Inspection Scheme registered (BASIS), with the BASIS Advanced Contractor Certification Scheme (BACCS).

All tree work must be undertaken by a qualified professional, registered with the Arboriculture Association and all play area inspections will be undertaken by a professional holding an up-to-date RPII certificate (Register of Play Inspectors International).



Financial implications

Those looking to maintain public open spaces, it is important to consider there are both 'Capital' and 'Revenue' spending with regards to the maintenance and upkeep of open spaces. Capital being for specific purchases and revenue funding the ongoing regular maintenance works.

As a broad comparison of identifying the indicative costs of any landscape management scheme, costs of the associate maintenance figures are contained within Appendix E; of the Planning Obligations SPD.

References and other documentation

Supplementary Planning Document: Planning Obligations (May 2008)

Open Space, Landscaping and Recreation Supplementary Planning Document (December 2009)

Local Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (March 2023)



Appendix 1; Typical open space maintenance scheduling works

Soft landscaping;

	Description		Frequency	At what time
All new planting	Watering (year 1)	To maintain health and condition of plants. Frequency may need to be increased in warmer/drier periods	Weekly	April-October
	Pruning	In line with horticultural best practice	Annually	Varies
	Mulch	Top dress with 50mm of mulch	Annually	February – March
	Divide	Lift, Divide and replant, removing weak or dead sections	Every three years	March to April
	Dead/dying planting (1-3 years)	Replacement within the planting season with same species/size unless otherwise agreed	Annually	October to March
All newly planted trees (1-3 years)	Watering (year 1)	To maintain health and condition of plants. Frequency may need to be increased in warmer/drier periods	Monthly	April-October
	Mulch	1m radius from trunk top dressed with bark chipping of 75mm	Annually	February – April
	Weeding	300mm radius to be treated with contact herbicide	Annually	April – May
		For whips all weeds within 0.5m to be hand removed	Twice a year	May and October
	Strim Guards, ties and stakes	Check and replace Remove	Annually and after severe weather After 5 years	Anytime
New Hedge planting	General maintenance	Same as new tree planting (years 1 -3)		

	Height reduction	In year two reduce height by a third to promote thicker growth	Once	November – February
Existing Trees	Inspection	Visually inspect health and condition of tree	Every 3- 5 years Annually where there is high footfall	Anytime
		Dangerous or damaged trees	Within 24 hours	
	Epicormic growth	Remove	Once a year	May-June and September – October
	Crown works (ie. Shaping, thinning and crown lift)	Maintenance to be informed by visual inspection and to maintain balanced crown	As required	November to January
Existing Hedgerows	Cut back	Cut back season's growth	Annually	February
	Gap up	With whips of same hedge species	Annually	October - February
Free standing planters	Watering	To maintain health and condition of plants. Frequency may need to be increased in warmer/dryer periods	Weekly	April – October
	Prune	In line with horticultural best practice	Annually	Varies
	Weeding	Weed by hand	Monthly	February – April
	Mulch	Top dress to depth of 50mm	Annually	
Amenity Grass	Litter	Removed before grass cutting	Prior to each cut	
	Cutting	Minimum mow height of 40mm	14 cuts per year	March – November

Hard landscaping;

	Description		Frequency	At what time
Paths	Inspection	Visual inspection to ensure fit for purpose	3 monthly to annually	Year round
	Repairs	Make safe	As reported	Within 24 hours
		Full repair	As reported	Within 28 days
	Weeding	Spray any vegetation growing onto path with herbicide	Twice a year	May and August
Street furniture	Maintain	In accordance with manufactures instructions	Inspected at same time as paths	At all times
	Inspect			
	Repair	Make safe	As reported	Within 24 hours
		Full repair	As reported	Within 28 days
	Painting	Repaint metalwork	As required	May/August
Replace	Any damaged or stolen	As reported	Within 6 months	
Gates and locks	Inspect	Check in good working order and no accessibility restrictions	As part of inspection	Each Month
	Repair	Fully repair	As reported	Within five working days
Retaining walls/structures	Inspection	Safety Inspection by suitably qualified structural engineer	Annually	Anytime
	Repair	Make safe	As reported	Within 24 hours
		Fully repair	As reported	As per professional recommendation

Play areas;

	Description		Frequency	At what time
	Inspection	Recorded visual inspection by an RPII qualified individual	Weekly or fortnightly depending on useage	Each week
		Recorded operational inspection by an RPII qualified individual	Quarterly	Each month
		Independent RoSPA inspection and report	Annually	Each year (inspection period must be no greater than 1 year)
	Repairs	Make safe	As reported	Within 24 hours
		Full repair	As reported	Ideally within 6 weeks
	Dogs	Not permitted with fenced play areas at any times		

General cleaning;

	Description		Frequency	At what time
	Litter	Litter pick or all areas	Daily to once a week depending on footfall	Each week
	Litter bins/dog waste	Empty each week or when full	As above	Weekly
	Leaf litter	Paths to be blown or swept	Weekly during periods of leaf fall or on accumulation of large amounts	September - December