

Green Space Strategy

2007-2017



for
Test Valley

A Green Space Strategy for Test Valley

2007 - 2017

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 High quality green spaces are a vital part of healthy sustainable communities. As such they are an aspect of everyday life that people - young and old - feel passionately about yet often take for granted.
- 1.2 This strategy has been prepared to ensure that the green spaces within Test Valley Borough Council's ownership are highly valued and cared for – not just by those responsible for its maintenance but also by those who live nearby and enjoy their use.
- 1.3 The Green Spaces Strategy has been produced with assistance of a panel of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The panel developed local standards for green spaces following best practice guidance set out by The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and created templates in order to assess sites consistently. These templates have been applied to 60 sites across the borough to assess the actions for improvement.
- 1.4 This strategy will move us from a previously responsive approach to a more forward looking and proactive position. To this end a 10 year action plan has been developed which sets out sustainable improvements. This approach will also increase our prospects for securing external funding, justify opportunities to bring in developer contributions whilst identifying priorities for the deployment of existing resources.

2.0 Background to the Strategy

Why have a Strategy?

- 2.1 In recent guidance issued by CABE Space (The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), it has been acknowledged that “The standard of a local authority's management and upkeep of the green spaces in its care is a very public indicator of its broader performance. High quality, well used spaces are possible only if those responsible for their planning, management and improvement think strategically.” Research has also shown that where a parks or green space strategy links into the wider strategic thinking of the authority that the quality of their green spaces is often higher than those with a stand alone, inward looking document and that without a strategy resources will be poorly targeted (National Audit Office 2006).
- 2.2 There is growing evidence that those local authorities that have published a comprehensive strategy are better able to make progress towards improving their green assets than those that have not (Alan Barber, 2004 Commissioner for CABE). By following this advice, Test Valley Borough Council will be in a better position to deploy its resources more effectively.

2.3 Furthermore, the wider benefits of having a strategy for green spaces include:-

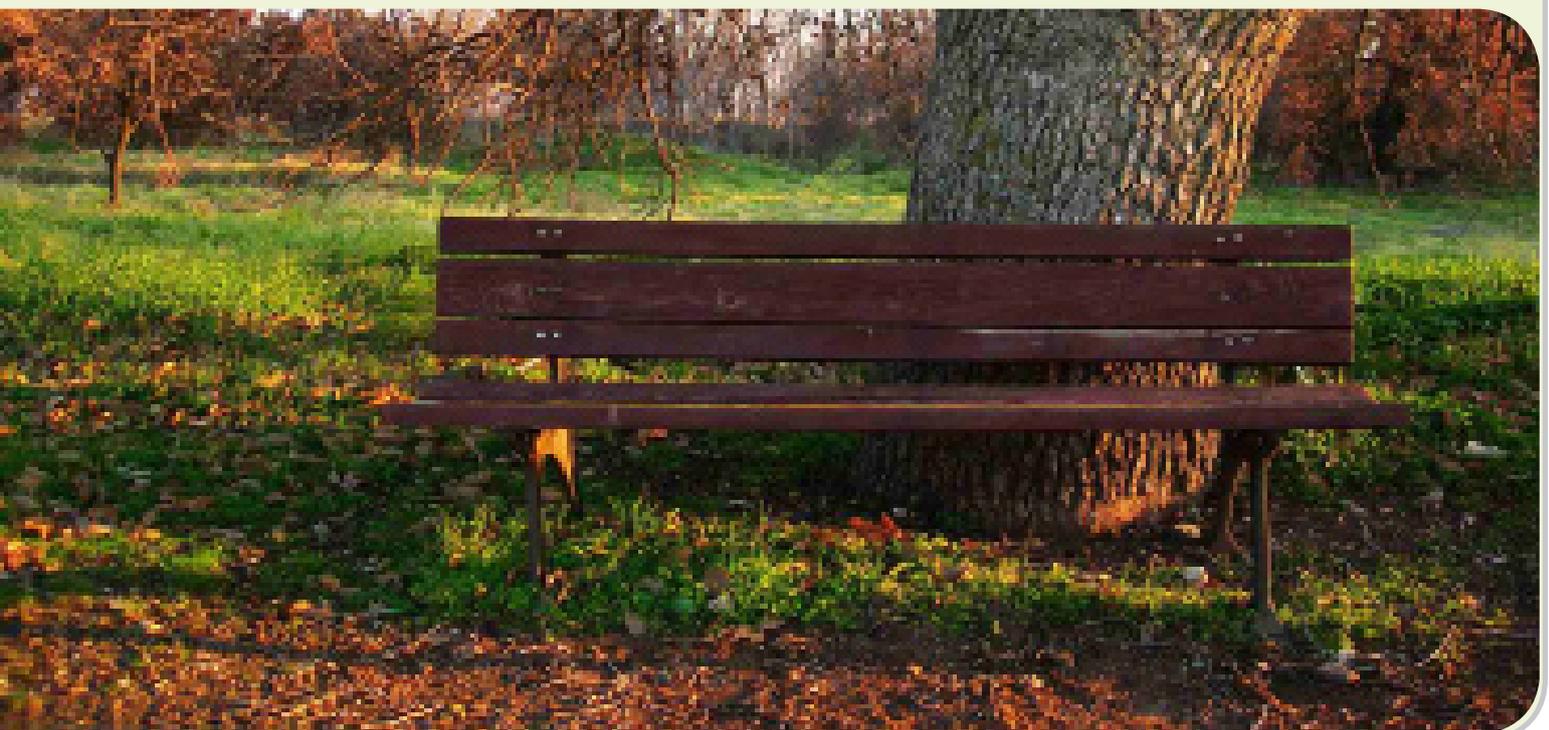
- Increasing the attractiveness of a local environment to create a sense of civic pride and belonging
- Protect and enhance habitats in the urban environment
- Raising value and aiding neighbourhood renewal
- Helping to secure external funding (particularly through developers contributions) – and focusing internal capital and revenue expenditure more cost-effectively
- Additional support / recognition for the role green spaces play in meeting the Council's corporate priorities, the Test Valley Community Plan and the Government's Shared Priorities

What is the Scope of the Strategy?

2.4 The strategy has focused on those areas of land within the control of the Council comprising, formal parks, informal open space, allotments, cemeteries, nature reserves and ecologically important sites. A methodology has been developed as part of the strategy to assess the standards of existing open spaces which could also be applied to areas provided within new developments. Children's play, although an integral part of quality green space is not considered within the scope of this strategy, but a Children's Play Strategy for Test Valley has been prepared as a separate exercise.

What is the Purpose of the Strategy?

2.5 The strategy has been prepared to provide a basis for the management of open space, provide the basis for making decisions on future funding for their maintenance and improvement and to inform decisions in securing off-site contributions to meet the recreation needs of new residential development.



3.0 Relationship with other policy documents and guidance

- 1.1 The strategy forms part of a series of documents which the Council is preparing as its response to the advice set out in Planning Policy Guidance 17 'Sport and Recreation'. The Borough Local Plan 2006 – 09 and emerging Local Development Framework sets out the standards of open space provision which the Council considers should be provided in association with new residential development.
- 1.2 The Council is also preparing for consultation, Supplementary Planning advice on Infrastructure and Obligations. It will include advice as to potential scale of contributions which will be sought from developers to meet the recreation needs. The guidance within the Green Space Strategy will inform the negotiations on the scale of any off-site contribution for recreation.
- 1.3 The protection of the natural environment is a key issue with green space management. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 put a duty on all public authorities, including Local Authorities, to have regard to biodiversity conservation. This duty came into effect on 1 October 2006 with the aim to raise the profile of biodiversity across the public sector to ensure that it becomes a natural consideration in all relevant policies decision and strategies. The need to integrate nature conservation into green space management has been considered throughout this strategy, which will be linked to the soon to be published Test valley Local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 1.4 The strategy is aimed at delivering the objectives set out in both the Community Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan. The Environment chapter of the Community plan seeks to protect the natural environment whilst delivering meaningful targets to combat climate change. Both the Cultural and Environmental elements of the Council's SCHEME priorities are addressed within the strategy. Green spaces are at the heart of communities and are highly valued by Test Valley residents. The strategy seeks to underpin not only the importance of the natural environment, but the role they play in bringing different cultures together and facilitating community cohesion.
- 3.5 The Integrated Regional Framework 2004 composed by the South East England Regional Assembly identifies a shared vision and objectives to improve the economic, social and natural environment. The appropriate themes and objectives from this Framework have been worked into this strategy.
- 3.6 With the completion of the 'Vision for Andover' and 'Look at Romsey' projects both towns have been targeted for continued growth and as well as cultural revival. The Vision for Andover's key objectives are Education for All, Health and Well Being, Inclusiveness, and Passionate about Participation. The development and sustainable management of green spaces will be pivotal in the delivery of these principles.



4.0 *What are the key issues?*

- 4.1 Increasing pressure on green spaces from greater development coupled with pressure on resources has limited the Council's ability to proactively manage and develop green spaces within the urban environment of Test Valley in a manner which meets good practice guidelines. The overall management and development of green spaces should address issues such as health and safety, cleanliness, bio-diversity, sustainability, community involvement and engagement.
- 4.2 Anti-social behaviour and the overall safety of public green spaces is commonly cited as an important issue for users. The Council has a duty to ensure that it does everything possible to prevent crime and disorder within its geographical boundaries. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 clearly states that "Crime Reduction is not solely the responsibility of the police" and therefore advocates the responsibility of local public, private, community and voluntary groups to work with the community in reducing crime and disorder. It is vital that the strategy aims to tackle these complex issues in order to alleviate fear of crime and encourage greater use. This strategy creates links to the Council's community safety and enforcement initiatives.
- 4.3 Health and well being is currently an important issue for local communities. In order to stop the rising levels of obesity, particularly in children we need to create safe, enjoyable and challenging environments which encourage participation in physical activity. The current growth in the organic food market has been mirrored with the uptake of council allotments with demand now outstripping supply. The need for the public to know the origin of food and the Council's commitment to promote healthy eating and 'grow your own' is increasingly important and new sites need to be identified to meet demand.
- 4.4 Equality and diversity issues are also acknowledged as an important factor to ensure full and welcoming use of public green spaces. The social value of recreational land for those with a physical disability or sensory impairment cannot be under estimated. This can be further demonstrated by the need to acknowledge different religious and personal beliefs when dealing with specific burial requirements.
- 4.5 Partnership working and community participation is a fundamental aspect of good practice for the management of green spaces. Working in partnership with regional government agencies, charities, local educational establishments and voluntary groups are all essential to the care and conservation of neighbourhood green spaces.
- 4.6 The Council is now obliged to develop actions which can contribute positively to reducing carbon emissions and therefore climate change. Green spaces provide a cooling effect and will become ever more valuable for people if the current prediction with regard to rising temperatures proves to be correct. The management of green space through consideration of recycling waste, appropriate schemes to limit the level of material used and resources wasted, as well as robust policies for suitable woodland creation can all go some way to 'offsetting' the Council's carbon footprint.

5.0 Strategic priorities

5.1 The priorities which this strategy will address are:

- To ensure all identified green spaces meet the set minimum standard in 10 years
- To minimise resource consumption
- To maximise the use of external and internal resources
- To seek external accreditation for excellence in green space management
- To engage communities to make green spaces more sustainable
- Increase provision of allotments
- Investigate provision of woodland burial

5.2 The above priorities form a ten year action plan which is located and expanded upon in section 11.

6.0 Supply Analysis

6.1 Test Valley Borough Council owns over 300 hectares of land classed as green space. The strategy focuses on the following categories of green space:

- Nature reserves
- Allotments
- Informal open spaces
- Parks
- Cemeteries
- Green corridors



6.2 How are these green spaces categorised

6.2.1 Nature Reserves

Nature Reserves are managed to protect and enhance wildlife habitats and species, and provide opportunities for local people to learn about wildlife whilst enjoying the outdoors. Urban nature reserves have become increasingly important wildlife refuges with the potential to support increasingly more diverse ranges of species if managed correctly. The management of nature reserves in Test Valley are directed by 5 year management plans reviewed annually and monitored though out the year by professional staff supported by a network of volunteers.

6.2.2 Allotments

Allotments offer opportunities for people to grow their own produce and go some way to promote sustainability, health and social inclusion. The importance of the role of allotments in urban regeneration, social justice, sustainable communities and quality of life is being increasingly recognised. Allotments can be vibrant community spaces that offer a good physical workout while providing healthy, fresh and very affordable foods. They offer social contact to holders and an opportunity to make choices about what food to grow and how. They encourage composting and reduce the food miles associated with supermarket produce. At the time of writing all 495 allotment plots are let and a waiting list exists.

6.2.3 Open space (informal)

Open spaces are generally located in residential areas, providing visual and amenity benefits, helping to define the character of the neighbourhood and giving space for informal recreational use. Informal in layout, facilities within these spaces could include provision for play including equipped play areas, multi use games areas (MUGAs), youth shelters, skate parks and goal posts.

6.2.4 Parks

Parks are highly visible and highly valued spaces which can set the quality characteristics for an urban centre. Parks are often formally laid out with lawns, flower beds, paths, shrubs and trees and can be categorised for their historical significance. Parks are generally centrally located and provide key venues for high profile events which draw people from the local community. Facilities would typically be seasonal bedding schemes, trees and shrubs facilities for children's play, bowls tennis courts, kiosk/café, bandstands and sculptures / memorials.

6.2.5 Cemeteries

Cemeteries are not only important for the relatives and friends of those whose remains have been committed but are also public open spaces offering place for quiet contemplation. Cemeteries often contain icons of community cultural heritage, such as memorials to events that remain in the community memory. Cemeteries can be bright, welcoming spaces packed with interest. More recently cemeteries have been identified as areas which can be ecologically important, offering a variety of undisturbed habitats for some of Britain's best loved wildlife. Offering choice is important and identifying areas for natural and woodland burial is an emerging priority.

6.2.6 Green Corridors

Green corridors provide opportunities for walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel. Corridors provide traffic free links between green spaces and provide very important links between habitats offering protection for wildlife migration.

6.3 Current revenue spend

The current spend on the management of the council's green spaces is £853,380. This figure includes all open space including areas adopted by the Council within new housing developments which are funded from developer contributions.

6.4 Mapping Exercise

For the purposes of this strategy a comprehensive mapping exercise was undertaken to identify key open spaces to be included within this strategy. Specific green space within each of the categories listed in 4.1 has been selected for their size, recreation value and importance locally. These sites do not make up the total area of open space or account for the total revenue spend within the borough and it is acknowledged that areas omitted during this exercise may offer some recreation value i.e. larger roadside verges, river corridors etc. A full review of these smaller areas could be carried out as a second phase to this strategy and if appropriate additional sites could be added subject to member approval.



7.0 Demand Analysis

- 7.1 Following a government review of Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) - Open Space standards in 2001, a comprehensive survey was carried out. PMP Consultancy was employed in 2003 to assess levels of public perception of existing open space, which involved surveying key user groups in the borough. A further assessment of the quality and maintenance of open space was also carried out following PPG17 guidance. In undertaking their work the consultants identified the following key findings:
- 7.1.1 Open spaces are regularly used and their appeal appears to be universal – men and women, young and old, those with children and those without visiting sites.
 - 7.1.2 Residents generally consider the current amount of open space provided in the borough to be adequate.
 - 7.1.3 There is a strong consensus that Test Valley needs to maintain and protect the existing areas of open space – combined with concern that open spaces may be lost to development / housing and that if development does go ahead, additional open spaces need to be provided for the new residents.
 - 7.1.4 Diversity of provision plays a large part in ensuring the universal appeal of open spaces as they enable different groups to make use of the facilities for different reasons – many adults do so to walk the dog, or for fresh air and exercise, whilst children make use of the open spaces to play on the equipment, the sports pitches and courts to make friends. The Council's Children's Play Strategy 'Positive about Play' 2007 researched recent patterns of participation and found that 50% of parents and carers use green spaces for children's play.
 - 7.1.5 Nearly all respondents walk to informal recreation areas but by comparison, at Memorial Park in Romsey, 40% travel to the site by car.
 - 7.1.6 There are concerns over personal safety and security with nearly one-third of all respondents reporting this as a barrier to access. Factors which played a part were: large groups of teenagers, teenage drinkers, poor lighting on access routes, lack of telephone boxes near to open spaces, not enough CCTV.
 - 1.1.7 Key areas for improvement in open spaces were felt to be: the provision of more toilets; the provision of more seating; improved security; the provision of more shelter; the need for cleanliness and tidiness to be maintained (in particular call for more bins to be provided and less dog fouling).
- 7.2 In the 2006 Audit Commission review of Best Value indicators, Test Valley Borough Council were ranked as the highest performing council when comparing residents use of public green space over a 6 month period. The comparison was made against Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) nearest neighbours and recognises the importance of green space to local people.

8.0 Standards for Test Valley Borough Council's Green Spaces

8.1 The framework for this strategy follows the guidance recommended in the Civic Trust's Green Flag initiative.

The criteria are as follows:-

8.1.1 A Welcoming Place

First impressions are important and green spaces should be positive and inviting. Sites where possible will be made accessible to the whole community with provision for the elderly and disabled visitors as well as young people. Signs both inside and outside the space will be clear and of appropriate design to offer appropriate information. Safety and access are valuable features which will also be assessed.

8.1.2 Healthy, Safe and Secure

Sites will be safe for all age groups and sectors of the community, including staff. Drinking water, first aid facilities, toilets and emergency equipment will be provided if appropriate to the site. An onsite presence in green spaces can make people feel safer and contributes to the general security of individual areas. A long term strategy to look at getting a visible presence in these spaces will be investigated. A Health and Safety policy will be put into practice and hygiene issues such as dog fouling will be addressed.

8.1.3 Clean and Well Maintained

The appearance and overall upkeep of a green space is a determining factor in whether local people use and respect the space. For aesthetic, environmental, health and safety reasons litter, graffiti and waste management will be addressed. Flower beds, lawns, buildings, equipment, benches and water features will be evaluated, locations and conditions logged and facilities repaired or replaced if necessary.

8.1.4 Sustainability

The maintenance of green space and its facilities will be environmentally sound. The application of pesticides will be minimised and the use of horticultural peat will be eliminated. Wherever possible, waste vegetation will be recycled or composted and used on site, and priority will be given to low maintenance planting. The implementation of energy conservation measures and pollution reduction where applicable are considered as a high priority as is the need to offset carbon emissions through increased tree planting.

8.1.5 Conservation and Heritage

Every green space is unique. Every effort will be made to conserve and manage any natural or built heritage. If appropriate, original land features and historical buildings will be restored and maintained to a high standard. Consideration will be given to increasing biological diversity, and maintaining and creating new habitats will be incorporated at every opportunity.

8.1.6 Community Involvement

Public participation is essential to the success of any green space. Where we actively involve the local community and visitors in the development and implementation of projects, improvements are more sustainable and have a higher success rate. Where possible, 'Friends' groups and other community-based strategies will be fostered to support the management and long term development of key sites.

8.1.7 Marketing

The local community will be made more aware of where green spaces are, what facilities are available and what events happen there. Methods to market the sites need to be diverse with site information publicised through tools such as leaflets, websites or notice boards.

8.1.8 Management

The development of 5 year management plans to deliver sustainable improvements to green space will be written, primarily for sites with the greatest visitor numbers. Management plans will illustrate the daily management prescriptions and operational schedules as well as a timescale for surveys. Management plans will be reviewed regularly.

8.2 Framework Assessment

The member panel established a framework for assessing all areas of green space using these criteria. This ranged from minimum to higher standards which were formulated into templates for each open space type. The aim is to have each site should meeting minimum standards, with the option of achieving the higher standards in areas considered to be a top priority or where resources permit.



9.0 Next step / future action

- 9.1 All sites have been assessed, and scored using the minimum and higher standards templates. Sites have been prioritised according to the score with the lowest ranked sites prioritised for action.
- 9.2 To implement the action plan, the current revenue budget will be prioritised and added to developer contributions (collected in each ward to further develop the recreation value of green spaces for new residents). Where appropriate bids will be made to the Council's capital programme for assessment against other council priorities and pressures. Further funding will come from partners and external funding opportunities will be pursued.
- 9.3 The Council when granting permission for new residential development seeks the provision of land and or facilities to meet the recreation needs generated by it ref Policy ESN 22 of the local plan(2006).the policy seeks provision either on site or off site via a financial contribution. The contributions would be used to meet the needs of the development either by increasing the capacity of existing open spaces or the provision of new sites. The council where the opportunity arises will use developer contributions to bring forward investment in its open spaces to meet the target set out in the action plan ahead of the proposed timetable. The evaluation of individual sites undertaken in preparing the strategy will be used to inform decisions about the scale of developer contributions and which schemes they could assist in delivering
- 9.4 Involving the public in the development of green space and making use of local knowledge will be the key to ensure the sustainable success of any project. Where specific needs have been identified or where major improvements are planned, local communities will be consulted to ensure that public expectation is properly managed.
- 9.5 Looking to the future, we will research the viability of securing suitable sites for woodland burial. Similarly, and probably part of the same exercise, we will explore a tree planting programme which could assist in a carbon offset scheme for the Council, and potentially other bodies. Ideally this would be at no cost to the Council.
- 9.6 To meet the growing demands for allotments, we will explore new provision with developers, again as a no cost option to this council.

10.0 Monitoring and Evaluation

- 10.1 In order to monitor and evaluate the strategy, it is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitors its implementation, reviews the strategic aims and action annually, and reviews the templates on a two yearly basis. External partners will also be involved with this process.

Action Plan 2007 - 2017

Strategic Priority 1

Ensure that all parks and open spaces within the Council's ownership are fully accessible and meet all minimum standards within 10 years.

Action	Lead Officer	Measure	Timescale	Date completed
Band 1 sites to meet minimum standards	PCM	New indicator – % sites meeting minimum standards	Sites to meet minimum standards by 2010	
Band 2 sites to meet minimum standards	PCM	New indicator – % sites meeting minimum standards	Sites to meet minimum standards 2012	
Band 3 sites to meet minimum standards	PCM	New indicator – % sites meeting minimum standards	Sites to meet minimum standards by 2015	

Strategic Priority 2

Ensure that resources are protected; waste recycled and adequate provision is made to contribute positively to reducing carbon emissions.

Action	Lead Officer	Measure	Timescale	Date completed
Develop a network of recycling units in key green spaces and monitor collection of material	PCM	New indicator for level for levels of recycling	List of potential sites identified by December 2008	
Develop a tree management planting policy to actively plant trees	PCM	New indicator - Number of trees planted against number removed	5% increase in tree planting to be realised by 2009	
Through the LDF locate and fund the creation of a new council woodland	PCM	Area identified and incorporated in to LDF	Site identified and cost calculated by March 2008	

Strategic Priority 3

Ensure that partnerships and internal resources are in place to increase investment in parks and open spaces through a combination of TVBC and external funding sources.
Targets to be achieved by 2011

Action	Lead Officer	Measure	Timescale	Date completed
Create a Member Group to oversee the implementation of the Green Spaces Strategy	PCM	n/a	Group to be established and meet by April 2007	
Link the Strategy to the work of the Test Valley Partnership	PCM / BDM	n/a	Contribution to Partnership actions / priorities agreed by April 2007	
Increase proportion of investment from external funding sources by 5%	PCM / BDM	New indicator - % of investment funded through external sources	5% increase to be realised by 2011	

Strategic Priority 4

Ensure that the quality of facilities and management at 2 sites are sufficiently high to achieve and sustain Green Flag Status within 5 years.

Action	Lead Officer	Measure	Timescale	Date completed
Work towards achieving Green Flag status at War Memorial Park	GSO	New indicator - % higher standards achieved at WMP	100% higher standards achieved by 2012	
Work towards achieving Green Flag status at Vigo Road Park	PCM	New Indicator - % higher standards achieved at VRR	100% higher standards achieved by 2012	

Strategic Priority 5

Ensure that sufficient education, training and community participation takes place to increase use, prevent anti-social behaviour / vandalism and promote sustainability. Targets to be achieved by 2011

Action	Lead Officer	Measure	Timescale	Date completed
Support and develop 'Friends of Groups', and other volunteer networks	GSO	LSPI 6a - Number of volunteer hours worked at TVBC parks & open spaces	5% increase to be realised by 2011	
Co-ordinate a programme of educational visits to schools	COs x 2	LSPI 6b - Number of educational visits to promote countryside sites and issues	Annual programme – ongoing basis	
Develop a Ranger programme to improve public perception and reduce fear of crime	PCM	SCHEME priority 'Community safety'	Resources reassigned or funding bid successful	
Visible patrol and targeted enforcement carried out in green space 'hot spot' areas as identified by the Hot Sport tasking group	CSM	Reduction in vandalism cost and repairs carried out	Target measured annually with criminal damage reports.	
Investigate the feasibility of declaring play areas / youth facilities as 'Alcohol Free Zones'	CSM	SCHEME priority 'Community safety'	Number of play areas/ green spaces declared 'Alcohol Free Zones'	
Work with the Turnaround Project to address needs of Alamein and St Mary's Wards	GSO	IMD indices (indirect measures)	Currently unaware of any timescales for the TAP project	
Co-ordinate events and activities across the year to promote conservation issues and healthy lifestyles to local communities	GSO & COs	LSPI 11a(iii) Participation levels at REAL. LSPI 11a(v) Participation levels at Wood Fair & Water Festival	Annual programme – ongoing basis	

Strategic Priority 6

Ensure that the increase demand for allotment plots is met with an increase in provision
Targets to be achieved by 2011

Action	Lead Officer	Measure	Timescale	Date completed
Identify key areas of demand	PCM PPM	n/a	List of potential sites identified by December 2008	
Formulae developed to include in LDF - inclusion of allotment sites in all new housing developments	PCM / BDM	n/a	Formulae developed and approved for inclusion in LDF by August 2007	
Increase the number of allotment plots by 100	PCM / GSO	New indicator - % of investment funded through external sources	20% increase on current plot total of 495 to be realised by 2017	

Strategic Priority 7

Ensure adequate provision is made to offer Test Valley residents the option of woodland burial
Targets to be achieved by 2011

Action	Lead Officer	Measure	Timescale	Date completed
Identify potential private/public sector partnerships to offer woodland burial	PCM	Partners identified and partnership statement agreed	All private sectors operators appraised and rated for potential partnership by November 2007	
Identify areas currently in council ownership which could be suitable for woodland burial	PCM	n/a	List of potential sites identified by December 2008	
Identify potential suitable sites for purchase	PCM PPM EV		Sites identified and capital sum approved for purchase.	

Key - Lead Officer

PCM Parks and Countryside Manager

GSO Green Space Officer

BDM Business Development Manager

CO Countryside Officers

PPM Planning Policy Manager

CSM Community Safety Manager

EV Estates Valuer

