

# Medway Countryside and Open Space Strategy (June 2007 – 2016)

- Analysing & Informing
- Planning & Providing
- Protecting & Celebrating

January 2007



## **MEDWAY COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGY - FOREWORD**

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This is a time of great opportunity for Medway. Regeneration is bringing investment to the area and with it raised aspirations for Medway's communities, built and natural environments. This focus on Medway as a successful and attractive city in which to live, work and visit has increased awareness of the area's special qualities and its potential to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Our countryside and open spaces stand out as some of the most significant assets we have in Medway, important for both people and wildlife.

Medway's countryside and open spaces form part of all our daily lives. Views of the hills, river and marshes accompany us as we move around Medway. The chalk hills of the Downs and the open vistas of the estuaries and marshes define Medway's sense of place. Parks, greens and allotments provide spaces where we can spend time to unwind, play, explore, exercise, socialise, and learn. Medway's environment is also of world-class importance for wildlife. Countryside, parks and greens are shared resources, and offer a neutral space to bring new and existing communities together.

We have responsibilities to safeguard our natural environment, protecting wildlife and landscapes. We also realise the importance of safe, stimulating and quality open spaces that can perform a range of uses for different people, in contributing to a decent quality of life.

Medway has the opportunity to use its rich natural environment and amenity areas as a means to achieve its future as an attractive place to live, work and visit. Quality parks, play areas and allotments are intrinsic to healthy and vibrant communities. At a time of change, there are both pressures and opportunities for our countryside and green spaces. One of the greatest concerns that people have about development is the impact on the local environment, the loss of open spaces and countryside. This strategy seeks to address these concerns by promoting a strong vision of our countryside and open spaces at the heart of development plans. It provides direction on how we can secure and enhance both the quality and accessibility of the countryside and open spaces.

For the first time in Medway, this document brings together information on our local countryside and open spaces to coordinate planning and development. It is a chance to celebrate our best assets and bring attention to the potential for improvements. Our work builds on the knowledge and concerns of our partners and local communities. We have used a wide ranging information base, including statutory data, site surveys, expert advice and best practice, together with local knowledge to inform the strategy. This has allowed us to identify priorities for investment and to set out the actions we need to take to achieve our aspirations for quality and accessible greenspaces throughout Medway, functioning successfully for wildlife and people.

Our strategy's focus is to deliver on our aspirations. It is a basis for our partnership work, putting the greenspaces agenda at the centre of plans for Medway.

This strategy informs the regeneration plans for Medway as a successful and thriving city. World-class cities are defined by the quality of their open spaces. We have the added benefit of a high quality countryside setting surrounding our urban area. We now need to focus our work on bringing forward the full potential of Medway to provide for our residents and wildlife. This strategy sets out this direction.

**Neil Davies, Chief Executive, Medway Council**

**Councillor Rodney Chambers, Leader, Medway Council**

**Councillor Howard Doe, Portfolio Holder, Community Services**

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## MEDWAY COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGY - A SUMMARY

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In a national climate of tight budgets, increased user expectations and demands, and a growing pressure on the countryside and landscape, this strategy confirms that Medway still has much to celebrate and that we are starting from a strong countryside and open space asset base.

In the last 3 years Greenspace Services have secured over £5m of hard won investment, held over 300 walks and 15 major events visited by over 70,000 people, have established and supported 19 Friends of groups and have received over 2m visits to Riverside and Capstone Farm country parks. We have seen an increase in pitch bookings and allotment lettings as well as in the development of four new promotional walking guides. The accessible countryside and open space in Medway is large, totalling some 1,900 ha, and consists of 48 countryside sites, 3 country parks, 32 allotments, 117 play areas and 28 parks. Greenspace Services are also working across the authority on health initiatives, are involved in strategic planning and development control and are developing external bids to enhance key sports facilities and open spaces. This is a service punching above its weight.

In 2004, 72% of Medway residents were satisfied with their open spaces (Mori 2004 BVPI 119a). Our audits and surveys tell us that users experience inconsistent quality across the range of open spaces. Our countryside areas and play areas are considered good quality, while some parks and allotments are falling short of expectations. Young People have informed us that we need to provide more and better teenage facilities at sites across Medway.

Our Play Audit tells us that we need to increase accessibility to some of our play areas and parks and also concentrate on better site management. Our workshops and conferences confirm that we need to work harder to ensure that countryside and open space assets are better protected and above all are valued for their ability to support regeneration, economic growth, health and tourism. Greenspace Services are keen to develop 'destination' sites for play, countryside, allotments and outdoor sport. The idea is to target income generation and development resources to selected sites that will be capable of attracting users from across Medway rather than just the local neighbourhood.

To maintain momentum, while also tackling the above issues, this strategy aims to improve year on year the residents opinion poll ratings, to address the findings of the open space quality and quantity audits, to celebrate the strengths of the countryside and open space resource and to secure additional internal and external funding. This desire has informed both the strategy's vision and the following proposed six **key outcomes 1) More high quality facilities, 2) Improved monitoring and management, 3) Prioritised investments, 4) Improved protection/conservation, 5) More open spaces contributing directly to regeneration and 6)**

**Greater celebration and engagement.** The delivery of the vision and the delivery of strategy's headline actions, will ensure that Medway Council and its partners are in a better position to deliver and protect the resource that local people want and expect. This strategy looks forward 10 years to 2016 and is supported by a Delivery Framework that maps out resources and timetabling for driving the strategy forward.

# CONTENTS

# PAGE

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<b>Forward</b>	3
<b>Summary</b>	5
<b>Section 1: Why a Countryside and Open Space Strategy</b>	
1.1 Introducing the Strategy	9
1.2 Developing the Strategy	11
1.3 About the Strategy	13
1.4 Countryside and Open Space Vision	14
1.5 Strategy Outcomes 2007 - 16	15
1.6 The Benefits of Countryside and Open Spaces	16
<b>Section 2: Developing A Strategy: Research and Consultation</b>	
2.1 Greenspace Service's Statement of Intent (2005)	20
2.2 Greenspace Conferences	20
2.3 Playing Pitch Study, 2003	21
2.4 Play Area User Survey and Youth Audit	21
2.5 Mori Poll 2004 / Citizens Panel 2006	21
2.6 Country park Audits, 2005	22
2.7 Park Audits	23
2.8 Summary Table of Response to Audits	23

<b>Section 3: Medway’s Countryside</b>	
3.1 Policy Statement	24
3.2 Overview of Countryside in Medway	25
3.3 Wildlife and Nature Conservation	26
3.4 Landscapes in Medway	35
3.5 Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards	38
3.6 Country Parks and Countryside Sites – A Medway Success Story	41
<b>Section 4: Medway’s Open Space Network</b>	
4.1 Overview of Open Spaces in Medway	44
4.2 Play Provision in Medway	48
4.3 Formal Sport Provision in Medway	55
4.4 Urban Parks and Amenity Sites in Medway	59
4.5 Allotment Provision in Medway	64
<b>Section 5: Managing Medway’s Rural and Urban Fringe</b>	
5.1 Introduction to Urban Fringe Issues	69
5.2 Public Rights of Way Network	69
5.3 Green Grid in Medway	70
5.4 Landscape and Access Management Schemes	71
5.5 Delivering Green Grid	74
<b>Section 6: Implementation Plan</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Appendix:</b>	<b>81</b>

# SECTION 1: WHY A COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGY?

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Medway is well placed to grasp the opportunities offered to develop into a city of learning, culture, tourism and enterprise. Supported by more than £120 million of Sustainable Communities funding, Medway will change dramatically over the next 20 years. Whilst 85 per cent of our population live in Medway's urban areas, half of the land area is rural. There are abundant natural resources, including eight nature conservation sites designated as nationally or internationally important.

The population of Medway is 250,000. In 20 years, due in part to planned development and an increasing birth rate, it will be 300,000. Medway's population is younger than the average for England, but the profile is slowly changing. Our older population is increasing and the predicted growth in the over 60s between 2003 and 2028 is 75%. Our countryside and open space network must respond to this demographic profile by providing adequate facilities for children and young people, while at the same time considering the health and access demands of an older population. Our challenge is also to protect and enhance the natural environment to complement our regeneration agenda, improving health and promoting higher quality of life for people in Medway.

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is active in defining the Vision and 'place making' qualities of the Thames Gateway, and the planned open space interventions in Medway will be an important part of this.

Neither Greenspace Services alone can achieve the vision for Medway's countryside and open space if working in isolation. Therefore this strategy promotes joined-up thinking and delivery as a key to sustained success. We need to ensure that our partners support the key outputs promoted in the strategy and are aware of the benefits that meeting the vision could have on environmental, economic and social sustainability.

Medway Council, its partners and stakeholders have thus produced this strategy for the reasons set out below.

### **Planning:**

- To fulfil the commitment in the Medway Core Strategy<sup>1</sup> (policy CS 22) to produce a Countryside and Open Space Strategy to provide equal opportunity for all people to enjoy accessible, high quality and affordable open space facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Medway Local Development Framework 2006 – 2021, Medway Council, August 2006.

- To address the Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG 17) requirement that local authorities undertake an audit of the current open space resource (quality, quantity and accessibility) for current and future residents.
- To deliver to the Local Strategic Partnership's Local Area Agreements which set out key objectives for the countryside and open space.
- At the heart of the Thames Gateway, Medway is set to experience an increase in population. The new and existing communities need and desire a network of high quality countryside and open space close to where they live, work and play. At times of such significant change there is a need for a robust and well-informed strategy that helps ensure that the value of the countryside and open spaces is protected and enhanced. It is the role of this strategy to set out how the delivery of high quality facilities can be achieved, with indicative costings and timetables.

#### **Securing funding and providing high quality facilities:**

- There is a need to plan the allocation of internal resources and to secure additional external funding.
- When applying for internal and external grants it is important to have an informed and strategic overview of how best we can enhance our countryside and open spaces.

#### **Communication and Celebration**

- There is a need to communicate the value that Medway Council, its communities and its partners place on the countryside and open spaces. This strategy coordinates and prioritises future activity and funding needed to meet the requirements of countryside and open space users.
- There is a desire for Medway to evolve into a city of learning, culture, tourism and enterprise. This strategy has been developed to demonstrate the important and necessary contribution that Medway's countryside and green spaces can make in assisting Medway to become a great city in the Thames Gateway.
- Countryside and open spaces touch all of our lives. Our inherited environment has already developed into an important and unique local, national and international asset – an asset that this strategy will help to protect, enhance and celebrate. The conservation and enhancement of our environment is central to developing a sustainable community and economy.

## 1.2 DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

Medway Council has developed the Countryside and Open Space Strategy in partnership with the Council's Regeneration and Development Directorate and Community Services Directorate.

The development of this strategy has been informed by:

**Core Council documents** such as the Economic Development Strategy (2006), Medway Community Plan, the Rural Action Plan (2004), the Sports Development Strategy (2004), the Medway Renaissance Regeneration Framework (2006) and the Medway Local Plan (2003).

**National policy documents and statements** – these include: Kent Biodiversity Action Plan, Defra's Working for the Grain of Nature, Office for the Deputy Prime Minister and Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs Greening the Gateway (Strategy and Implementation) and Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Sports Recreation and Open space), CABE's Best Practice on production of Strategies and Greenspaces and Better Places (Department for Transport and Local Regions – Urban Parks Taskforce Report).

**Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9)** sets out planning policies on the protection of biodiversity and geodiversity through the planning system. This Statement seeks to:

- promote sustainable development by ensuring that biological and geological diversity are conserved and enhanced as an integral part of social, environmental and economic development, so that policies and decisions about the development and use of land integrate biodiversity and geological diversity with other considerations.
- conserve, enhance and restore the diversity of England's wildlife and geology by sustaining, and where possible improving, the quality and extent of natural habitat and geological and geomorphological sites; the natural physical processes on which they depend; and the populations of naturally occurring species which they support.
- contribute to rural renewal and urban renaissance by enhancing biodiversity in green spaces and among developments so that they are used by wildlife and valued by people, recognising that healthy functional ecosystems can contribute to a better quality of life and to people's sense of well-being; and

ensure that developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity in supporting economic diversification and contributing to a high quality environment.

**Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG 17)** states that open space, sport and recreation are fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives. These include:

- supporting an urban renaissance - local networks of high quality, well managed and maintained open spaces, sports and recreational facilities help create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe. Green spaces are important as areas for nature conservation, biodiversity and as 'green lungs' which help improve air quality.
- supporting a rural renewal - the countryside can provide opportunities for recreation and visitors can play an important role in the regeneration of the economies of rural areas.
- promoting social inclusion and community cohesion - well planned and maintained open spaces and recreational facilities can help improve people's sense of well being and serve as a focal point for community activities and social interaction.
- health and well being - open spaces, sport and recreational facilities have a vital role to play in promoting healthy living and preventing illness, and in the social development of children of all ages through play, sporting activities and interaction with others.
- promoting more sustainable development - by ensuring that open space, sports and recreational facilities (particularly in urban areas) are easily accessible by walking and cycling and that more heavily used or intensive sports and recreational facilities are planned for locations well served by public transport.

**PPG17** states that, to ensure effective planning for open space, sport and recreation it is essential that the needs of local communities are known. As such, the Guidance encourages local authorities to develop open space strategies, and undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities. Assessments will normally be undertaken at district level, although assessments of strategic facilities should be undertaken at regional or sub-regional levels.

**Customer response**, through Youth consultation, four stakeholder meetings (held between September and December 2005), the Greenspace Conferences (2003 and 2004), Consultation responses to the Greenspace Services Statement of Intent (2003), Citizen Jury questionnaire (2006) and input through the Strategy steering group (2005)

**Open Space Audits** – Medway Council staff and consultants undertook quality, quantity and accessibility audits of parks, allotments, countryside areas and play facilities. The results informed the programmes of action.

**Stakeholders:** Medway Countryside Forum, CABI Space, CABI Space enablers, Local Strategic Partnership, Medway Access Forum, Open Space and Commons Association, Medway Allotments Federation Medway Sports Council, Kent Wildlife Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Gravesham Borough Council and Kent County Council.

The development of the strategy was also guided through CABI Space's (government advisors on open space) **Enabler scheme**, which supported three consultants (Chris Blandford Associates, Robert Holden, and Andy McNab of Scott Wilson) to work alongside officers.

### 1.3 ABOUT THE STRATEGY

This strategy is structured as follows:

**Section 1: Introduction** provides the vision for countryside and open space in Medway. This vision is supported by high-level key objectives related to specific themes (delivery, quality, management and monitoring, prioritising investment, ensuring protection, celebration and engagement and regeneration).

The next part of section 1 sets out the importance of **combining the needs and interests of countryside and open space** in one document. It makes clear the inter-relationship between the countryside and open space, as well as confirming their differences and strengths.

**Section 2 Developing a Strategy – Research and Consultation** describes the background research and consultation that underpins the study (the evidence base).

**Section 3: Medway's Countryside** sets out the nature of Medway's countryside, its wildlife, landscapes and recreational facilities.

**Section 4: Medway's Open Space Network** focuses on open spaces including urban parks, amenity spaces, sports pitches, play areas, allotments and churchyards.

**Section 5: Medway's Rural-Urban Fringe** focuses on the area between the towns and the countryside and on the green grid proposal.

**Section 6: Implementation Plan** summarises the key proposals.

## **1.4 COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN SPACE VISION**

The vision below is the product of consultation on the Greenspaces Statement of Intent (2003) and the strategy workshops held during 2005. Both of the above consultations confirmed users and partners desire to recognise Medway's valuable countryside and wildlife resource alongside the need for protection and enhancement of all open space to meet current and future needs.

***By 2016, Medway will be characterised by and celebrated for its attractive, distinctive estuarine, downland and woodland and farmed countryside, its rich diversity of wildlife and its high quality open space network. These will be protected to meet the needs of local communities, to improve levels of customer satisfaction and usage and will enhance our shared environment for present and future generations to enjoy and use.***

The vision will be achieved by focusing strategy delivery through the 6 key strategy outcomes listed below.

## 1.5 STRATEGY OUTCOMES 2006 - 16

### **Outcome 1: More high quality facilities**

Medway Council, its partners and stakeholders will ensure that all residents and visitors will have access to a range of parks, play areas, allotments and sports sites that are more welcoming, safer, cleaner and greener.

### **Outcome 2: Improved monitoring and management**

Medway Council, its partners and stakeholders will ensure that all residents and visitors experience better monitoring and management of greenspace sites.

### **Outcome 3: Prioritised investments**

Medway Council and its partners and stakeholders will work together to increase investment and income generation. They will then prioritise work in order to achieve best value for money.

### **Outcome 4: Improved protection/conservation**

Medway Council, its partners and stakeholders will work together to realise their duty to protect, manage and enhance the countryside and open space resource.

### **Outcome 5: More open spaces contributing directly to regeneration**

Medway Council and its partners and stakeholders will ensure that Medway's countryside and open spaces contribute to on-going regeneration.

### **Outcome 6: Greater celebration and engagement**

Medway Council, its partners and stakeholders will ensure that residents and visitors have opportunities to enjoy and appreciate Medway's countryside and open space resource and also to engage in discussion about future management.

## 1.6 THE BENEFITS OF COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN SPACES

The benefits of good urban green spaces are diverse and wide ranging. National and local research indicates that people believe that a high quality countryside and open space network contribute towards a higher quality of life and economic development. For example, research by CABI has shown that house buyers are willing to pay more for a house close to high quality public space (CABI 2005<sup>2</sup>). Since the improvements to Bryant Park (location to be provided) commercial rental values have increased by up to 220%. Furthermore, the success of initiatives such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers' Green Gyms, (a scheme which offers the opportunity to 'work out' in the open air through local, practical environmental or gardening work) has shown that nature is good for us. The most frequently expressed reason for visiting the countryside or an open space in Medway is for physical exercise. This section considers Government policies relevant to the countryside and open spaces and summarises the benefits to be derived from a strategic approach to planning and management.

The government's **Greening the Gateway Strategy (Defra/ODPM, 2004)** and supporting Implementation Plan stresses the important role of open space and wildlife in supporting the creation and maintenance of sustainable communities. A major theme of Greening the Gateway is the concept of functional green infrastructure offering a range of benefits.

In summary, we have defined seven key benefits from a high quality, attractive, ecologically diverse and accessible greenspace network in Medway.

### **Benefit 1: Countryside and Open Space improving image and perceptions.**

The development and promotion of a well managed countryside and open space network will reinforce the message that Medway is an attractive and fun place to live, work, learn and play. This outcome will help to create and sustain a positive image of Medway as a city with safe, clean and green open spaces that are accessible to all, and will support tourism and economic development targets. Key strategy outcome 6 promotes the need to encourage greater celebration of our high quality countryside, landscapes and open space network – a key factor in tackling negative perceptions of Medway's environment. There are links to Putting Medway on the Map initiative, Medway Community Plan and Local Area Agreements and Medway Regeneration Framework.

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<sup>2</sup> This report looked at whether improvements to parks and green spaces increased the economic activity in the area. It found that being directly adjacent to such parks added a 5 to 7 per cent premium to house prices, and that most properties within two blocks were priced more highly than equivalent properties that were in the same market area but further away.

Medway Example: *Medway Council purchased Ranscombe Farm, Cuxton, in 2004 with support from the ODPM and the Tubney Trust. This purchase secured the ownership of this important open space on the urban fringe of Medway and Gravesham for future generations to enjoy. More importantly, the purchase, associated publicity and the on-going events also helped raise public awareness of Medway's attractive landscapes and rich wildlife resource.*

## **Benefit 2: Countryside and Open Space improving our environment and ecology.**

The environmental benefits of green spaces are well documented and range from the obvious support of biodiversity (wildlife), to less obvious factors such as reductions in flood risk (Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes), countering air pollution, and reduction of the urban micro-climatic effects of heat, wind, insolation and humidity. Well-managed green space can also provide opportunities for people to be closer to nature and to enjoy attractive landscapes and important habitats. **Key strategy outcome 4 promotes the protection of Medway's unique biodiversity resource that must be maintained and enhanced.**

**Medway example: Since 2004. Greenspace Services have been investing in two large areas of previously poorly managed chalk grass – the Daisy and the Conev Banks. Both sites are surrounded by dense urban areas and experience a range of inappropriate uses. Works to improve the environment have included removal of scrub, cutting back of grassland and the erection of secure fences. The fences will support future cattle grazing and have already led to a decrease in motorcycling activity. The work will continue for another 7 years.**

## **Benefit 3: Countryside and Open Space improving our health.**

**There is growing concern about the health of the nation and particularly the health of young people. Obesity is now a major public health concern: over 20% of men and 25% women could be obese by 2005 (Green Spaces, Better Places – Final Report, 2002). Medway's countryside and open space network are powerful tools in the fight against obesity and ill-health. The realisation of initiatives such as Green Grid, and planned investments in sport facilities and improvements to allotments, will ensure that Medway's countryside and open spaces continue to play an increasingly prominent and important role in improving the health of residents and visitors. There are links to the Primary Care Trust's '4 Life' programme, the Medway Obesity Action Plan and the Sports Development Plan, 2005**

**Medway Example: Greenspace Services has worked with local communities to provide six new ball courts to encourage greater youth involvement in active recreation. The Service also undertook enhancements at the Hillyfields Open Space including the creation of a new path complete with 100 metre markings to encourage people to run between points. (insert photo). The Race for**

*Life held at Capstone Farm Country Park encouraged 2250 to participate in 5km run – many for the first time. A future project targeted to improving health is the Extreme Sports in Medway event, which is likely to be attended by a minimum of 3000 people.*

#### **Benefit 4: Countryside and Open Space supporting sustainable transport.**

Some areas of open space and countryside provide opportunities for us to move around by foot or cycle. Investing in walking and cycling routes that connect open space sites and provide positive and safe links to schools, shops and the surrounding countryside will help realise open space's contribution to the promotion of sustainable transport. The inclusion of Green Grid principles in future site enhancements, development briefs and master plans will enable the countryside and open spaces to contribute fully to the promotion of sustainable transport opportunities. There are links to the Green Grid Action Plan, the Local Transport Plan, 2005 and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007

*Medway Example: In 2005, Medway Council and the Friends of Berengrave secured funding to improve access to a previously closed site – including the provision of a 600m cycle-route. This path will link to the proposed Green Grid initiative and as such will provide a critical north south connection.*

#### **Benefit 5: Countryside and Open Space contributing to economic development.**

As towns and cities increasingly compete with one another to attract inward investment, the presence of attractive countryside and landscapes, good parks, squares, gardens and other public spaces become a vital business and marketing tool. Schemes such as the Great Lines City Park, Gillingham Park Heritage Project, the World Heritage Site and green tourism initiatives will help to create destinations that support tourism growth. A good quality public landscape also offers clear benefits to the local economy in terms of stimulating increased property prices, encouraging employment and inward investment and attracting visitors. The development of high quality open spaces and attractive landscapes across Medway promotes greater confidence in the area and provides a positive background and sense of place that is capable of assisting in measures to increase inward investment. There are links to Putting Medway on the Map working group, Medway Economic Development Strategy and the Regeneration Framework (Medway Renaissance Strategy) and the Medway's Public Realm Strategy.

*Medway Example: In 2006, Greenspace Services led on the Great Lines City Park development proposal which engages the business community in planning future investments in this key green space. Ideas include tourism initiatives and connections to housing developments.*

## **Benefit 6: Countryside and Open Spaces supporting social regeneration and inclusion.**

Engaging people in their countryside and open spaces can foster social inclusion, community development, citizenship and local pride. Medway's countryside and open spaces are open to all, regardless of ethnic origin, age or gender and can act as a positive meeting space for all. Inclusive community engagement in the decision making and management of open spaces, plus involvement in training schemes such as Cozenton Nursery and as proposed at the Great Lines City Park, all indirectly contribute to social well-being, cultural identity and community regeneration. **Medway Council values the positive and sustained community engagement opportunities associated with the process of enhancing and managing our countryside and open space resource.**

*Medway Example: Cozenton Nursery, the council's nursery hosts a horticultural training scheme in basic skills for excluded and hard to reach groups, co-financed by the European Union and Job Centre plus. £300,000 has been generated to support the project. 150 people will derive benefit from the project, and 52 have obtained jobs as a result of the project. A further 20 have progressed on to higher and further education. A partnership arrangement with Hadlow College is being arranged to develop the nursery into a North Kent satellite centre for horticultural and land based training.*

## **Benefit 7: Countryside and Open Spaces supporting education activity.**

When considered as an outdoor university or classroom, Medway's countryside and open space network provide opportunities for outdoor learning and involvement in environment, ecology, landscape and social history. They can also provide space for outdoor team work, sports and cultural activities. **Medway Council values the role that the countryside and open space resource can play in providing opportunities for life long education, awareness of natural and cultural history, volunteering and sport.**

**Medway Example: Medway's Country Parks support the delivery of over 3500 pupil visits per annum and new initiatives such as Forest Schools will see this figure increase year on year. Also, Greenspace's sites are used to host events such as the 'Your Town Your Future' events which attracts an additional 1600 children. Great South Allotments, Chatham, and Street End Allotments, Luton have plots used by schools to grow local foods.**

## **SECTION 2. DEVELOPING A STRATEGY: RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION**

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Section 2 provides a summary of the research and consultation that underpins the Strategy.

### **2.1 GREENSPACE SERVICES STATEMENT OF INTENT (2003)**

In 2003, copies of the Greenspace Services Statement of Intent were distributed to stakeholders, partners and local communities. The council received over 120 responses, which demonstrated that people in Medway believe that clean, safe, and attractive green spaces are important. It confirmed that people do want to become involved in decision-making and be kept informed on how the countryside and open space resource is being managed.

The feedback showed that 85% of respondents believe that clean, safe and attractive parks, countryside and green spaces are important to a good quality of life. Furthermore, 81% of respondents stated that they would be willing to work in community forums to help achieve attractive parks, countryside and green spaces.

### **2.2 GREENSPACE CONFERENCES 2003 AND 2004**

Greenspace Services organised two conferences to aid communication and engagement in countryside and open space management. Both conferences consisted of a morning session with presentations from local forums and Greenspace officers on open space issues. Afternoon sessions consisted of workshops in which all attendees had an opportunity to address a specific open space or countryside issue – forums or key users groups led the workshops.

Consistent messages from the two conferences included:

- The need to improve the provision and management of facilities for youth.
- The need to ensure that the countryside and open space resource are protected from loss to housing.
- The need to encourage new users into allotments and parks.

- The need for an over-arching strategy promoting the protection and management of Medway's countryside and open space resource.
- The need to tackle impact of vandalism and anti-social behaviour on open spaces across Medway.

### **2.3 PLAYING PITCH STUDY, 2003**

The Playing Pitch study, undertaken by an independent expert, assessed the quality and accessibility of outdoor pitches and formal sport provision across Medway. It concluded that:

- Outdoor sport provision makes up 330 ha of the open space network (about 20%) and, by 2016, there is likely to be a 112 hectare shortfall in provision.
- The quality of outdoor sports provision was poor to very poor – no pitches were considered to be 'excellent' quality and numerous pavilions were rated as being very poor.
- The majority of residents live within the recommended 1.2km from an outdoor sports facility. (See Sports Action Plan for more detail)

### **2.4 PLAY AREA USER SURVEY AND INDEPENDENT CHILDREN'S PLAY AND YOUTH AUDIT, 2005**

An extensive survey was undertaken to capture the experience of play area users. This concluded that the location, accessibility and safety of play areas were considered to be the most important qualities for open spaces. Overall the Play Areas User Survey suggested that users feel the variety, quality, condition and cleanliness of play areas and equipment is poor. The only aspect the users felt was generally adequate was the layout of play spaces. The majority of parents would not let their children play out on their own and the majority of respondents felt that their local play area does not cater well for supervising adults. Two thirds of the respondents have no problem getting to their local play area due to problems such as busy roads. All but a couple of respondents felt that there is not enough provision for young people in their local play area.

### **2.5 MORI POLL 2004 / CITIZENS PANEL 2006**

The 2004 Mori poll on Medway Council services revealed that 72% of residents were satisfied with the quality and cleanliness of the open space provision in Medway. This figure is monitored every three years as one Medway's Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). One of the key aims of this strategy is to ensure that this satisfaction rating improves.

To complement and update the BVPI satisfaction rating, Greenspace Services commissioned a more detailed survey through the **Citizens Panel (March 2006)**, which focussed on country parks, countryside sites and play areas. A postal survey was sent to all members of the Panel. Of the 1,485 questionnaires, 801 were completed and returned – a response rate of 54%. The questionnaire was divided into four sections; country parks; parks and play areas; countryside sites and priorities for investment.

One of the conclusions from the Citizens' Panel 06 was that visitors enjoyed the country parks, due to the high quality management and permanent ranger service, but thought that the countryside sites and urban parks, which have fewer dedicated visitor facilities, variable management and less evident staff, were less enjoyable. In particular:

- The country parks received the highest approval ratings both overall and in terms of the individual facilities and services covered by the questionnaire. The overall approval rating for country parks was very high, with 80% rating them as good/very good.
- Users are less satisfied with the quality of parks and play areas due to poor maintenance, lack of facilities and a general perception of vandalism and anti-social behaviour.
- 66% of countryside sites were rated as good/very good.
- Just over half of Medway residents visited a countryside site in the last 12 months and 41% of visitors went to a site less than once a month.
- Residents living in Strood, Gillingham and Chatham were more likely to be frequent visitors (fortnightly or more often).
- Of those never going to a countryside site, 17% said they had too little time and 17% said that they had too little information. This illustrates the need 1) to 'sell' the value of these sites to encourage more visits and 2) to improve communication and signing of these sites. The production of leaflets and the development of green grid will both help to increase the usage.

## 2.6 COUNTRY PARK AUDITS, 2005

The Country Parks User Survey 2005 (Riverside and Capstone Farm) found that users generally visit Country Parks once every two to three months, although each has a core sets of users who visit once a week. Almost three-quarters of users travelled further than two miles to visit the sites and more than 8 out of 10 travelled to the sites by car. Visitors most commonly use the spaces for

walking, exercise, dog walking and picnics. There is also a significant set of users whose primary purpose for visiting is to observe wildlife. The cafés were also an important draw for users, with 16% coming specifically to use the facility. The age of users is encouragingly broad, although common age groups are between 16-24 and over 65 years old.

## 2.7 PARK AUDITS

**Quality Audit** This has been designed to evaluate the quality of designated parks and amenities and is intended principally to provide qualitative data. It provides the basis for assessing a range of assets of a park covering its design and physical structure, management and maintenance, and its value to people. The methodology was derived from the Greater London Authority's recommendations, using PPG 17 typology. The assessor was professionally trained officer with a background in landscape design and parks management.

## 2.8 SUMMARY TABLE OF RESPONSE TO AUDITS AND SURVEYS

The table below illustrates the linkages between the findings from the above consultations and the formation of the proposed strategy outcomes:

### RESPONSE

**Key outcome 1 (Provide more high quality facilities)** responds to the need to deliver high quality facilities and to maintain or improve customer satisfaction rates. This is particularly true for outdoor sports provision, allotments and play areas.

**Key outcome 2 (Improved monitoring and management)** responds to the need to improve management structures and procedures in order to maintain or improve satisfaction rates. Examples include the need to improve management of play areas to reduce the impact of vandalism, and the need to improve sports pitch quality.

**Key outcome 3 (Prioritised investments)** responds to the need to determine how Greenspace Services and its partners will invest in Medway's countryside and open spaces to improve management and user experience across all interests.

**Key outcome 4 (Improved protection/conservation)** responds to the desire to maintain a critical mass of countryside and open space across Medway in order to meet biodiversity, landscape and recreational needs.

**Key outcome 5 (More open spaces contributing directly to regeneration)** responds to the need to establish strong and positive links to the regeneration agenda in order to deliver sustainable communities and to ensure that existing and new communities benefit from access to positive countryside and open space.

**Key outcome 6 (Greater celebration and engagement)** responds to the desire of local people to have an involvement in managing and promoting the use of countryside and open spaces across Medway.

## SECTION 3: MEDWAY'S COUNTRYSIDE

### 3.1 POLICY STATEMENT

**Medway Council, as statutory planning and highway authority will ensure that local people, officers and members are aware and mindful of the value of wildlife and countryside in rural, urban and fringe areas. This strategy recognises and celebrates the positive contribution that wildlife, landscape and access interests offer to sustainable regeneration programmes and quality of life initiatives. Medway Council will ensure that appropriate processes and resources are secured and sustained in order to meet legal responsibilities and will ensure that designated landscapes and protected sites are appropriately managed and sustained.**

The threat associated with the Cliffe Airport proposal helped to raise awareness of and interest in the North Kent Marshes. Medway Council and their stakeholders realise that residents and visitors must have better opportunities to visit and enjoy the countryside if people are going to help protect and enhance it for future generations. This strategy will inform other key local authority documents, such as the Rural Action Plan and the Local Development Framework and Rights of Way Improvement Plan to ensure a consistent approach to countryside protection and joined up delivery. It will also support responses to Thames Gateway Initiatives such as the Thames Gateway Parklands as promoted in the Thames Gateway Interim Draft (2006), the Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway Initiative (GGKM) and the proposed Green Grid in Medway.

#### Thames Estuary Parklands

Countryside and open space development in Medway will be delivered through specific site investment, the development of green grid and the investigation and realisation of Landscape and Access Management Schemes. Local open space management will take onboard the ideas and thoughts promoted in the Greening the Gateway Strategy (2003) and the Interim Strategy Plan (2006) – specifically the Thames Gateway Parklands.

The Thames Gateway Parklands concept will provide high-level promotion of the need to create and sustain multi-functional open space and countryside. The Parklands covers all of the Thames Gateway and will help to create high quality open spaces that meet the needs of existing and new communities, as well as creating a positive environmental identity for the Gateway and realising sustainable regeneration by providing naturally functioning carbon sinks, flood relief management and water resource management. It is important that the Thames Gateway Parklands is both informed by local needs and aspirations and helps Medway Council and its partners deliver the goals contained in this Countryside and Open Space Strategy. This defines Medway's local response to the Thames Gateway Parkland initiative. Alongside similar strategies in Swale, Gravesham and Dartford, it will influence the development of greenspace priorities for north Kent and help set common standards for accessibility, quality and quantity.

### **Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway (GGKM)**

The launch of the Government's Greening the Gateway Strategy<sup>3</sup> for the Thames Gateway, heralds a new wave of enthusiasm and direction for greenspace planning in North Kent. The Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway Initiative is a strategically informed and coordinated initiative that is supported by a range of partners to secure a positive future for North Kent's estuaries, downs and towns. The GGKM will be central to the goal of achieving sustainable communities within a high quality environment for the north Kent Thames Gateway. This Strategy is consistent with the goals of the Greening the Gateway and of the Kent and Medway Initiative.

### **The Medway Green Grid**

The concept of the green grid presents wide ranging and long lasting benefits. A green grid will work to promote access, landscape and wildlife connections along key strategic corridors. We know that Medway's open spaces are capable of providing access for people taking local walks or enjoying a Sunday afternoon stroll. When viewed collectively these areas can be regarded as a network, or grid, of open spaces, habitats and landscapes.

This approach will 'open up' opportunities for the establishment of greener and safer routes for the community including the creation of new cycle routes starting in Medway's urban heart and leading to the North Kent marshes and Kent Downs. The green grid is covered in more detail in Section 5.

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<sup>3</sup> Creating sustainable communities: Greening the Gateway, A greenspace strategy for the Thames Gateway, Defra / ODPM 2004

## 3.2 OVERVIEW OF COUNTRYSIDE IN MEDWAY

Medway's countryside and landscapes are as impressive as they are diverse. This section promotes Medway's countryside as a positive asset to rural and urban communities and sets out what we need to do to ensure that this finite resource makes an even greater contribution to wildlife, image, farming, access and regeneration, quality of life, water resource and air quality management. However, it can not add a tier of planning policy to assist the protection of the international and national sites. The Council will work closely with government agencies and non-governmental organisations, to ensure that the protection of important assets is consistent with national and international environmental policy framework

Over 50% of the Medway land area is rural in nature – this figure rises to 80% when including the Thames and Medway rivers and estuary.

Furthermore:

- Some 60% of non-developed land area is covered by International, National or Local environmental designations.
- Our marshes and estuary are of global importance and support internationally significant numbers of over wintering wetland birds, which feed on Medway's mudflats and saltings. The North Kent Marshes support nationally significant populations of water voles, a species which has seen a 95% decrease in geographic area over the last 30 years.
- The landscapes of the Kent Downs are recognised as being of National Importance, akin to a National Park!<sup>4</sup>
- The countryside of Medway supports numerous rare and protected species – including orchids on the chalk grassland and the corncockle at Ranscombe Farm.
- Medway land area includes 42% of Kent's mudflats, 33% of Kent's saltmarsh, and 36% of Kent's grazing marsh. These figures illustrate the need to ensure conservation in Medway to help achieve county and national targets.
- Our ancient woodlands support important populations of nightingale and plants such as orchids, bluebells and hellebores.

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<sup>4</sup> Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, A Management Plan for 2004 – 09, April , 2004

### 3.3 WILDLIFE AND NATURE CONSERVATION

This section considers Medway's ecological resources in terms of protected areas, habitats and species and by reference to the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan. It seeks to raise awareness of the wildlife and nature conservation resource in Medway but is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to wildlife interest of the area.

#### Internationally Important Nature Conservation Sites - SPAs

There are 79 internationally important ecological sites (Special Protection Areas – SPAs) in England covering 5.5% of the country. In Medway no less than 28% of the total area is designated as SPA, mainly the mudflat, freshwater grazing marsh and the saltmarsh. These valuable habitats are given the strongest and most robust protection available under the Conservation (Natural Habitat and Wild Species) Regulation 1994 and the Ramsar Convention (1971). This strategy recognises the protection offered to these habitats by the Medway Local Plan and emerging Local Development Core Strategy.

The goal of SPAs is to preserve and protect biodiversity of European importance. Sites are designated due to the presence of internationally important habitats and species. The objective of SPA designation is to ensure not only protection but that there is no net loss of habitat or decrease in biodiversity. This state is termed 'favourable condition'. Habitat Regulations 48 – 53 require Medway Council, as a competent authority, to make an assessment of plans or projects that may impact upon the SPAs. This could include development upstream of the estuary, encroachment on to mudflats, water extraction / discharges and marina development.

SPA Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Support measures and partnerships that promote positive management of areas of international importance.	2007 - 16	Outcome4: Improved Management / Conservation

#### Nationally Important Sites Nature Conservation Sites - SSSIs

The nationally important conservation sites are termed Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). There are nine SSSIs in Medway, which cover 7660 ha, or 32.5% of the land area. By comparison, the average percentage land cover for SSSI in England is 7%. Natural England, formerly English Nature, has a national target to ensure that 95% of SSSIs are in a favourable or improving condition. (A site is considered to be in favourable condition if it is able to support the wildlife interests for which it is designated).

In 2002, English Nature completed a survey of SSSIs to determine their health. Of the nine SSSIs in Medway, 33% (2590 ha) were considered as in favourable condition, and 66% (5070 ha) in unfavourable condition. The majority of woodlands in Medway, which account for 33% of SSSIs, are in favorable condition. The 66% of SSSIs that are in unfavorable condition are estuarine habitats. The situation was revisited by Natural England in January 2006 74% of SSSIs were in favorable condition, 7% in declining condition, 7% in unfavorable conditional and 10% in recovering conditional. The condition of SSSIs will continued to be monitored as a core Medway LDF sustainability indicator.

Medway Council owns SSSIs at Ranscombe Farm (extensive woodland) and land adjacent to Riverside Country Park (estuarine habitat). The Council is also in discussion with Southern Water to improve the management and condition of the Motney Hill reed beds SSSI. The Council is working with partners to ensure that these sites continue moving towards favorable condition.

The Medway Local Plan and draft Local Development Framework affords protection to SSSIs from development.

SSSI Headline Action (1)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Promote positive management of Medway owned SSSIs to ensure that they continue moving towards favourable condition.	2007 - 2010	Outcome 4: Improved protection/conservation
SSSI Headline Action (2)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Ensure protection of SSSIs to ensure they continue to contribute to sustainable development goals.	On-going	Outcome 4: Improved protection / conservation

### Locally Important Sites of Nature Conservation Sites - SNCIs

The locally important nature conservation sites are termed Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs). There are **17 SNCIs** in Medway covering a total of **399ha**. Many of Medway’s SNCIs are located close to residential areas and are therefore more accessible to people than sites such as the internationally important marshes. SNCIs are identified to protect nationally and locally threatened habitats and species as identified in the UK and Kent Biodiversity Action Plan. The nature conservation interest of these sites is not legally protected, although individual key species and possibly their habitats will be protected under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). These sites receive local protection through policy CS24 of the Medway Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

Medway Council values the landscape and biodiversity contribution of the SNCI network and will work in partnership with the countywide Biodiversity Action Partnership as led by Kent County Council to seek the long-term protection, management and designation of SNCIs.

SNCI Headline Action (1)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Work with Kent Wildlife Trust to increase landowner awareness and positive management of SNCIs.	2007 – 2009 and then on-going	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation

## Biodiversity – The Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

### Policy Statement

Medway Council recognise the importance of protecting, managing and enhancing wildlife habitats and species across Medway and will work with the planning system, Green Grid and Landscape and Access Management Schemes to prioritise the management and protection of BAP habitats to raise awareness of the value and importance of this resource to achieve and sustain economic, social and environmental growth.

The UK Government is committed to a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. This commitment is recognised in the England Biodiversity Strategy, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and in Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

The Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) establishes priorities for enhancing and maintaining Kent and Medway’s wildlife. Its objectives and outcomes are influenced by national and county priorities which are relevant to Medway. In 2003, a three-year partnership project led by Kent County Council completed an audit of all UK BAP targets and produced a set of 28 Habitat Action Plans. Each Plan denotes the importance of conserving, enhancing and restoring the natural condition of a habitat by working together on projects.

The Countryside and Open Space Strategy is consistent with the Kent BAP and does not seek to replace it. BAP targets will inform:

- 1) the Landscape and Access Management Schemes,
- 2) the development and focus of Green Grid in Medway
- 3) the management of our countryside sites.

Figure X (maps to be added) shows the location of Medway’s most important habitats as identified by the Kent BAP. It demonstrates that Medway makes a significant contribution towards the conservation of species associated with estuarine habitats, ancient woodlands and chalk grassland.

BAP Headline Action	Timescales	Key Outcome
To assist in the delivery of Kent Biodiversity Action Plan objectives for key habitats through raising awareness of Kent BAP objectives, positive planning and the prioritising of investment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medway BAP Booklet – 2007</li> <li>• Valley of Vision AONB Bid – 2007 - 09</li> <li>• North Kent Marshes HLF bid – 2008 - 10</li> </ul>	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement

### Key Habitats in Medway

#### *Brownfield sites (previously developed land)*

The Core Strategy states that 80% of planned development will occur on previously developed land. Such “brownfield” sites can often support rare plants, invertebrates and reptiles. . Key brownfield sites include Temple Marsh, Grain, Upper and Lower Lines, Rochester Riverside and Gillingham Waterfront. As promoted in the Medway Community Plan, More to Medway, Medway Council is committed to completing ecological surveys of brownfield sites to ensure that the planning process operates in full knowledge of ecological interests.

Brownfield Headline Action	Timescales	Key Outcome
Based on accurate ecological survey information, ensure that where feasible the nature conservation interests of brownfield sites are maintained during	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey all brownfield sites – on - going</li> <li>• Incorporate brownfield interests in to Green Grid / LAMS - 2007</li> </ul>	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation

and after development, and are complemented by the delivery of the Green Grid and Landscape and Access Management Schemes (LAMS).		
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### Woodlands

Pre 1960s, woodland cover in Medway stood at 30%. By 2006, this figure has fallen to 4%, significantly less than the UK average of 14%. However, in Medway, 98% of residents live within 1km of woodland, and 56% live within 5km of a 50ha woodland site. The important contribution of woodland to landscape value in Medway is illustrated in that 37% of woodlands occur in Areas of Local Landscape Importance and 38% within the Kent Downs AONB. The urban expansion into previously wooded landscape has created a situation where residents are living in close proximity to small, isolated but ecologically valuable woodlands. This increases the likelihood of management conflict caused by processes such as coppicing. Better management of woodlands is important if their ecological, landscape and cultural associations are to be retained. The positive management and protection of existing woodland is given a higher priority than the creation of new woodlands,

Future partnership actions will include promoting coppicing, accepting no loss of ancient woodland (over 400 years old), enhancing secondary woodland through the removal of sycamore and the planting of native species, decreasing the impact of fragmentation by targeting new planting to join existing valuable woodlands, ensuring nationally important woodlands are returned to favourable condition and identifying management objectives (conservation, landscape, economic and, or recreational) for all woodlands in Medway.

Positive management of woodland and scrub is beneficial for specific plants and birds. Of key importance in Medway is the nightingale population with summer migrants being heard during April and May amongst hawthorn and willow thickets along the River Medway. The Medway Valley (between M2 and M20), Hogmarsh Valley (Wainscott / Hoo) and Temple Marsh in Strood are all important areas for nightingales. The current master plan for Temple Marsh has taken on board the need to preserve and enhance the nightingale population. Current thoughts centre on retaining young scrub as well as dense cover alongside ensuring minimal disturbance.

Woodland Headline Action (1)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Establish and maintain a Woodland Strategic partnership to take forward joint	Establish 2007 First Annual Review 2008	Outcome 3: Prioritised Investment

woodland initiatives.		
<b>Woodland Headline Action (2)</b>	<b>Timescale(s)</b>	<b>Key Outcome</b>
Promote the conservation of nightingale populations at sites such as Medway Valley, Temple Marsh and the Hogmarsh Valley.	Map interests 2007 Positive management 2008 onwards	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation

### *Lowland calcareous (chalk) grassland*

These are flower-rich grasslands that grow on the chalk of the North Downs. Fifty percent of the global resource of lowland calcareous grassland occurs in the UK, and Kent supports 5% of the national resource. Of this 5%, just over 10% occurs in Medway - a total of 60ha. There are opportunities to create more. The Kent Lifescapes Information System has identified that an additional 304ha of species rich grassland can be created in Medway – this would increase our resource by 500%. The current Kent BAP target for chalk grassland is to create 249ha by 2010.

The chalk soils are low in nutrients, free draining and often occur on south facing slopes; hot dry places that are capable of supporting high species diversity. These grassland sites require management in the form of grazing or mowing. Medway's premier lowland calcareous site is at Darland Banks and sites such as the Great Lines, Daisy and Coney Banks and the Horsted Valley are now being managed to promote greater enjoyment of these sites for wildlife and people. The urban location of our existing calcareous grasslands results in high levels of incidents of damage to fencing and to livestock. An inability to overcome these problems places a major threat to the Council's ability to support the Kent BAP and meet Countryside and Rights of Way Act duties. These chalk grasslands sites help define the structure of Green Grid in Medway and as such are set to be far more in the public eye.

Greenspace Services will continue to support the Kent Wildlife Trust in managing the lowland calcareous sites across Medway, seek investment opportunities to support the improved management of existing sites, work to the Local Plan and LDF to seek protection of these sites from development and seek opportunities to create new chalk grassland in areas such as Capstone Valley, Cuxton and Halling.

### *Species of importance*

- Red star thistle – small population thrives amongst the longer uncut grasses on the plateau and slopes of the Great Lines and at Darland Banks.
- Man Orchid – a Kent and Medway speciality found in chalk grassland such as Darland Banks and Princes Park (here it actually occurs along the road verges!).
- Corncockle – a very rare UK plant now only found in one field at Ranscombe Farm, Cuxton. This is the last remaining native site for corncockle in the UK.

- Broad-leaved Cudweed – a nationally rare plant that is on the UK BAP species list and found growing at Ranscombe Farm, Cuxton.
- Skylark – a county priority species that is found breeding amongst the rougher grassland sites across Medway such as Great Lines City Park.

Calcareous Grassland Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
To work in partnership to establish a chalk grassland management plan and support the introduction of a grazing scheme to promote optimum management of the existing grassland sites.	Review funding opportunities 2007 Submit bid(s) by Q4 07/08	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Celebration

### The Greater Thames and Medway Estuaries

The mudflats, saltmarsh and tidal water of the Medway estuary are of worldwide significance due to the high number of feeding, roosting and breeding birds they support. Thirty per cent (74,000) of Medway residents live within 1km of the estuary and each winter over 70,000 wetland birds flock to the same estuary for food and shelter making it the tenth most important in the UK. Key species are shelduck, pintail, marsh harrier, little tern, and avocet. Water voles are still found amongst the ditches of the grazing marsh, but have nationally experienced a 95% decrease in distribution in the last 20 years. The estuarine habitats are affected by sea level rise (1cm per year), by proposals for managed realignment as part of a long term strategic review of flood risk and by disturbance.

Medway Council will promote Riverside Country Park, Gillingham and the Cliffe RSPB Reserve as gateways to the Medway Estuary – providing physical and intellectual access for all to this fantastic and important resource.

### Notable Species

- Avocet – once extinct in the UK, the avocet, has since 1948 started to become a more frequent sighting around coast and estuary. Avocets breed close to saline lagoons within the grazing marshes of North Kent. In Medway avocets breed at Cliffe National Nature Reserve. At other times of the year avocet feed over the extensive mudflats of the Medway Estuary.
- Water Vole – a priority county and national biodiversity action plan species, which has a stronghold on the North Kent Marshes. Nationally, Water vole populations have experienced a 95% decline in distribution over the last 20 years making the Medway population of great importance.

Estuaries Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Support Estuary Partnerships in submitting an Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Area Partnership bid to deliver positive management and greater awareness of Medway and Thames estuarine resources.	First draft of bid Q1 07 / 08 Submit bid Q4 07 / 08	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement

### The River Medway

Historically, the River Medway acted as a transport route and has over time developed a suite of unique military and industrial cultural assets. Twenty-six kilometres of the river are accessible by public right of way and eleven per cent of Medway residents live within 500m of the River Medway. The Environment Agency state that water quality is good and improving – seals are now seen off Riverside Country Park and as far upstream as St. Mary's Island. Today's challenge is to positively join up proposals for transportation, environment protection and regeneration in way that supports the positive long term management of this complex and valuable resource. The positive management of the inter-related agendas of regeneration and green grid is a key opportunity. Medway Council will work closely with the Environment Agency and Medway Renaissance to promote positive access along the banks of the River Medway promoting accessibility for all, health and biodiversity. Key sites for activity are Temple Marsh, Grain Foreshore, Riverside Country Park, Rochester Riverside and Halling Waterfront.

River Medway Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
In association with Green Grid, coordinate positive action to deliver a functional, accessible and ecologically functioning riverside zone.	2007 and on going subject to opportunity to influence development briefs.	Outcome 5: More open space contributing to regeneration

## 3.4 LANDSCAPES

Medway's landscapes provide the visual backdrop to our everyday lives and their coherence and qualities influence the values that we place on an area. Medway has a range of landscapes associated with the estuary, downs and towns. Some are of national importance (the Kent Downs) while others merit protection and management for their local importance (the Areas of Local Landscape Importance). This section of the Countryside and Open Spaces Strategy raises awareness of the importance of these landscapes and raises the need for informed and positive management.

**Policy Statement:** Medway Council and its partners recognise the valuable contribution that designated landscapes make to economic, social and environmental well-being and will work to ensure the positive management and protection of such areas through the planning system and through countryside management such as the Landscape and Access Management Schemes.

### Nationally Important Landscapes – the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty covers 5% of Medway and is the fifth largest Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in England and Wales. The purpose of the AONB (the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949) is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

The steep slopes and dry river valleys of the Kent Downs are the main focus for the designation. These features are particularly valuable where they support chalk grassland and native deciduous woodlands. Other qualities of note are views from the escarpment, pastoral scenery, parklands, villages, churches and castles. The economic and social activity that contributes to the landscape and natural beauty is fundamental to shaping the future of the AONB. Policies, projects and programmes developed in Medway should respect landscape quality and promote social and economic activity that invests in and sustains the AONB landscape quality.

The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, April 2004, promotes policies and actions to ensure that the natural beauty and special character of the landscape is recognised, maintained and strengthened. The management plan ensures the protection and management of the AONB is akin to that of a National Park. Medway Council has a legal 'duty of regard' with respect to its activities and functions in the AONB.

The Council will continue to support the protection offered to the Kent Downs and will work closely with partners to secure additional investment in environmental, social and economic interests. It will support works to increase marketing of the Downs through green tourism initiatives and will promote positive images of the Downs in Medway.

AONB Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
To exercise the Council's 'Duty of Regard' for the interests and qualities of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.	2007 – onwards.	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation

### Regionally Important Landscapes: The North Kent Marshes Special Landscape Area

Located in north Medway, the North Kent Marshes Special Landscape Area occupies 19% of rural Medway. The landscape of the North Kent Marshes is of county importance and is recognised as a Special Landscape Area in the Local Plan and Kent and Medway Structure Plan.

The marshland landscape, with its broad and low horizons is of particular importance for wetland birds, which visit in tens of thousands during the winter. Key features of the landscape are their sense of remoteness, the ditches that form wet fences controlling the movement of people and cattle, and the winter flooding which creates wetlands for feeding birds and breeding.

The remoteness of the North Kent Marshes is a product of its separation from urban Medway. The rural hinterland, which acts as a buffer between the marshes and urban Medway provides this physical separation and therefore also requires careful management. The RSPB, Friends of North Kent Marshes and Medway Council are working together to increase awareness of and interest in this landscape by promoting greater awareness through the promotion of green tourism initiatives. All partners agree that care must be taken to ensure that the key qualities of this landscape are recognised and not compromised. **(Map to be added)**

North Kent Marshes Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
To support the proposed North Kent Marshes HLF Area bid to deliver greater awareness, understanding and informed management of the marshland landscape.	Submit planning grant 07 / 08	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement

## Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLIs)

There are 23 Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLIs) in Medway that are predominantly located in Medway's rural-urban fringe. Due to their location within or adjacent to the rural/urban fringe, many of the ALLI's are subject to a wide range of pressures, including speculative development, and various types of anti-social behaviour (motorbike scrambling, fly-tipping, and arson ).

Medway Council recognises the need to offer protection to ALLIs through policy in the Medway Local Plan 2003 and the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework. This Strategy complements this protection and through the targeted Landscape Access Management Schemes promotes positive management to maintain and enhance the key features of the ALLIs.

Medway's ALLIs are particularly well placed to contribute to countryside and open space management due to their proximity to urban centres and hence accessibility. However, ALLIs are subject to a greater pressure than other designated landscapes and need a new approach (Landscape and Access Management Schemes, 5.4, page 71) to ensure that these landscapes can continue to play a significant role in improving quality of life and liveability across Medway.

Area of Local Landscape Importance Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
To support the positive management of ALLIs through green grid and Landscape Access Management Schemes.	2007	Outcome 4: Improved Protection / Conservation

## THE RIVER AND ESTUARY SEASCAPE

The Medway Estuary and River are not covered by a specific landscape or seascape policy. However, the marshes and river are subject to biodiversity designations that offer protection to species and habitats and thereby to landscapes. The estuary comprises distinct zones: upper saltmarsh, intertidal mudflats and the main river. The width of each zone varies depending on location and local hydrological impacts.

The perception that the estuary is industrial, dirty, smelly and muddy means that the estuary landscape is harder to promote as a positive feature within Medway. It is an area easier to appreciate from the water and when the estuary is free of litter.

The developed coastline of Gillingham, Chatham and Strood dominates the urban estuarine landscape. Here, the river sustains the cultural context for key Medway landmarks such as Upnor Castle, St Mary's Island, the Dockyard and historic defences associated

with the Great Lines and Fort Amherst. The middle estuary has a less developed feel and provides extensive, wild views from north to south.

The emerging Riverside Path, proving new access to the river through urban regeneration sites such as Rochester Riverside, Gillingham Waterfront and Temple Marsh will start to challenge perceptions.

The use of consistently high quality built design standards for path surfacing in urban areas, the retention of all coastal habitat in urban areas and the removal of unsightly debris and litter will help to enhance the health of the estuary.

River and Seascape Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Support the work of Estuary Partnerships in promoting guidance for positive management of the River Medway and riparian land.	2007 onwards	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement

### 3.5 ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE STANDARDS (ANGST)

Natural England has developed the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) and Urban Greenspace standards as a set of benchmarks for ensuring access to places of wildlife interest. There are 78 areas of accessible natural greenspace in Medway – this figure includes Medway owned countryside sites and parks, as well as Trust owned, or privately owned sites. The privately owned sites include Rochester Forest in Cuxton and Halling, the RSPB Cliffe Reserve in Cliffe and the RSPB Northward Hill in High Halstow.

Natural England recommends that these standards be used as a guide and suggests that targets are set to reflect local character, opportunities and need. Medway does have a significant number of accessible large natural greenspaces and therefore does well with respect to meeting the standard ANGSt/Urban Greenspace Standards. However, Medway falls short in the provision of Local Nature Reserves and more importantly the 300m target.

Medway has a relatively compact and dense urban area to the south and an expansive open rural area to the north that makes it unrealistic to apply the most challenging standard of 300m. Therefore a revised standard of 600m has been set which still compares favourably with the 1km distance threshold applied in Greater London, much of which is characterised by a similar population density as much of urban Medway. Work undertaken in 2005 recorded that 58% of Medway’s population live within

600m of natural greenspace. Focus attention on urban Medway and the figure rises to 67%. This suggests that a target to achieving 100% of urban residents living within 600m of an accessible greenspace is possible.

Accessible natural greenspace is defined as land, water or geological features which have been naturally colonized by plants and animals and which are accessible on foot to large numbers of people. Access means certain rights of approach, entry or use that are legally defined or hallowed by custom. Accessibility is the extent to which these rights can be enjoyed. Accessibility is affected by: how far the place is from home; whether there are barriers in the way such as busy roads; and how far different groupings of adults or children are able to - or are allowed to - walk by themselves. It is also affected by social and cultural matters, including how safe people feel traveling to and using the place concerned.

### *Increasing provision of natural areas*

Greenspace Services recognises the need to provide new countryside within easy access of Medway residents. This will be achieved through the creation of new accessible greenspace sites within key developments such as at Temple Marsh, Strood Waterfront and Rochester Riverside. Greenspace Services will also explore opportunities to improve / establish new access to currently inaccessible sites. This will be encouraged through use of grants and permissive rights of way. Lastly, Greenspace Services will endeavour to create new areas of natural greenspace by 1) investigating possible change in management within larger parks, sports pitches (Borstal and Short Way) and cemeteries and 2) ensuring key regeneration sites create or sustain natural areas within the development.

Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
To improve biodiversity management of amenity sites to create more wildlife friendly sites in Medway and to help meet the ANGSt target of 100% of urban residents living within 600m of an accessible natural greenspace.	2007 onwards	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities

### *Local Nature Reserves*

### *Increasing Local Nature Reserve provision*

Natural England defines Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) as places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally. LNR is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by local authorities. In association with other ANGSt targets, Natural England promotes sustainability guidance that local authorities should strive for 1ha of Local Nature Reserve per 1000 population – for Medway this equates to a requirement for 250ha. Medway currently has 100ha of designated local nature reserves and therefore needs to designate an additional 150 ha. This figure will increase by another 50ha (equivalent to 10 Gillingham Parks) if Medway’s population increases to 300,000. Greenspace Services will work with Natural England to identify a minimum of 200ha of new LNR for designation by 2008 / 09.

The Medway Local Plan (2003) identifies the following sites as Local Nature Reserves; Baty’s Marsh, South Wood, Berengrave Pit, Rainham Dock East, Darland / Ambley Wood, Darland Banks. A further twelve sites are identified as proposed LNRs. Initial sites to be designated include Rede Common, Watts Meadow and Horsted Valley – this will increase area by a further 70ha.

<b>Local Nature Reserve Headline Action (1)</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Key Outcome</b>
Secure the designation of an additional 150ha of local nature reserve by 2008 and a further 50ha by 2016	Additional 150ha by 2010 Additional 50 ha by 2016	Outcome4: Improved Protection/Conservation

<b>English Nature’s standards for access to Natural greenspace</b>	<b>Current provision across Medway</b>	<b>Proposed Medway Accessible Greenspace Standard</b>
Minimum level of 1ha of Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population	0.4 ha of LNR per 1000 population	1ha of LNR per 1,000 population by 2016
Every home should be within 300m (5 minutes walk) of a natural green space	30% within 400m 50% within 500m 58% within 600M  (When applied to urban Medway the 600m figure rises to 67%).	100% of urban residents within 600m of an accessible natural greenspace by 2016.

Every home should have at least one accessible 20ha greenspace site within 2km	87% within 2km of 20ha site	100% within 2 km of a 20ha site 2016.
Every home should have at least one accessible 100ha greenspace site within 5km	51% within 5km of 100ha site	100% within 5 km of a 100ha site 2016.
Every home should have at least one accessible 500ha greenspace site within 10km	No figure available – revisit info	Awaiting review of data

### 3.6 COUNTRY PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SITES – A MEDWAY SUCCESS STORY

#### Medway owned countryside sites

##### Policy Statement:

**Medway Council recognises the value placed on our countryside sites and recognises that people use them for a range of activities such as walking and exercising in a green and natural environment. Medway Council will enhance the resources available to improve the quality of management, and seek opportunities to increase provision and accessibility of the resource. We will seek to increase the number of countryside sites that are designated as Local Nature Reserves and will improve marketing and promotion of key countryside sites.**

##### *Countryside Sites and Parks*

Medway’s countryside sites are Council owned open spaces managed to enhance their biodiversity and landscape value. They are managed by the Greenspace’s Countryside Rangers with support from volunteer groups and “Friends of” groups. The majority of these Countryside sites are woodland or chalk grassland and occur in urban Medway. Not all countryside sites have a current management plan to inform their long-term management or benefit from the funding and staffing resources required to ensure best management.

Having access to wild places close to where we live is something that is highly valued and worthy of protection. People seek out opportunities to visit places where wildlife thrives, where birds can be heard and plants seen. Medway's countryside sites help us keep in touch with nature and the changing seasons – they provide random colour and interest in an otherwise ordered urban landscape.

### Summary

- A combined figure of over **750,000** people visit Riverside and Capstone Country Park each year.
- Over **6,000** people visit the annual events at Riverside and Capstone
- There are **48 areas of natural green space, or countryside areas**, within the open space network.
- Overall the natural green spaces (countryside sites) are of **poor to average quality**, with almost 70% scoring under 3 out of 5<sup>5</sup> with respect to a series of quality indicators

Only a third of the Countryside sites have either a nature or a wildlife designation, and only a quarter are subject to a management plan. Medway residents have access to three country parks: Riverside, Capstone Farm and Ranscombe Farm. Covering some 430ha, these sites comprise a significant element of the open space network. All are located within the rural urban fringe and will continue to make a valuable contribution towards the development and realisation of the green grid in Medway.

Riverside and Capstone Farm Country Parks have been available for many years and are now well established. They are managed solely by the Council and conform to the public concept of a park, with visitor facilities such as toilets, on-site staff and a cafeteria. In contrast, Ranscombe Farm was purchased by the council in 2003/04 and is managed as a working farm. A new car park and over 6km of new paths have been created. The focus of Ranscombe Farm is as a working landscape that people are encouraged to explore and enjoy. A new cycle route and additional parking is being explored. Country Parks received the highest approval ratings both overall and in terms of the individual facilities and services covered by the questionnaire (Citizens Panel, 2006). The overall approval rating for country parks was very high, with 8 out of 10 rating them as good/very good.

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<sup>5</sup> Medway Council's Countryside Sites Quality Assessment, 2005

Positive aspects that are frequently cited by users are the large and attractive open areas, tranquillity, and accessibility and wildlife value. The level of safety is generally considered to be good, however this attribute was rated lower than others, with 18% of Capstone Farm Country Park users considering the Park to be unsafe or very unsafe.

The main improvements requested by Country Parks users are; greater awareness of the Country Parks to encourage more people to use them, a reduction in dog fouling, keeping dogs on leads and improving play areas and children’s activities.

**Provision of new Country Parks:**

The existing Medway Local Plan, 2003, supports policy L9: Country Parks which promotes the establishment of three new Country Parks at Grain Foreshore, Ranscombe Farm and Horsted. Grain is in an area with a shortage of open space and facilities for young people. The proposed site is already in public ownership (parish council) and is of high nature conservation value. Greenspace Services supports the Grain management committee – a group that oversees site management and is interested in realising country park status for the site. Horsted Farm is also in public ownership (Greenspace Services) and forms an extensive area of open space close to large housing estates. A new friends of group has been set up to help develop a suite of community informed plans for the area – the culmination of which will be a country park designation.

<b>Country Park Headline Action (1)</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Key Outcome</b>
To prepare and deliver Country Park Improvement Plans for Capstone and Riverside leading to Green Flag application for Riverside Country Park.	2007 – 2009	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
<b>Country Park Headline Action (2)</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Key Outcome</b>
To explore all options for realising new country park facilities at Grain and Horsted.	2007 – 2012	Outcome 5: More open space contributing to regeneration

<b>Countryside Sites Headline Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Key Outcome</b>
To promote funding bids and initiatives that will assist greater awareness, protection and positive management of Medway owned countryside sites. This will be incorporated in the Green Grid and LAMS.	On - going	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation

## SECTION 4: MEDWAY'S OPEN SPACE NETWORK

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**Policy Statement: Medway Council is committed through this strategy to ensure that those living in and visiting Medway have access to high quality open space of the right type, close to where they live. No open space or countryside sites will be considered as surplus to requirements without reference to the Sites Options Strategy. To achieve this policy, Medway Council will prioritise investment and development work to bring open spaces to an appropriate standard – both through better management and monitoring and through the provision of new facilities. Greenspace Services will work alongside development control and developers to ensure consistent provision of accessible high quality open space provision serving new and existing communities.**

### 4.1 OVERVIEW OF OPEN SPACES IN MEDWAY

PPG 17 states that open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value, including areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation, as well as acting as a visual amenity. Open spaces are typically characterised either according to size or to function. Medway has a significant amount of green open spaces: 1,909.63ha. There are also significant areas of privately owned open space such as Dean Ridge, Gillingham Golf Course and Rochester Forest that are not included in this figure.

Total open space per thousand population in Medway is thus approximately 7.6 ha. This is a relatively high figure compared to other Districts but it will, of course, fall given the projected increase in population unless new provision is made.

It is also important to consider the distribution of open space and its accessibility as a guide to new provision and improvement priorities. The open space provision by Ward has been calculated by simply dividing the ward population by the area of open space in hectares. The wards with the lowest level of provision are: Gillingham South, Rochester East, Rainham Central, Strood North, Chatham Central, Rainham South, Walderslade and Princes Park. All of these Wards provide less than 2.4ha of open space per 1000 population (the NPFA standard). Two of these wards, Chatham Central and Princes Park, are amongst the 20% most deprived wards in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation and therefore merit particular attention. Greenspace Services will target investment to those Wards with less than 2.4 ha of NPFA open space and especially Chatham Central and Princes Park to increase the provision, accessibility and quality of open space.

The Wards which are expected to see an increase in population growth linked to regeneration / Thames Gateway development are Chatham Central, Peninsula, River and Strood South. Greenspace Services will target these Wards to increase provision.

Open spaces are typically classified according to function or size. Open space provision in Medway by function is summarised below on the basis of the typology contained in PPG 17. Comments are made on quantity and quality.

The Borstal Open Space in Rochester is an example of a ‘destination’ site development. This site is currently subject to plans to enhance the pitch provision, to create a sports pavilion which can double as a wider community facility and possible visitors centre and to undertake landscape and biodiversity works. These plans have been informed by the Borstal Open Space Society and will be achieved through funding bids and developer contributions. This Strategy also promotes Cozenton Park, Jacksons Recreation Ground and Riverside Country Park as destination sites set to receive external funding to help create significant play and youth facilities. The idea of creating destination sites will help achieve the idea of ‘mending before extending’ and will focus on existing sites rather than creating new sites.

Typology	Quantity (2006)	Quality
(i) Parks and gardens - including urban parks, country parks and formal gardens, countryside sites and Country Parks.	25 urban parks and gardens with an average size of 2.2ha. The largest is at Broom Hill, Strood, which is a site that is currently a priority for improvement. Rochester has the greatest concentration of parks with seven.	33% of the Local Parks (2-20ha) scored as below average.
(ii) Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces - including woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (eg downlands, commons and meadows) wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and derelict open land	78 areas of accessible natural greenspaces – this figure includes non-Medway Council owned sites such as RSPB reserves and Parish owned sites.  Medway Council supports 48 Countryside Sites and 3 Country Parks  Habitat Survey, 2003, Tidal Waters (1858 ha), Marshes (142ha), Chalk grassland (50ha), Saltmarsh (484ha), Mudflat (4305ha)	Overall, the natural green spaces are of poor to average quality, with almost 70% scoring less than 50% on quality ratings.
(iii) Green corridors - including	Green Grid draft Strategy identifies key green	The Thames Estuary and River Medway

river and canal banks, cycleways, and rights of way	corridors across Medway. The River Medway and Thames Estuary are important accessible river banks. Medway has nearly 400km of public right of way and is set to complete the Rights of Way Improvement Plan by November 2007.	are important assets with varying degrees of accessibility. The Saxon Shore Way recreational walk promotes both these important assets. The proposed City to Sea route will provide additional access and promotion to the North Kent Marshes.
(iv) Outdoor sports facilities, including tennis courts, bowling greens, sports pitches, golf courses, athletics tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor sports areas;	There are 92 identified outdoor sports and leisure facilities totaling 335ha.	Eleven of the identified outdoor sports and leisure facilities spaces have private or restricted access. 'Very poor' pavilions were recorded at Beechings Way and APCM Cliffe, and a 'poor' pavilion at Cliffe Woods. Beechings Crossing pavilion was recorded as 'excellent'. Six sports pitches were only ranked as 'acceptable' and none were 'excellent'.
(v) Amenity greenspace (most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas) - including informal recreation spaces, greenspaces in and around housing, domestic gardens and village greens	There are 62 amenity spaces most being under 2ha in size	40% of amenity space scored 4 out of 5 for quality.
(vi) Provision for children and teenagers - including play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops, and other more informal areas (eg 'hanging out' areas, teenage shelters)	There are 125 sites covering 11.35ha. This figure includes 9 Local Areas of Play 66 Local Equipped Areas of Play, 36 Neighborhood Areas of Play and 14 individual teenage play facilities covering 11.35ha.	The Play Area Assessment showed that 69% of play areas complied with national standards for quality and accessibility, 7% failed to meet the standard due to accessibility, 7% were not applicable and 17% failed due to insufficient equipment.  Medway is well served by Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPS) but has fewer Neighbourhood Equipped Area for

	<p>NPFA requirement (based on 0.2ha per 1000) equates to 49.27ha illustrating a 37.92 ha shortfall.</p>	<p>Play (NEAPS) and 35% of NEAPs failed to meet expected equipment standards.. The vast majority of play areas are considered to be of good quality (83%) although user experience lessened due acts of vandalism.</p>
<p>(vii) Allotments, community gardens, and city (urban) farms</p>	<p>33 allotment sites (28 Medway owned and 5 Parish Council owned), best coverage is in the north and west of urban Medway comprising a total of 30ha. Sites range from 0.06ha with only 3 plots up to 4.02ha with 166 plots.</p> <p>Not evenly distributed across Medway – homes in the more recently developed parts of Medway, such as Lordswood, Parkwood and Walderslade, have limited access to allotments</p>	<p>Allotment quality varied from average to poor. The larger sites tend to be of better quality. All allotments suffer from acts of vandalism, arson, theft and fly tipping.</p>
<p>(viii) Cemeteries and churchyards</p>	<p>16 churchyards and cemeteries ranging up to 10.5ha (Small Local to Local).</p>	<p>These spaces are well maintained and are frequently of historic value, six are located in Conservation Areas.</p>

## 4.2 PLAY PROVISION IN MEDWAY

### Policy Statement:

Medway Council recognises the importance of play in the social, physical, intellectual and emotional development of children and young people. The Council is committed to providing high quality and accessible play and youth provision across Medway. This will be achieved by numerous activities including better monitoring of the quality of sites, by responding to expressed needs through the implementation of an investment framework and by insisting on best design and location of play and youth provision. This strategy promotes the establishment of strategic play and youth facilities at key locations across Medway and will complement the existing provision to address market failure in destination play provision. These actions are consistent with the Sports Development Strategy and the Young People Strategy.

### SUMMARY OF PLAY RESOURCE:

Facilities: Medway has 125 play facilities, including 9 Local Area of Play, 66 Locally Equipped Areas of Play and 36 Neighbourhood Equipped Areas of Plays and 14 individual teenage play facilities. Of these facilities, 88 are owned and managed by Medway Council and 37 are owned by either parish councils or housing associations.

Quantity: Medway's current play area provision stands at a 38-hectare shortfall across Medway based on the NPFA standard. Medway's equipped play provision stands at 0.15 ha per 1000 people. There is 13.3 ha shortfall of teenage play provision (based on 0.06 ha per 1000 pop as the adopted standard).

### PLAY POLICY AND CONTEXT:

**A local context for play:** Local Authorities, including Medway Council, use the National Playing Field Association's (NPFA) "Six Acre Standard" for assessing whether their play provision is at an adequate level for the children of their area and for assessing deficiencies (or even over-provision) in wards or estates. The Six Acre Standard sets '*Minimum standards for outdoor playing spaces*' the majority of which will be playing fields. Within the Standard there is a specific recommendation for outdoor space for children's play of:

*“0.2-0.3 hectares of equipped play space per 1,000 people”.*

**A National context for play:** This strategy identifies a new standard for play facility provision in Medway as recommended by the governments Planning Policy Guidance 17 document. PPG 17 encourages Local Authorities to set their own Standards for provision of children’s play, informing future provision and revisiting existing provision.

**An International context for play:** Article 31 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, ratified by the UK Government in 1991, states that: “every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in the play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts”.

### **MEDWAY PLAY POLICY STATEMENT:**

The following eleven Play Policy Statements provide strategic direction for tasks to address quality, quantity and accessible issues for play activity across Medway. They are consistent with the key strategy outcomes set out in section 1 and have been informed by public consultation and quality, quantity and accessibility audits.

1. Children, young people and parents will be involved in developing play projects to increase the sense of community ownership of facilities.
2. Public, voluntary and community sector partners will be encouraged to provide a coordinated, effective and good quality play offer.
3. Address the authority wide ward shortfalls of play provision in line with the Medway quantity standard.
4. Work with developers and planners to ensure that the layout of residential areas enable children and young people to walk/cycle around their neighbourhood, can access community facilities and publicly accessible open spaces.
5. Investments will ensure that disabled children can access their local playgrounds or “Play out”.
6. Play facilities are designed to enhance the quality of parks and open spaces.
7. Develop new facilities that provide an opportunity for adventurous play that encourage exploration of the natural environment and enhance the child’s perception of increased risk while playing.
8. Provide play facilities that are safe, clean and well maintained.
9. Address quality issues at identified playgrounds and review the status of closed sites.
10. Improve the ‘play offer’ at sites that have been found to have a low play value.
11. Ensure that facilities provided from developer contributions are adequate and meet design, space, accessibility and management requirements.

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## REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PLAY

Engagement Approach: The approach to public participation and consultation for this strategy was one that Medway Council hoped would determine the views of as many users of play facilities from a wide range of age groups and socio economic backgrounds as possible. Below is a summary of findings and conclusions. **Appendix 4 contains more detail on play consultation.**

**1) Play Area Assessment- questionnaire survey:** found that the location, accessibility and safety of play areas were considered to be the most important qualities for open spaces. Overall the Play Areas User Survey<sup>6</sup> suggested that users feel the variety, quality, condition and cleanliness of play areas and equipment is poor. The only aspect the users felt was generally adequate was the layout of play spaces.

**2) Observational and interview research** found that the travel distances for children as indicated in the NPFA standard do not reflect the increasing restrictions caused by traffic and poor design of street layout on children's freedom to play out. The catchments in the Medway play areas are therefore an over-estimate of the dwellings served by each play area. Where play places are open, visible and can be safely accessed then children use and value them and do so from a young age as children traditionally have.

**3) “Your Thoughts on Your Open Spaces-a consultation for 11-19 year olds”** found that more than half of respondents visit open spaces once a week or more and half of the respondents rated their play area as ‘good’ or ‘very good’. A significant number of participants (particularly the skaters) highlighted the Millennium Park in Maidstone as the type of facility they would like built in Medway.

**PLAY SPACE AUDIT<sup>7</sup> METHODOLOGY:** A play consultant carried out a comprehensive assessment of Medway's play facilities auditing the quality, quantity and accessibility of Medway's play facilities during summer 2003. This included Medway Council, Parish Council, Housing Association and equipped play areas managed by trusts set up by housing developers. A three-page report was produced for each of Medway's play areas detailing the key findings of the assessment relating to each site. This data

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<sup>6</sup> Play Area User Survey, Medway Council, 2005

<sup>7</sup> Play Space Audit, Rob Whewey, 2003, updated in August 2005

was updated in August 2005. The consultant's work also included significant engagement with local users. As part of the study for Medway Council, each play area was assessed for play value, parental and community oversight and social safety, vulnerability, usage and access.

### **Quality Findings:**

#### Locally Equipped Areas of Play (LEAPs):

- 18% scored the highest scored top marks
- 20% scored so lowly that a review of the site was recommended
- 45% of LEAPs were of satisfactory condition requiring no significant capital investment
- 17% of LEAPs require some refurbishment and capital works.

#### Neighbourhood Equipped Areas of Play (NEAPS):

- 31% of sites are in good condition
- 34% are in satisfactory condition
- 21% are in unsatisfactory condition
- 14% in poor condition.

There is significant variation in the level of use of play areas. Overall there are more spaces with low levels of use, which could be a result of a number of factors including poor quality, poor location or inaccessibility. Over a third of play areas have evidence of vandalism or other anti-social behaviour, which could explain (and be a result of) low usage in some of the play areas. The provision for older children and teenagers is inadequate.

As a rule, the smallest play areas (LAPs) are of highest quality. It is important to note that whilst this quality rating suggests that some play areas are of good quality, the experience for users can be reduced due to poor maintenance. Additional studies and surveys have confirmed that there is significant variation in the level of use of play areas. In general there are more play areas in Medway with low levels of use. This could be a result of a number of factors including poor quality, poor location or inaccessibility. The majority of play areas in Medway are considered to be of good quality. However, over 30% of sites show signs of vandalism and over 50% are inaccessible to people with mobility impairments.

Thirteen of Medway's play facilities are of such a poor quality that their use, should be reviewed. It was found that ten of these sites have had their play equipment removed due to significant vandalism or inappropriate sighting. It is important to note that these sites have not been included in the ward provision data as they have all been closed for long periods of time and do not currently contribute to play provision in Medway.

Play 'Quality' Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Subject 13 of the poorest quality play areas to the Sites Review and Disposal Guide to determine future action.	2007 – 2008	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities

### Accessibility Findings

The Medway study revealed significant differences in catchments between the straight-line distances (drawing a circle) and the walking distances. Some play areas, which may have been thought to serve a large catchment, in fact served a very small one. This data should be used as a guide in the development of the action plan but the plan should outline the need for a review of this data and the need to compare this with Geographical Information Systems (GIS) mapping showing site catchment areas. The catchment areas will be based on the NPFA travel distances but adapted for Medway. Areas outside of the catchment areas of existing sites will then be identified as shortfall areas.

An important finding of the play assessment was the accessibility problems associated with a large number of play spaces. Over half of Medway's play areas are currently inaccessible to people with mobility impairments. Whilst in some cases relatively simple changes would greatly increase access, in half of the play areas design changes to access points could be required.

## PROPOSED MEDWAY PLAY STANDARDS – QUALITY / ACCESSIBILITY / QUANTITY

The Medway Play Standards are based on an audit of existing play facilities, consultation with local people and observational and interview research of children at play, a Medway Standard for children's play has been formulated.

### Proposed Medway Standard for Play Quality

The Medway Standard for quality of its designated playgrounds and other play places:

Medway Play Quality Standards	Timescale	Key Outcome
1. Ensure play value and age range are appropriate to the size and location of site.	2007 – 16	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
2. Improve feeling of security for the child by good sightlines.	2007 – 16	
3. Improved condition, cleansing and maintenance regime.	2007 – 08	
4. Increase the quality of Medway's		

worst quality facilities to a 1-2 quality assessment score.	2007 – 10	
5. Revisit function of non-operational play sites.	2007 - 08	

### Proposed Medway Standard for Play Accessibility

Medway Standards for Play Accessibility	Timescale	Key Outcome
1. LAP threshold distance should be 100m.	2007 – 16	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
2. LEAP threshold distance should be 400m.	2007 – 16	
3. Distance threshold for NEAP for 4-8 year olds will be reduced to 400m.	2007 – 16	
4. Distance threshold for NEAP for 9 and 19 year olds will remain at 1000m.	2007 – 16	
5. The criterion is that children and teenagers can play out using a range of activities including talking, games, play equipment, informal sports in a variety of locations (front garden/pavement, friend's, park/play area, public space.	2007 – 16	
6. Accessibility for those with mobility or visual impairments, for parents with pushchairs etc. will be site specific and will be achieved by reference to the recommendations in the NPFA "Can Play Will Play".	2007 - 16	

### Proposed Standard for Quantity

- Medway’s quantity standard for play will remain at the NPFA benchmark level of: *0.2 hectares of equipped play space per 1000 population*

This will be broken down in to:

0.2 hectares of equipped play space per 1000 population	0.14 ha of which will be provision for younger children (LAPs and LEAPs)
	0.06 ha of which will be teenage play provision

Standards for Quantity	Timescale	Key Outcome
1. Investment prioritised to address ward and authority wide shortfalls by implementing facilities projects as identified in Appendix 8 and 9.	2007 – 16	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
2. Travel distances based on the NPFA targets but adapted for Medway.	2007 – 16	
3. Sizes of play places based on the NPFA target; however this will be interpreted with some flexibility.	2007 - 16	

### Proposed criteria for identifying priorities for play development

All of Medway’s wards are deficient in equipped play space. However, due to the size of Medway’s shortfalls of provision this strategy cannot aim to address this shortfall completely. Therefore the projects identified in the Medway Play Facilities Action Plan will meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The provision of large destination playgrounds at easily accessible sites that will serve large catchment areas.
- Facilities that include provision of ‘accessible’ play equipment for disabled children.
- Improving the quality of sites which have scored 4 or above in the quality audit.
- Increased provision for young people.

- Address some of the most significant ward shortfalls (where possible-for example Gillingham South ward is the ward with the highest shortfall but there are no sites within this ward with the potential to develop new facilities). Therefore, in cases such as these, neighbouring wards should have their facilities improved and or expanded in order to compensate.

## 4.3 FORMAL SPORT PITCH PROVISION

**Position Statement: Medway Council is committed to ensuring the maintenance of an accessible and high quality sports facility provision that meets the diverse needs of existing and future users and is complementary to the implementation of the Medway Sports Development Strategy, Tackling Obesity Strategy and the 2012 Olympics Plan. This will be achieved by working in partnership with the diverse range of users and the statutory / funding bodies to deliver the investment framework and through the consistent implementation of the Medway Council Developer Contribution Strategy.**

### The Proposed Medway Standard

Medway Council will work with its partners and stakeholders to achieve:

- A balanced provision of outdoor sports facilities across Medway a maximum of 1.2km from where people live.
- Outdoor facilities that are safe, clean and fit for purpose.
- Outdoor facilities that are accessible to all members of the community.
- New outdoor facilities that reduce travel time, are well designed, are multi-functional, enhanced biodiversity and community safety.

### Quantity

Medway residents have access to 92 senior football pitches, 63 junior pitches and 10 mini pitches, 10 rugby pitches, 1 hockey pitch plus 2 available for community use, 4 Artificial Turf Pitches (ATPs), 21 cricket pitches, 73 tennis courts and 8 bowling greens. Together, these sites make up 330ha of open space, which is about 15% of the total open space resource.

In 2003, Medway Council commissioned a Playing Pitch Study, which told us that there is likely to be a shortfall of 112 hectares of playing pitch by 2016 assuming forecast population growth, which is about 30% of current sport pitch provision.

## Football

The Saturday league experiences a surplus of 51 senior, 63 junior pitches but a shortfall of 13 mini pitches. Sunday league experiences a shortfall of 5 senior and 17 junior pitches but a surplus of 10 mini-pitches. There is a projected shortfall of 10 senior, 25 junior and 4 mini-pitches across Medway by 2016.

Football Headline Action (1)	Timescale	Key Outcome
To submit Football Foundation bids for Beechings Rec. and Borstal Way.	2007	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
Football Headline Action (2)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Greenspaces to work with partners to create and secure community use of 10 senior, 25 junior and 4 mini-pitch throughout Medway.	2007 - 16	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities

## Cricket

There are 25 clubs (49 teams) active in Medway. 10 clubs play regularly in a league. The current supply of pitches available for both mid week and weekend periods is adequate for current demand. Medway Council has 21 local grounds of which 5 hosted 29 games in the 2002 season (last data available). 18 of these were played at Hempstead. Another 4 grounds only hosted 11 matches between them. Projections for 2016 show a surplus of 8 pitches. It is likely that sports development will encourage greater participation in cricket and minimise this surplus.

Cricket Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Secure external funding to improve Chattenden MOD pitch, Luton Rec and Knights Place.	2007 - 2008	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities

## Rugby Union

There are 2 rugby clubs (Medway Rugby Football Club and Gillingham Anchorians Rugby Club) that play regularly in Medway. Clubs state that they are growing in membership due to the popularity of junior and mini rugby but pitch supply currently meets demand.

## Tennis

There are 6 tennis clubs in Medway and a total of 73 courts of which 33 are in voluntary / private ownership, 33 in council ownership and 8 on school sites. Our research shows that there is a current shortfall of 17 tennis courts in Medway, which is expected to grow to 22 courts by 2016. Discussions are in progress regarding the establishment of a major tennis centre at Sterling.

Tennis Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Investigate provision of additional all weather tennis courts in Gillingham, Chatham and Rainham.	2007	Outcome 1: Providing high quality facilities.

## Hockey

Competitive hockey is now totally played on artificial turf pitches (ATP). Medway has 5 ATP's. The recognised standard of provision for ATP's in the southeast is one pitch per 45,000 of population (Sport England). This equates to 5.5 pitches for current population of 250,000, rising to 6.6 pitches if the population increases to 300,000.

Hockey Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Investigate the utilisation of s106 contributions to provide an additional Artificial Turf Pitch in Medway, taking into account the developing University Project.	2007	Outcome 1: Providing high quality facilities.

## Quality

No pitch was measured as being of excellent quality. There are very poor pavilions at Beechings Way, APCM Cliffe and Borstal Recreation Ground. Cliffe Woods was considered poor. No pitches were rated as excellent.

Summary of proposed actions for Quality:

- Achieve 'good' ratings for all pitches and facilities
- Retain 'excellent' ratings for pitches and pavilions
- Achieve more 'excellent' ratings for pitches and pavilions

## Sports Pitches - Accessibility

The majority of Medway residents live within 1.2km of an outdoors sports facility.

The Playing Pitch Study considered overall accessibility to sports pitches. This was informed by both the NPFA standard for 'distance to travel' and local consultation whereby all residents should ideally have access to a playing field within 1.2 kilometres of where they live. Research showed that in the majority of cases this standard is being met across Medway. The NPFA's six-acre standard also states that a minimum of 1.2 hectares of formal sport provision should be provided for every 1000 population. This standard should be regarded as a minimum.

Summary of proposed action for Accessibility:

- Maintain or improve on the current level of access to playing pitches for local residents.

Accessibility Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Protect existing outdoor sports pitch provision and secure additional facilities alongside regeneration schemes.	2006 – 2016	Outcome 4: Ensuring Protection

## 4.4 URBAN PARKS AND AMENITY SPACES IN MEDWAY

**Policy Statement: Medway Council recognises the important contribution that urban parks make to the quality of life of people living in urban areas. Greenspace Services are committed to delivering accessible and high quality urban parks. This will be achieved by prioritising the sites that scored low in the Parks Quality Audit. This will complement the Medway Regeneration Framework, Local Area Agreements and the Community Safety strategy.**

### INTRODUCTION

There are **25 parks** averaging about 2ha in size. Most are either ‘Local’ or ‘Small Local’ Parks (6 are Pocket Parks, 9 are Small Local Parks and 10 are Local Parks). The small size of the urban parks in Medway means that they are best placed to serve local communities but are not capable of delivering a strategic park destination serving Medway. The majority of urban parks occur in the built up areas of Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham. Strood and Rainham are less well served. The majority of sites are of average quality and the six lowest sites, as ranked for overall quality and maintenance, are subject to significant investment programmes (Temple Marsh, Luton Millennium, Broom Hill Park, Reed Common, Queen Elizabeth Fields and Hillyfields).

There are **62 amenity spaces** averaging less than 2ha in size (i.e. of Small Local or Pocket Park size). The amenity spaces are scattered fairly evenly across the urban parts of Medway. The larger amenity spaces - such as Queen Elizabeth and Hillyfields tend to occur close to urban centres.

In general the amenity spaces are well located with respect to communities and are fit for purpose. Perhaps as a result they also performed well with respect to levels of vandalism and grounds maintenance. However the amenity spaces are also generally less well designed and are of poor quality with respect to stimulation and interest for users. In addition, there are minimal biodiversity features and the grass maintenance is poor. A key factor for amenity spaces is the lack of clarity as to who can use the spaces and therefore they can lack community ownership. The enhancement of biodiversity poor amenity spaces will both improve the value and interest of the spaces as well as help achieve the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard. There are already some amenity spaces that stand out from the ‘norm’, for example spaces such as in Low Meadow in Halling, which score highly for biodiversity features and stimulation and interest.

Amenity Space Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Prioritise the review of sites in areas of open space deficiency in / or close to urban centres with a view to increasing biodiversity provision or more formal recreational use.	2006 – 2016	Outcome 4: Regeneration

## SUMMARY OF PARKS AND AMENITY SPACE QUALITY AUDIT:

A full audit of 25 urban parks and a selected 19 amenity spaces was undertaken to inform this strategy (The Medway Parks Quality Audit, 2004). The audit was designed to evaluate the quality of designated parks and amenities to provide qualitative data. It provides the basis for assessing a range of assets of a park covering its design and physical structure, management and maintenance, and its value to people. The methodology was derived from the Greater London Authority's recommendations, using PPG 17 typology. The assessor was professionally trained officer with a background in landscape design and parks management.

The key findings were as follows:

- Landscape:** Our larger parks provide a more stimulating and exciting landscape.
- Facilities:** Facilities offered in open spaces are generally not appropriate to their size or location.
- Furniture:** Park furniture and buildings are generally not thought to be well designed or located
- Maintenance:** The quality of maintenance is generally poor.
- Cleanliness:** Average to good.
- Management:** Country Parks are managed to a high level, play areas showed an average quality of management and urban parks are less well managed
- Community**
- Involvement:** Higher in the larger and more wildlife focused spaces. There is an indication of community involvement in 33% of urban parks and garden.
- Vandalism:** More in outdoor sports and leisure facilities and play areas than other spaces. Countryside areas suffer less vandalism but experience a greater degree of fly tipping.

**Sense of safety:** Good. However, a high perception of fear of crime exists due to park design and physical qualities.

**Usage:** Usage of open space is variable with Gillingham Park receiving about 500,000 visitors per annum while many amenity spaces are poorly used due to their ill-defined function. Few open spaces cater well for all ages

Parks and Amenities site Headline Action (1)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Submit a Heritage Lottery Fund Application – Parks for People – to fund restoration works to Gillingham Park and undertake works as agreed.	2007 - 12	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities

Parks and Amenities site Headline Action (2)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Work alongside Design & Conservation to establish a ‘metropolitan’ size park at the Great Lines, Chatham, consistent with the proposed World Heritage Site application.	2007 - 2009	Outcome 5: More open space contributing directly to regeneration

Parks and Amenities site Headline Action (3)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Secure Green Flag standard for Riverside Country Park, The Vines and Castle Gardens.	2006 – 2009	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities

## ACCESSIBILITY

The distance thresholds used in this strategy are based on recognised standard walking and travel times<sup>8</sup>. Ideally everyone should live within 5mins walk (280m) of a small park. For larger parks the distance threshold is higher at 20 mins walk (1.2km). The application of such standards is only relevant and appropriate for urban Medway.

The table below shows that the most significant shortfall in accessibility relates to District Parks. However, over 80% of people have good accessibility to Small Local Parks and a good proportion (two-thirds) have a good accessibility to Pocket Parks.

<sup>8</sup> National Playing Field Association and Natural England’s Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard

Park size	London Standard	Current Medway performance	Suggested Medway standard
Formal Metropolitan Park <sup>9</sup>	100% population within 3.2km	0%	Develop the Great Lines as a city park (Metropolitan facility) to increase percentage of residents living with 3.2km of a metropolitan park to 50% by 2016.
District Park	100% population within 1.2km	49%	Increase to 60% by 2010 and prioritise quality and access to the larger parks. This will be achieved through the realisation of formal recreational open space at Temple Marsh, enhancement of Hillyfields and the Queen Elizabeth open spaces and creation of wider function for sport sites such as Borstal and Shorts Way.
Local Park	100% population within 400m	64%	Increase to 70% by 2010 through realisation of new facilities such as Lower Lines Park and Fort Amherst.
Small Local Park	100% population within 400m	81%	90% to be realised through creation of new open spaces such as associated with developments such as Rochester Riverside, Grange Farm and Howlands Nursery.
Pocket Park	100% population within 280m	67%	Due to the limited function of these small sites and the efficiency of maintenance, the Medway Standard is to enhance quality of existing pocket parks rather than creating new

<sup>9</sup> Note that Medway's three country parks are not captured under this typology as they provide an informal rather than formal space

Parks and Amenities Accessibility Headline Action (4)	Timescale	Key Outcome
Prioritise the creation of new district parks (2ha – 4ha) within new developments, enhancement of amenity sites and by broadening the management and style of countryside sites (e.g. the Lower Lines and Queen Elizabeth Playing Fields)	2006 – 2016	Outcome 4: Regeneration

## ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DEVOLVED MANAGEMENT OF PARKS

There are currently four active urban parks groups: Medway Urban Parks Forum, The Friends of Gillingham Park, The Friends of Rede Common and The Friends of Hillyfields. The role of the groups is to help liaison between officers and users. They seek to ensure that all sections of the community and the professionals agree and own a common vision.

Parks and Amenities Accessibility Headline Action (5)	Timescale	Key Outcome
In accordance with Local Area Agreements, Greenspaces will aim to support 10 constituted 'Friends of' groups for Medway's key urban parks and amenity sites.	2007 / 08      6 Groups established 2008/09      2 additional groups established 2009/10      2 additional groups established	Key outcome 2: Improved Monitoring and Management

## 4.5: ALLOTMENTS IN MEDWAY

Allotments are a great leveller and can bring together people from a variety of backgrounds in a common activity. Building relationships across social structures, ages and abilities and developing co-operation and contact.

**Policy statement: Medway Council recognises the wide appeal of allotments and values the contribution that allotments make to health, sense of place, wildlife, sustainable food production and social cohesion. Greenspace Services will seek to improve site safety and enhance facilities of allotment sites to ensure that they continue to play a unique role in community life. This will require the protection of existing allotment sites and the delivery of an investment framework to make quantity, quality and accessibility improvements. Greenspace Services will also explore opportunities to create a new high quality community farm / garden – possibly linked to one of the country parks or larger countryside sites.**

### 4.5.1 Quantity

Medway Council manages 28 sites designated as allotments covering approximately 22 hectares. Parish Councils are responsible for a further 5 allotment sites located in rural Medway. To assess the quantity of allotment provision in Medway it is possible to compare the number of plots available to the standard set by the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG). The NSALG advocates a standard of 15 plots per 1,000 households, Medway currently has 9 plots per 1,000 households.

When new sites are to be provided, they should, if possible, be provided next to existing open spaces to facilitate positive conversion, as well as to encourage passive security for the open space as a whole. Greenspace Services will seek to procure additional allotment land, particularly in Lordswood, Parkwood and Hempstead where there is demand but no available sites.

Allotment Quantity Headline Action (1)	Timescale	Output
Target additional provision in Lordswood, Parkwood and Hempstead	2007 - 2016	Regeneration

In the unlikely event that allotment land is found to be redundant, alternative uses should be considered through implementation of the Guide for the Review and Disposal of Assets (Appendix 2). If allotment land is genuinely surplus due to falling demand, then consideration must be given to alternative community based, sustainable land-based activities, for example community gardens, community orchards, a city farm or nature reserves. However, provision must be made for converting back to allotments if demand increases.

Allotment Quantity Measure (1)	Current Provision	Target 2010	Target 2016
15 plots per 1,000 residents	9 plots per 1,000 residents (800 in total)	12 plots per 1,000 residents (1,175 in total)	15 plots per 1,000 residents (1,720 in total)

The above target will be met jointly by exploring provision of new designated allotment sites and by continuing a programme of halving the size of redundant and released plots. This will create an increase in additional plots of a size appropriate to encourage new comers to allotmenting.

**Proposed Medway Allotment Quantity Standards for destination sites:**

1. Investigate opportunities for allotment sites in areas of under provision
2. Incorporate allotment requirements into the planning system
3. Continue to work with allotment societies to review plot sizes

## Quality

The Allotment Condition Survey, 2004, undertaken by Medway Council, provided the following findings:

1. Water provision is not consistent across sites
2. Criminal damage is often evident in the form of vandalism and fly tipping
3. Sites with active associations are better cared for
4. Boundaries are often poorly managed
5. Only one site has an on-site toilet

The facilities which users feel are essential for a good quality allotment are: water; secure boundary fencing and good maintenance. Therefore the main improvement standards are suggested to existing sites are:

Proposed Medway Allotment Quality Standards for destination sites

1. Improving site security/ boundary fencing
2. Providing toilets
3. Clearing vacant plots
4. Assisting in rubbish disposal
5. Improving water supply

Allotments Quality	Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
	Secure capital funding / receipt to create 5 destination allotment sites across Medway.	2007 - 2010	Outcome 1: Providing high quality facilities.

## Accessibility

Allotment sites are not evenly distributed across Medway – homes in the more recently developed parts of Medway, such as Lordswood, Parkwood and Walderslade, have limited access to allotments. These later areas will be a focus for attention.

Allotment Area Measure	% of total pop	Target 2010	Target 2016
Land Area within 1km radius of Allotments	70%	75%	90%

## Management

All Medway Council owned sites are managed by Greenspace Services. There are currently no sites where devolved management is practised. Most sites have allotment associations, some of which are more active than others. There seems to be a correlation between active site associations, plot take-up and overall site quality. Attractive, functioning and popular sites all tend to have very active site associations. The Medway Allotments Federation supports and promotes allotment gardening across the whole authority and represents the interests of allotmenting. We know that there is interest in devolved management, as many plot holders in the survey mentioned that they would like further information. Devolved management schemes can benefit both local authorities and their allotment gardeners. A reduced burden of administration and maintenance responsibilities means savings for the authority and a route to engaging with local communities in the regeneration and management of important environmental assets. This could “kick-start” the process of turning underused sites around, and provide “best-value” to service users.

For plot holders, devolution can bring more responsive management on a day-to-day basis, a sense of pride in any improvements to the site, and opportunities for volunteers to bring their skills and expertise to a new challenge, particularly beyond retirement.

Allotment Management Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Work in partnership with the Allotment Federation to investigate the mutual benefits of devolved management of sites.	2007 - 10	Outcome 6: Greater celebration and engagement

Allotment Quantity	Headline Action	Timescale	Key Outcome
Protect existing allotment provision and seek provision of new sites through positive planning and developer contributions.	2006 - 2010	Outcome 4: Ensuring Protection	

A survey (2004) of the allotment users in Medway highlighted that most users had held their plot for over 10 years and that the average user felt their plot was convenient to their home, visiting it around 3-4 times a week.

Current spend by the Council is 35% greater than budget due to high costs of repairs and vandalism.

Across Medway, allotment holders spend in the region of £50,000 per year on materials, sundries and tools with local garden centres. This represents a significant supply market and ought to attract sponsorship from the industry.

Medway has no publicly owned and managed City or Community Farm.

## SECTION 5 – MANAGING MEDWAY’S RURAL-URBAN FRINGE

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### **Policy Statement**

Medway Council and its partners will work to establish a high-quality ‘Green Grid’ network of open spaces and countryside sites, with linked green corridors, footpaths and landscape, which connect and integrate the urban and rural environment of Medway with existing and new communities. The overall aim of the Green Grid project is to provide a network of accessible green spaces and corridors that have an inherent landscape, visual, functional, recreational and ecological value.

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The rural-urban fringe is the boundary between the built up areas and the farmed or forested areas of Medway. It is sometimes a positive transition but more often is an area that suffers from an ill-defined purpose and poor quality landscape, fly-tipping, motorbike scrambling and anti-social behaviour. However, it is also a zone of great opportunity.

A greater sense of ownership by urban residents of the rural - urban fringe needs to be developed. It is an undervalued resource on the doorstep of residents that could work harder to enhance their quality of life. Securing community involvement through welcome events and activities could be a useful way of achieving this (but as previously highlighted increasing the ease of access to the countryside is of paramount importance).

Medway’s three Country Parks perform a valuable function as ‘gateways’ to the countryside and the development of additional strategically located gateways at Grain, Hogmarsh, Horsted and Broomhill will help enhance access to rural Medway.

Agriculture in the rural-urban fringe faces particular pressures, with incidences of trespass, arson and fly-tipping. There has also been an increase in land used for horse pasture – all factors which can have implications for landscape character.

### **5.2 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY**

Medway has about 388km of public rights of way, which breaks down to 330km of Footpaths, 23km of Bridleways, 17km of Roads Used as Public Paths and 18km of Byways. The Highways Authority (Medway Council) has a statutory duty to maintain this network of footpaths, bridleways and by ways. Public rights of way are important in connecting the countryside and open spaces to where people live and work. Medway Council and the Local Access Forum (a statutory local consultee on access issues) are

working on a Rights of Way Improvement Plan to be completed by September 2007. This Plan will be informed by a full audit of the quality of paths in Medway and will make recommendations for new paths to be added to the network. The draft Green Grid Action Plan has identified key zones for access enhancements and will also inform the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

### 5.3 GREEN GRID IN MEDWAY

This section of the Medway Countryside and Open Space Strategy provides both the high-level strategic planning for the establishment of green grid, as well as the spatial illustration of what the grid could look like on the ground.

It is important to note that the grid does not attempt to include all the open space in Medway. Those sites not forming part of the grid have been omitted from the initial plan as they are not as well placed to facilitate green grid objectives rather than being considered as being of lower value. This strategy identifies seven key strategic corridors that are believed to offer the maximum opportunity for connecting people, places and wildlife.

The routes are:

1. Star Hill to Motney Hill
2. St Mary's Island to Riverside Country Park
3. Great Lines to Capstone Valley
4. Great Lines to Horsted Valley
5. Great Lines to Wouldham
6. Whitewall Creek to Upper Halling
7. Whitewall Creek to Hoo Peninsula

These routes represent the most direct access between a suggested starting point and a clear destination. The corridors are tightly defined across urban Medway to ensure the focusing of resources. In rural Medway the corridors coalesce into a wider vision that encompass rural public rights of way and the wider countryside.

## Green Grid's Objectives

The objectives below seek to establish a strategic vision for Green Grid in Medway. They have been written to respond to the increasing pace of regeneration in Medway and the opportunities this presents for green grid. The Green Grid objectives are focused around four key themes:

- 1) Planning and Delivery
- 2) Promotion and Access
- 3) Health and Community
- 4) Biodiversity and Awareness

## 5.4 LANDSCAPE AND ACCESS MANAGEMENT SCHEMES (LAMS)

In response to Medway's valuable and pressured landscape, Greenspace Services will lead in the promotion of landscape-scale interventions targeted at delivering integrated and proactive land management schemes. All outcomes will complement the existing North Kent Environmental Priorities, the emerging Thames Gateway Parklands concept and the supporting Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway initiative. There are five Landscape and Access Management Schemes (LAMS).

1. Capstone Valley
2. Hog Marsh Valley and Chattenden Ridge
3. Gillingham Waterfront
4. Cliffe Three Parishes Plan
5. Grain Four Parishes Plan

The guiding principles of Green Grid and Landscape and Access Management Schemes are:

- **Engagement:** Wide community engagement (rural and urban, owner and user).
- **Partnership:** LAMS will be delivered in partnership with a wide range of interest groups from within Medway and surrounding authorities.
- **Complementary:** Where possible, LAMS will invest in existing groups and activities to deliver actions.
- **Funding:** Partnership funding, including DCLG, Defra, Heritage Lottery Funds, European Union, local authority and grants will be sought.
- **Sustainability:** Long-term management requirements will not be ignored. Endowment schemes, such as those piloted by the Land Restoration Trust and Medway Council's s106 contributions policy, will be explored.
- **Access:** Enhancing existing strategic routes, designing out problems such as fly tipping, making a connected network by identifying and addressing gaps, promotion to new users groups
- **Biodiversity:** Working to connect habitats such as native woodlands in Capstone Valley and Chattenden Ridge, chalk grassland sites in Cuxton and Capstone, wetland habitats along the Hog Marsh Valley, Cliffe area and Allhallows.
- **Green tourism:** Producing a range of destinations from high to low profile, marketing and profile raising, linking countryside destinations to rural and urban bus services, improving interpretation of cultural and natural history heritage, investing in local businesses such as B&B, equestrian activity, education.
- **Natural Resource management:** Works contributing to improving air quality, sustainable water resource management and flood alleviation schemes.
- **Landscape Enhancement:** Contribute to the conservation, restoration and enhancement of Medway's landscapes including dry river valleys, wooded copses, marshlands and estuarine habitats.

### ***Planning and Delivery Objective 1***

To ensure that all future planning documents and policies support the delivery of a strategic green grid network across Medway linking to neighbouring local authorities. The cornerstone of the effective delivery of green grid is the planning process. The embedding of green grid principles in master plans, development briefs and section 106 agreements will ensure a cohesive and complementary approach. The active promotion of green grid as a concept will ensure that all future developments are approached with knowledge of the green grid aspirations.

### ***Planning and Delivery Objective 2***

To protect public open space that is well placed to contribute to the green grid network. As development continues, the strategic value of existing green space may be changed. A policy of precautionary measures will minimise the loss of any open space, however small, that may contribute to the green grid. This will be assessed on the ability of a site to deliver access, landscape or ecological benefits.

### ***Planning and Delivery Objective 3***

To secure flexible funding and robust management frameworks to support the long- term maintenance of the green grid. At the outset there is a need to communicate how the green grid is to be managed and maintained. Requirements will vary depending on the location and character of the grid. The countryside sections will primarily require land and access management. The more urban sections will require a greater degree of management for access, interpretation, soft landscaping and wardening. The implementation of an annual programme of maintenance with a dedicated budget for capital and revenue works must be established if the green grid is to be maintained and operated effectively. This should be supported by a cross directorate team to ensure coordinated delivery of short and medium term activities. Funds may be available from s106 planning agreements, endowments, capital receipt from land sales, Sustainable Communities Fund (Community and Local Government funding) and core funding.

### ***Promotion and Access Objective 1***

To encourage activity and to raise awareness of the benefits of the green grid. Produce seven route guides plus general Green Grid publicity material including signage, leaflets and way marking.

### ***Promotion and Access Objective 2***

To provide access for all sectors of the community, focusing on walking and cycling as appropriate to the character of the route.

### *Health and Community Objective 1*

To work in partnership with health groups and professionals to mainstream objectives and measures to maximise improvements in health and well being through encouraging walking, cycling and use of the green grid network.

### *Health and Community Objective 2*

To work in liaison with the forums such as the Local Strategic Partnership's Sustainable Development Partnership, the Local Access Forum and "Friends of" groups to ensure community engagement in Green Grid design and implementation.

### *Biodiversity and Awareness Object 1*

To ensure that the development and implementation of Green Grid plans and proposals are ecologically informed and lead to the maintenance and enhancement of key habitats and species as noted in this strategy.

## **5.5 DELIVERING GREEN GRID**

The Green Grid is unlikely to be delivered in one phase, through a single project, funding source or organisation. Its delivery and realization will be based on ensuring that the on-going and future piece-meal activities are informed by the green grid strategy. The action plan will help ensure that the separate pieces of existing infrastructure and new developments are brought together. Given the number of delivery mechanisms it will be important to ensure that the appropriate directorates and services are clear on their obligations to help meet the Green Grid vision. Highways, Planning, Health, and Greenspace Services can all help to deliver the green grid.

Green grid is designed to fundamentally change the way visitors interact with green space in Medway. There will be a need to address key issues such as fears about user safety, vandalism and poor accessibility (as highlighted in section 4). It will be important to gain control of access points to reduce potential problems such as illegal motorcycling and antisocial behaviour. Consistent high quality design of paths, gateways, seating, signage and habitat management must be encouraged to ensure the establishment of safe, clean and green environments. As the majority of green grid will be implemented in a piecemeal fashion, the impact of fragmented ownership on the delivery of the whole cannot be underestimated. A single non-participating landowner can block the establishment of a meaningful and attractive green grid. Given the large areas of redevelopment in strategic locations the development of effective partnerships with developers is imperative if the vision is to be realised. Preliminary mapping work has

indicated potential pinch points or blockages within the network and officers from across the council will be working proactively with land owners and developers to address the relevant issue.

## SECTION 6 -DELIVERY PLAN

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The following Implementation Plan brings together all the Headline Actions included in the Strategy. Their delivery has been planned over three phases. Phase 1: 2007 to 10, Phase 2: 2010 to 13 and Phase 3: 2013 to 16.

### Medway COSS Section 3 – PHASE 1

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Headline Action	Output	Phases 1, 2 or 3	Key Outcome
<b>Special Protection Area</b>	Support measures and partnerships that promote positive management of areas of international importance.	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 4:Improved Management / Conservation
<b>Site of Special Scientific Interest (1)</b>	Promote positive management of Medway owned SSSIs to ensure they continue moving towards favourable condition.	Phase 1	Outcome 4:Improved Management / Conservation
<b>Site of Special Scientific Interest (2)</b>	Ensure protection of all SSSIs to ensure they continue to contribute to sustainable development.	Phases 1,2 and 3	Outcome 4:Improved Management / Conservation
<b>Site of Nature Conservation Interest</b>	Work with KWT to increase landowner awareness and positive management of SNCIs.	Phases 1,2 and 3	Outcome 4:Improved Management / Conservation

### Medway COSS Section 3

Headline Action	Output	Phases 1, 2 or 3	Outcome
<b>Biodiversity Action Plan</b>	To assist in the delivery of Kent Biodiversity Action Plan objectives for key habitats through raising awareness of Kent BAP objectives, positive planning and the prioritising of investment.	Phase 1,2 and 3	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement
<b>Brownfield sites</b>	Based on accurate ecological survey information, ensure that where feasible the nature conservation interests of brownfield sites are maintained during and after development, and are complemented by the delivery of the Green Grid and Landscape and Access Management Schemes.	Phase 1	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation
<b>Woodland (1)</b>	Establish and maintain a Woodland Strategic partnership to take forward joint woodland initiatives.	Phase 1	Outcome 3: Prioritised Investment
<b>Woodland (2)</b>	Promote the conservation of nightingale population at sites such as Medway Valley, Temple Marsh and the Hogmarsh Valley.	Phase 1 and 2	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation
<b>Calcareous Grassland</b>	To work in partnership to establish a mobile grazing flock to promote optimum management of the existing grassland sites.	Phase 1	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation
<b>Estuaries</b>	Support Estuary partnerships in submitting an HLF bid supporting positive management and greater awareness of estuarine resource in Medway.	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement

<b>Headline Action</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Phases 1, 2 or 3</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>River Medway</b>	In association with Green Grid, to coordinate positive action to deliver a functional, accessible and ecologically functioning riverside.	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement
<b>Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</b>	To exercise the Council's 'Duty of Regard' for the interests and qualities of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation
<b>North Kent Marshes Special Landscape Area</b>	To support the proposed North Kent Marshes HLF Area bid to deliver greater awareness, understanding and informed management of the marshland landscape.	Phase 1	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement
<b>Area of Local Landscape Importance</b>	To support the positive management of ALLIs through Green Grid and landscape Access Management Schemes	Phases 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation
<b>River and Seascape</b>	Support the work of Estuary Partnerships in promoting guidance for positive management of the River Medway and riparian land.	Phases 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 6: Greater Celebration and Engagement
<b>Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard</b>	To improve biodiversity management of amenity sites to create more wildlife friendly sites in Medway and to help meet the ANGSt target of 100% of urban residents living within 600m of an accessible natural greenspace.	Phase 1,2 and 3	Outcome 1: More higher quality facilities
<b>Local Nature Reserve provision</b>	Secure the designation of an additional 150ha of local nature reserve	Phase 1	Outcome 4: Improved Protection and Conservation
<b>Country Park 1</b>	To prepare and deliver Country Park Improvement	Phase 1	Outcome 1: More high

Headline Action	Output	Phases 1, 2 or 3	Outcome
	Plans for Capstone and Riverside CP leading to a green flag application for Riverside Country Park.		quality facilities
Country Park 2	To explore all options for realising new country park facilities at Grain and Horsted.	Phase 1 and 2	Outcome 5: More open spaces contributing to regeneration

#### Medway COSS Section 4

Headline Action	Output	Phases 1, 2 or 3	Outcome
Play Quality Action	Subject 13 of the poorest quality play areas to the Sites Review and Disposal Guidance to determine future action	Phase 1	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
Play Quantity /Accessibility 1	Investment prioritised to address ward and authority wide shortfall by implementing projects identified in appendix 9 and 10.	Phase 1 and 2	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
Play Quantity /Accessibility 2	Prioritise capital receipts and external grant –in-aid to the establishment of key play and youth destination sites.	Phases 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
Football 1	To submit Football Foundation bids for Beechings Rec. and Borstal Way.	Phase 1	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
Football 2	Greenspace Services to work with partners to create and secure community use of 10 senior, 25 junior and 4 mini-pitches throughout Medway.	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
Cricket	Secure external funding to improve Luton Rec and Knights Place.	Phase 1	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
Tennis	Investigate provision of additional all weather tennis courts in Gillingham, Chatham and Rainham.	Phase 1	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
Hockey	Investigate the utilisation of s106 contributions to	Phase 1	Outcome 1: More high

Headline Action	Output	Phases 1, 2 or 3	Outcome
	provide an additional Artificial Turf Pitch in Medway, taking into account the developing University Project.		quality facilities
<b>SportsQuantity Accessibility</b> /	Protect existing outdoor sports pitch provision and secure additional facilities alongside regeneration schemes.	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 4: Improved protection and conservation
<b>Parks and Amenity Space 1</b>	Prioritise the review of sites in areas of open space deficiency in / or close to urban centres with a view to increasing biodiversity provision or more formal recreational use.	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 5: More open spaces contributing to regeneration
<b>Parks and Amenity Space 2</b>	Submit a Heritage Lottery Fund Application – Parks for People – to fund restoration works to Gillingham Park.	Phase 1	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
<b>Parks and Amenity Space 3</b>	Work alongside Design and Conservation to establish a ‘metropolitan’ size park at the Great Lines, Chatham, consistent to the proposed World Heritage site application.	Phase 1	Outcome 5: More open space contributing to regeneration
<b>Parks and Amenity Space 4</b>	Secure Green Flag standard for Riverside Country Park, The Vines and Castle Gardens.	Phase 1	Outcome 1: More high quality facilities
<b>Parks and Amenity Space 5</b>	Prioritise the creation of new district parks (2ha – 4ha) within new developments, enhance amenity sites, broaden the management and style of countryside sites (e.g. the Lower Lines and Queen Elizabeth Playing Fields)	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 5: More open space contributing to regeneration
<b>Parks and Amenity Space 6</b>	In accordance with Local Area Agreements, Greenspace Services will aim to support 10 constituted Friends of Groups for Medway’s key urban parks and amenity sites.	Phase 1 and 2	Outcome 2: Improved Monitoring and Management

<b>Headline Action</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Phases 1, 2 or 3</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Allotments 1</b>	Protect existing allotments and target additional allotment provision in Lordswood, Parkwood and Hempstead.	Phase 1, 2 and 3	Outcome 5: More open space contributing to regeneration
<b>Allotments 2</b>	Secure capital funding and receipt to create 5 destination allotment sites across Medway.	Phase 1 and 2	Outcome 1: Providing high quality facilities
<b>Allotment 3</b>	Work in partnership with the Allotment Federation to investigate the mutual benefits of devolved management of sites.	Phase 1	Outcome 6: Greater celebration and engagement

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## Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Joining up delivery to the Council's performance plan and 10 strategic priorities.

The council's performance plan establishes 10 strategic priorities. These were developed by taking into account customer feedback and through an analysis of performance. It is important that this strategy makes clear the contribution from Greenspace Services and good quality countryside and open space will make help to achieving Medway Council's and its community's priorities.

Council performance plan priority	Countryside and Open Space response
1. Put our customers at the heart of everything we do	Greenspace Services work will continue to be informed by conferences, workshops, 'Friends of' groups and users forums and customer satisfaction surveys. We will provide value for money through effective use of external grant-in-aid to deliver cleaner, greener and safer sites.
2. Improve and maintain our local environment	To be achieved through a combination of protection, celebration and enhancement of countryside and open space, supporting environment partnerships, securing internal and external funding, the implementation of Landscape and Access Management Schemes and Green Grid, involvement in the s106 process and by input to the regeneration framework and development plans.
3. Develop new sustainable communities to benefit existing communities	This strategy expresses a commitment to provide high quality open space facilities by working within the planning system to protect and enhance countryside and open space, following input to master plans, vision documents and planning documents detailing the provision of new open space for new and existing communities.
4. Work together to protect vulnerable children	Change for Children is a new approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. The programme places better outcomes for children firmly at the centre of all policies and approaches involving children's services. The Every Child Matters agenda and the Play Facilities Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed by the Medway Play Partnership-a forum of public sector (including Children's Services), voluntary sector and private sector organisations responsible for delivering play opportunities in Medway. The Every Child Matters agenda will be

	integral to the delivery of the Play Facilities Action Plan.
5. Realise the potential of young people	To assist this goal by prioritising investment in excellent and accessible sport provision, youth and play as informed by on-going consultation events targeted at youth and youth needs and dialogue with Medway Youth Parliament. We will support new Forest schools, the development of an educational and events programmes supported by targeted walks and activities programme, opportunities for volunteering activities and also training via Cozenton Nursery.
6. Extend culture, tourism and leisure opportunities	To assist the achievement of this priority by the promotion of green tourism, walking festival, events programmes based on the provision of high quality and high profile sites and the delivery of the Great Lines City Park, World Heritage Site and Green Grid.
7. Promote independence for vulnerable people	The Cozenton nursery training scheme provided in partnership with Hadlow college will offer skills training and support to enable vulnerable people to move into work, learn independence by using horticulture as therapy.
8. Make it easy to travel around Medway	Greenspace Services will support the creation of new cycle and walking routes across countryside and open space network through the promotion of green grid and will also raise awareness of walking opportunities within the rural urban fringe.
9. Reduce crime and anti social behaviour	The involvement of the new Parks Ranger Service at key sites across Medway coupled with future better design of play areas and parks, plus increased community involvement through “Friends of” groups, liaison with the police on ASB and motor vehicle crime will help meet this priority.
10. Promote pride in Medway	Greenspace Service’s contribution will include the production of attractive marketing material such as Tranquil Treks and the Saxon Shore Way Guide. We will also implement our Events and Education strategies and support the promotion of a positive perception of Medway based on the aesthetic and ecological value of Medway’s countryside and open spaces.

COMMUNITY PLAN PRIORITY (specific to Countryside and Open Space)	OUTCOME	GREENSPACE RESPONSE
Reduce anti social behaviour to increase people's feelings of safety	<i>Reduce overall crime</i>	To promote community engagement, ownership and pride in the delivery of high quality and well-maintained facilities. This will include appropriate siting of facilities; effective sightlines and ensuring sites are 'over looked' and be supported by the work of the Ranger Service.
	Reassure the public by reducing the fear of crime.	To communicate a positive message through Greenspace updates supported by effective maintenance of vandal / graffiti free open spaces.
	Build respect in communities and reduce anti social behaviour.	To work alongside the Neighbourhood Renewal, Social Regeneration schemes and Youth Services to deliver community engagement in countryside and open space regeneration projects, events and education programme.
Empower local people to have greater participation and influence in local affairs	Empower local people to have greater choice and influence over local decision making and a greater role in public service delivery.	To involve 'Friends of' groups, the Urban Parks Forum, Medway Allotments Federation, Sports Council, Medway Countryside Forum and Greenspace Conference in the work of Greenspace services and to mainstream customer survey / questionnaires results when reviewing Service Plans.

<p>Ensure that regeneration and development is matched to the natural resources and infrastructure available to improve the quality of life for existing and new communities.</p> <p>Cherish and enhance Medway's rural heritage and the important resources of open space, countryside, and wildlife habitats.</p>	Increase the number of volunteers recruited and working in Medway.	To promote volunteer activity in management of country parks, open spaces and events.
	Cleaner, greener and safer public spaces.	To raise awareness of this strategy and to promote greater investment and implementation.
	Improving the local street scene.	To implement new grounds maintenance and the supporting Quality Management Framework plus involvement in quality assurance schemes such as Britain in Bloom.
	Improving the key services for our customers.	To receive, hear and respond to customer needs and desires when delivering and enhancing Medway's countryside and open space resource.
	Protecting the countryside and open spaces.	To promote schemes (Green Grid and Landscape and Access Management Schemes) and partnerships that raises awareness and promotes further enjoyment, celebration and access to Medway's countryside and open space resource. To meet the standards and targets set out in this strategy.

## Appendix 2

### Greenspace Services – A Guide for the Review and Disposal of Assets

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Medway Council places great importance to the retention of recreational, countryside and amenity open spaces in urban and rural areas and recognises that once built on, they will usually be lost to the community forever. There will be a presumption that existing open space will be preserved and enhanced unless an improved provision can be made by new development to the benefit of the local population.

This guide should be considered in the context and findings of the Medway Countryside and Open Space Strategy (2007).

However, situations occur from time to time where it is suggested that facilities or sites are either unfit or are incapable of fulfilling their original purpose. Examples of this could be where a play area has sustained vandalism over a long period of time and it has proved uneconomical to continue in its present role. Whilst Council policy is towards the protection of open space from development, disposal should be considered where all reasonable long-term efforts to redress the situation have proved unsuccessful. At this time it is important to have a robust and clear methodology for assessing the immediate and long-term value of a site – both for its prescribed purpose as well as addressing shortfalls in open space provision. Therefore an informed decision then needs to be taken as to the long-term future of that land.

This will consider as to whether:

- further investment in the site should be prioritised
- the site should be given an alternative open space use, or
- to seek disposal of the site on the open market with income being reinvested for open space enhancement of a similar type as close as possible to the site .

## MEDWAY STANDARDS:

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The Council has adopted the Six Acre Standard of the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) benchmark of 2.4 hectares per 1,000 population.

Studies<sup>10</sup> have shown there is a shortfall of play areas in every Ward throughout the Medway area. There is also a significant shortfall in playing field provision and allotments.

### LOCAL PLAN POLICY (2003)

Policy L3 of the Local Plan refers to the Protection of Open Space and states that

*“ Development that would involve the loss of existing formal open space, informal open space, allotments or amenity land will not be permitted unless:*

- (i) sports and recreation facilities can best be implemented, or retained and enhanced through redevelopment of a small part of the site; or*
- (ii) alternative open space provision can be made within the same catchment area and is acceptable in terms of amenity value; or*
- (iii) in the case of outdoor sports and children’s play space provision, there is an excess of such provision in the area (measured against the NPFA standard of 2.4 hectares per 1,000 population) and such open space neither contributes to, nor has the potential to contribute to, informal leisure, open space or local environmental amenity provision; or*
- (iv) in the case of educational establishments, the development is required for educational establishments, the development is required for educational purposes and adequate areas for outdoor sports can be retained or provided elsewhere within the vicinity; or*
- (v) the site is allocated for other development in the Local Plan.*

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<sup>10</sup> Countryside and Open Space Strategy (2007)

It would be necessary to satisfy the applicable conditions of this Policy L3 for Planning Officers to agree to any change of use.

## **Planning and Policy Guidance 17**

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Planning for open space, sport and recreation (PPG 17), produced by the Department of Communities and Local Government sets out the policies needed to be taken into account by local planning authorities in the preparation of development plans. The Guidance states that Local Authorities should undertake audits of existing open space, sports and recreational facilities to establish usage, access in terms of location, and to give consideration to quantitative and qualitative elements of the facilities.

### ***LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK***

*Policy CS 22 Countryside and Open Space Strategy states that:*

A Countryside and Open Space Strategy will be established and maintained to provide equal opportunity for all people to enjoy accessible, high quality and affordable open space facilities.

*The strategy will ensure that:*

*A multifunctional network of open space facilities will, as far as possible, connect to create a system of footpaths, cycle routes, equestrian facilities and wildlife corridors in a green grid.*

*The Countryside and Open Space Strategy and supporting Action Plans provide an assessment of open space, sports and recreational facilities, illustrating locations and shortfalls given densities of population.*

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The following process will apply in identifying open space, sports and recreational facilities for disposal prior to a recommendation to the Corporate Property Team, Development Control or Cabinet.

**1. Site Assessment**

- a. Determine local provision using NPFA benchmark or other suitable standard as stated in COSS, quality of facilities, site history, covenants, S106 Agreements in perpetuity, community interest

**2. Site history**

- a. What is the nature and scale of the problem?

**3. Establish links to Departmental and Corporate Strategies**

- a. Determine potential impact of strategies on any proposal

**4. Local Plan / LDF compliance**

- a. Determine proposed disposal complies with Local Plan Policy L3 and LDF policy CS22.

**5. Options / Opportunities**

Can the factors impacting upon the site be address through community engagement, wardening, investment, improved maintenance and management, change of use within greenspace portfolio?

**6. Preliminary consultation with Property Services and Development Control**

- a. Seek guidance on suitability, planning considerations and potential value of disposal

**7. Consult with Portfolio Holder**

- a. Views of the Lead Member and Ward Councillor(s) to be sought prior to formalising any proposal for disposal of a site

**8. Public Consultation**

- a. Ascertain views of local residents, Friends Groups, etc

**9. Options:**

- a. **Option 1: Undertake works as required, or**

## b. Option2: Referral to Property Services for Disposal

### Appendix 3

#### Examples of ‘cross cutting’ countryside and open space projects:

**Cliffe Community and Conservation Partnership** – £224,000 invested from Medway Council, European Union and department for Communities and Local Government (formerly ODPM) and hosted by the RSPB. This unique project ran for three years on the Hoo Peninsula uniting the parish communities of Cliffe, Cliffe Woods, Cooling and High Halstow. It tackled a wide range of inter-related issues including; tourism provision (economic development), delivering training and skills, tackling anti-social behaviour (such as scrambling and fly tipping), promoting access, involving artists and schools in orchard projects, promoting new access routes, establishing a new community volunteer group and undertaking practical conservation and access projects. This project was extremely well received by local residents and visitors because it both helped to raise the profile and peoples awareness of the Hoo peninsula and because it involved so many local people in tackling what were essentially quality of life issues. It helped make clearer the community benefits of a well managed countryside.

**Three Valley Youth Partnership** – targeted at Capstone Valley area and those aged 12 – 21. Worked closely with Youth Service, HLF Young Roots and the Kent Wildlife Trust to secure £50,000. This supported the delivery of a range of community and conservation projects including development of IT skills through creation of a web site and use of plotting / GIS equipment, horse riding, practical conservation projects and forums. The project was well received locally as it was engaging with a new audience and hard to reach group. A section of the community that often feels unheard. Medway Council received an in-sight to the concerns and needs of local youth and how they can improve facilities in the area.

**Football Foundation bids** – Greenspace Services are preparing two funding applications to the Football Foundation to improve Medway’s outdoor sport facilities. The first application is for funding to replace the sports pavilion at Beechings Recreation ground in Twydall. The sports pavilion will double as a community facility and as being designed to meet the needs of youth clubs and community groups. The second application is for Borstal and Shorts Way where once again there is a need to replace lost pavilion facilities. This scheme will look to provide wider landscape improvements, possible visitor facilities, wildlife enhancements and improved access along the riverside path.

**Cozenton Nursery** - An innovative training scheme established through European Social Regeneration Funding (ESF) based in Gillingham. The scheme is a partnership between Greenspaces, Hadlow College, Job Centre Plus and ESF. It has provided horticultural and social skills to over 150 participants enabling some to enter the jobs market for the first time. Cozenton Nursery

has showed how joined up thinking and partnership work can help transform what was a nursery close to closure into a growing business and community interest.

## Appendix 4

### Review of Community Engagement:

#### APPROACH

The approach to public participation and consultation for this strategy was one that Medway Council hoped would determine the views of as many users of play facilities from a wide range of age groups and socio economic backgrounds as possible.

The participation and consultation process was designed so that the following could be determined:

- The views of users of play facilities on the current condition of play facilities in Medway.
- The aspirations of users of play facilities for the future development of play provision in Medway.

The key users of play facilities were identified as children up to 10 years old, young people between the ages of 11 and 19 years old and parents of children and young people. The following methods were used to engage with these users during the process:

- ***Play Area Assessment- questionnaire survey***
- ***Observational and interview research***
- Your Thoughts on Your Open Spaces - a consultation for 11-19 year olds

#### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

## **Play Area Assessment- questionnaire survey**

The location, accessibility and safety of play areas were considered to be the most important qualities for open spaces. Overall the Play Areas User Survey suggested that users feel the variety, quality, condition and cleanliness of play areas and equipment is poor. The only aspect the users felt was generally adequate was the layout of play spaces.

## **Observational and interview research**

The total number of interviews was 86 of which 1 was invalid.

The consultant made specific efforts to ensure that female children and male parents were interviewed, and some interviewees were found by knocking on doors, rather than waiting for those who could be sent. The aim then was to find children who were not allowed out to play and therefore could not be interviewed by meeting them by chance.

The following is a summary of the findings related to this work:

- The travel distances for children as indicated in the NPFA standard do not reflect the increasing restrictions on children's freedom to play out. The catchments in the Medway play areas are therefore an over-estimate of the dwellings served by each play area.
- The design and layout of residential areas and in particular the road and footpath layout significantly affect children's ability to play out.
- Roads which have traffic travelling at fast (compared to walking) speeds prevent children being allowed to play out or act as significant barriers to them accessing their nearest play area.
- Parents and children value open space close to and within sight of their homes.
- Where play places are open, visible and can be safely accessed then children use and value them and do so from a young age as children traditionally have.
- Girls continue to be more restricted than boys in their freedom to play out.
- The use of GIS to calculate catchment by travel distance is a useful new tool. It does however need to be used in consultation with local children and parents to discover what barriers (and possible additional access routes) exist which are not immediately apparent from the plans alone. Such barriers are likely to include roads and visual isolation of the site.

- The findings of this report may assist in further understanding of the site assessments previously carried out. They may also help to explain why some play areas in Medway are well used and therefore the equipment becomes worn and contrast it with areas which are less popular but the equipment becomes damaged.

### **Your Thoughts on Your Open Spaces-a consultation for 11-19 year olds**

The average age of respondents was 14 years old. Respondents were split roughly 50/50 between male and female.

The following is a summary of the key findings from the consultation with young people:

- More than half of respondents visit open spaces once a week or more.
  - Young people usually walk to open spaces but a large number also cycle.
- Two thirds of respondents take less than 10 minutes to get to the open space that they use most often. The remainder take between 11 and 20mins to get to the open space that they use most often.
- Half of the respondents rated their local open space as 'good' or 'very good'. Over a third of respondents rated their local open space as 'ok'.
  - More than half of respondents feel that open spaces are an important aspect of their every day life.
  - Over half of respondents feel unsafe when they use open spaces.
  - The most preferred facilities were wheel parks, MUGA's (basketball and football) and teenage shelters.
  - Male respondents were much more vocal than the females about the types of facilities that should be provided but the majority of girls stated that they would like somewhere to sit and 'hangout'. Youth shelters were therefore a popular choice.
  - There was concern from some of the discussion groups that in the past decisions had been made by the council about what facilities should be provided and they felt they should be involved more.
  - A significant number of participants (particularly the skaters) highlighted the Millennium Park in Maidstone as the type of facility they would like built in Medway.

## Appendix 5: Play Space Typology

TYOLOGY	DESCRIPTION	SIZE	TRAVEL DISTANCE	EQUIPMENT
<b>DOORSTEP</b>	A small amount of equipment focussing on seating and informal play space catering for mainly 4-6 year old children	100m <sup>2</sup> with at least a 5 metre buffer zone	100m	None required but seating, planting and small items of equipment should be considered.
<b>LOCAL</b>	Provision mainly for 4-8 year old children	400m <sup>2</sup> with at least a 20 metre buffer zone	400m	5 or more but greater flexibility than NPFA. Good design seen as main priority.
<b>NEIGHBOURHOOD</b>	Provision mainly for 4-19 year olds	1000m <sup>2</sup> with at least a 50 metre buffer zone	400m for 4-8 year olds and 1000m for young people	8 or more but greater flexibility than NPFA. Good design seen as main priority.
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Provision mainly for 4-19 year olds with a significant range of equipment and very high play value	Approx 2500-4000m <sup>2</sup> with at least a 50 metre buffer zone	4 km	10 or more including provision for young people.
<b>TEENAGE</b>	Provision for 9-19 year olds either as part of a NEAP or in isolation from younger children's facilities.	Approx 600m <sup>2</sup> (dependant on facility type) with at least a 50 metre buffer zone.	1000m (or up to 2000m for a large destination facility. Young people are likely to travel longer distances to facilities on skate board, bike, bus etc)	No specific requirement – to be informed by local needs. Could include wheel parks, MUGAs, sports walls etc. May include provision of a seating area.

## APPENDIX 6: PLAY SPACE PROVISION IN MEDWAY BY WARD

Shortfall ranking (1 being the largest shortfall) Score out of a total of ??	Ward	Total current equipped play space provision (ha)	NPFA requirement (0.2ha per 1000)	Total equipped play space (NPFA) shortfall (ha)	New Teenage Play Provision Req. (0.06 ha per 1000 pop.)	TPP Shortfall (ha)	Proposed projects (Teenage)	Proposed projects (Younger children)	Proposed (approx) increase of provision-Teenage facilities (ha)	Proposed (approx) increase of provision-Young children's facilities (ha)	Total proposed increase in provision (approx)
2	Chatham Central	0.34	2.93	2.59	0.87	0.82	-	-	-	-	-
21	Cuxton and Halling	0.31	1.05	0.64	0.31	0.29	-	-	-	-	-
19	Gillingham North	2.31	2.95	0.95	0.88	0.47	Hillyfields project-TBC	Hillyfields project (significant play area improvements)	0.06	-	0.06
1	Gillingham South	0.26	3.14	2.88	0.9	0.84	-	-	-	-	-
17	Hempstead and Wigmore	0.54	1.64	1.1	0.49	0.47	-	-	-	-	-
15	Lordswood and Capstone	0.31	1.89	1.58	0.57	0.52		Whimbrel Walk requires quality improvements	-	-	-
3	Luton and Wayfield	0.29	2.72	2.43	0.81	0.68	Barnfield Rec ball court improvements	Barnfield Rec Refurb existing children's play area	-	-	0.16
12	Peninsula	0.68	2.35	1.85	0.75	0.64	Hoo Rec ball court		0.06	-	0.06
10	Princes Park	0.09	2.07	1.96	0.61	0.58	Princes Park Open Space project-TBC	Princes Park Open Space project-TBC	0.06	0.04	0.1

7	Rainham Central	0.34	2.52	2.18	0.75	0.73	-	-	-	-	-
18	Rainham North	0.77	1.73	0.96	0.51	0.49	Cozenton Wheel Park	Riverside Country Park destination play facility	0.08	0.05	0.13
-4	Rainham South	0.52	2.81	2.29	0.84	0.8	Parkwood Green wheel park and ball court	Parkwood Green- requires quality improvements	-	-	-
22	River	0.79	1.39	0.6	0.42	0.39	Jacksons wheel Park	Jacksons Rec destination play facility	0.06	0.2	0.21
11	Rochester East	0.06	1.91	1.85	0.57	0.57	-	Copperfields requires quality improvements	-	-	-
6	Rochester Sth and Horsted	0.2	2.48	2.23	0.74	0.74	-	-	-	-	-
14	Rochester West	0.22	1.94	1.72	0.58	0.58	Borstal Rec TBC	Borstal Rec TBC	0.06	-	0.06
9	Strood North	0.69	2.65	1.98	0.79	0.65	Broomhill Park TBC	Broomhill Park TBC	0.06	-	0.06
8	Strood Rural	0.27	2.41	2.14	0.72	0.68	Cliffe Woods wheel park	-	0.06	-	0.06
5	Strood South	0.61	2.84	2.28	0.85	0.83	Rede Common BMX track	-	0.06	-	0.06
16	Twydall	1.49	2.65	1.16	0.79	0.68	Beechings Rec wheel park improvements	Vinall Park requires quality improvements	-	-	-
13	Walderslade	0.06	1.85	1.79	0.55	0.55	Chestnut Ave ball games area	Hook Meadow children's play area refurb	0.06	-	-
20	Watling	0.22	1.17	0.74	0.35	0.35	-	-	0.06	-	-
	TOTAL	11.35	49.27	37.92	14.7	13.35	-	-	0.79	0.39	1.14

## APPENDIX 7: Quality scores

Site	Quality Score
Hazlemere Drive	4
Vinall Park	4
Moonstone Drive	4
Hamilton Road	5
Hillyfields	5
Coplins Kick About Area	5
Parkwood Green	5
Whimbrel Walk	6
Capstone (Upper site)	6
Barnfield	6
Princes Park	6
Hook Meadow	8
Holding Street	8
Crestway	10
Winchester Way	10
Copperfields	10
Otway Street	10
Whitegate Wood	10
Luton Millenium Green	10
Edwards Close (COVENANT)	10
The old orchard	10
Craigie Walk	10
Sanctuary Road	10
Lyll Way	10
Hoo Common	10
Teynham Green	10

## APPENDIX 8: Design guidance for teenage play facility projects

### Design guidance for teenage play facility projects

- The site should be located in an area that is safely accessible by foot, bicycle or public transport.
- Design that encourages informal supervision of facilities is essential. Facilities should be positioned where they will be overlooked by pedestrian routes, roads and housing. However a buffer zone of 30 metres minimum depth should be provided between the activity zone and the boundary of the nearest property containing a dwelling. A greater distance may be required for wheel parks.
- The site should be well drained.
- Leaf fall on surfaces (wheel parks) can be hazardous. Positioning of facilities should take this in to consideration.
- Facilities should be positioned beside a hard surface pedestrian pathway as soil and mud on surfaces can be hazardous.
- Emergency access for vehicles such as ambulances is essential.
- Teenage shelters should only be provided alongside sport/play facilities.
- Additional ancillary items are recommended in conjunction with facilities:
  - Fencing (essential for wheel parks-see PAS 35 document)
  - Seating
  - Lighting
  - Litter bins
- Signage (essential for wheel parks-see PAS 35 document).

Reference documents include:

- British Standard PAS 35 (2001) Specification for Wheeled Sports Facilities
- ~~National Playing Fields Association Six Acre Standard recommendations (Medway Local Plan adopted standard for play facilities).~~

## APPENDIX 9: Facilities for 4-8 year olds

Site	Description	Capital costs
Barnfield Rec	Refurbishment existing children's play area	Approx £200k
Borstal Rec	TBC	
Broomhill, Strood	Refurbishment of existing children's play area	£150k
Capstone (upper)	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Copperfields	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Hamilton Road	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Hazlemere Drive	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Hillyfields, Gillingham	Complete refurbishment of existing facility with significant landscape improvements.	£360,000-funding secured
Holding Street	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Hook Meadow	Refurbishment of existing children's play area	£200k
Jackson's Recreation Ground, Rochester	Refurbishment and extension to existing play facility creating a large destination play area with equipment for accessible play.	£200k
Luton Millenium Green	Refurbish and reopen	£200k
Luton Rec	Increase size of children's play area to NEAP standard	Approx £150k
Mill Road, Gillingham	Improvements to existing play area and installation of a new hard surfaced ball games area. PROJECT COMPLETE	£50,000 funding secured
Moonstone Drive	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Parkwood Green, Rainham	Improvements to quality of existing children's play area, installation of new small skate ramps and improvements to ball games area.	£50,000
Princes Park Open Space project	TBC	TBC
Princes Park play area	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Riverside Country Park, Gillingham	Extension to existing play area focussing on a 'natural play' theme in keeping with the character of the country park.	£130k
Capstone Country Park-Upper Play Area	Extension to existing play area focussing on a 'natural play' and adventure play theme in keeping with the character of the country park.	£200k
Teynham Green	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Vinall Park	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k
Whimbrel Walk	Requires quality improvements	Approx £100k

## APPENDIX 10: Facilities for 9-19 year olds

Site	DESCRIPTION	Approx capital costs
Barnfield Recreation Ground, Chatham	Improvements to existing teenage facilities (ball court)	£50,000
Beechings Rec	Wheel Park improvements	£20,000
Borstal Recreation Ground, Rochester	(facility subject to wider site project plan)	TBC
Broomhill Park, Strood	TBC	TBC
Chestnut Avenue open space	New ball games area	£50,000 (Funding secured)
Cliffe Woods Rec	TBC	£50,000
Coplins estate, Gillingham	Improvements to existing ball court	£50,000
Cozenton Park, Rainham	Large 'destination' wheel park facility	£250,000 (BLF bid)
Hillyfields, Gillingham	(facility subject to wider site project plan)	TBC
Hoo Rec	Ball court	£50-100,000 (Parish Council project)
Hook Meadow, Walderslade	Ball court	£100,000 (Funding secured)
Jackson's Recreation Ground, Rochester	Medium-large wheel park facility	£200,000 (Funding secured)
Lordswood (shopping precinct)	Multi Use Games Area	£150,000 (COMPLETE)
Luton recreation Ground	(facility subject to wider site project plan)	£50,000
Mill Road play area, Gillingham	Multi Use Games area teenage shelter	£50,000 (Project complete)
Parkwood Green, Gillingham	Improvements to existing ball court Additional small wheel park facility	£100,000
Princes Park Open Space project	TBC	TBC
Rainham Rec	Ball court improvements	TBC
Rede Common, Strood	BMX track	£20,000

## APPENDIX 10: References

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