



Redditch Borough Parks & Open Spaces Strategy 2022



people spaces places

Redditch Borough

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

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Redditch Borough

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

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1 About Redditch Borough

Redditch Borough is located within the County of Worcestershire and borders Warwickshire County to the east and southeast. It is surrounded by Bromsgrove District to the west and north, Stratford-on-Avon District to the east and southeast and Wychavon District to the southwest.

The Borough is situated at the outer edge of the Green Belt boundary for the West Midlands. Redditch offers easy access to the countryside and prominent local areas, including culturally rich areas such as Stratford-upon-Avon and naturally rich areas such as the Cotswolds. The Borough lies 15 miles south of the Birmingham conurbation and Birmingham airport is approximately 25 minutes' drive time away.

Redditch Borough covers an area of 5,435 hectares (13,430 acres) and consists of the main town of Redditch, the villages of Astwood Bank and Feckenham and several other hamlets.

The Borough is split into the urban area of Redditch in the north, accounting for 50% of the area and 93% of the population; and the rural area to the south with 7% of the population. The rural area consists predominantly of Green Belt land, but also open countryside, as well as the villages of Astwood Bank and Feckenham.

Redditch was formerly a market town until 1964 when it was designated as a New Town; a status it maintained up until 1985. During this period, the Redditch Development Corporation was responsible for the growth of Redditch, predominantly to the east of the town.

The 2011 Census shows that Redditch Borough had a resident population of 84,214 and Mid-Year Populations estimates suggest that the borough population has increased to 85,199 in 2022. The population is forecast to reach 86,293 by 2043.

Redditch has a population with a similar age profile to the national average. The population of Redditch is the most ethnically diverse in Worcestershire. The Central and Batchley wards are the most diverse areas of the borough.

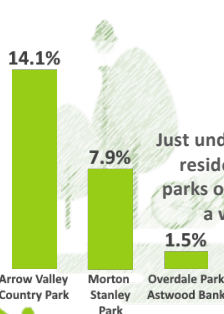
There are higher levels of economic activity in Redditch than the national average, however, Redditch has lower levels of qualifications and lower wages than both the regional and national averages.

Overall, Redditch has levels of deprivation in line with the national average according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019). Around a quarter (of the 55) Lower Level Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the borough are within the most deprived 20% nationally. The most deprived areas are parts of Church Hill, Batchley, Abbeydale and Woodrow which are in the top 10% most deprived nationally.

Whilst levels of physical activity in Redditch are in line with the national average for adults, and marginally higher than the national average for children and young people, there are an estimated 21,100 people undertaking significantly less than the recommended level of physical activity, at an estimated cost of £6.2 million.

The Figure below provides an overview of Redditch Borough's demographics.

Redditch Demographics



The top 5 reasons for visiting parks and open spaces in Redditch are:



Just under one quarter of residents visit these parks or open spaces on a weekly basis

Total population
85,261

Population increased by **1.2%** since 2011

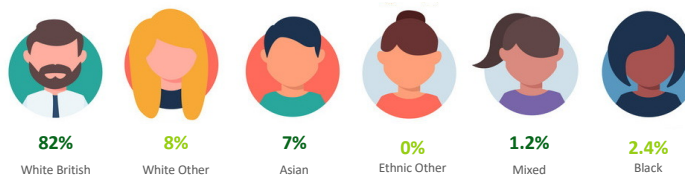
Projected population increase of **0.2%** per year

Redditch's population is ageing, with estimates that by 2029 **21%** will be aged 65+ with **6.3%** aged over 85

Gender split: Male 50%, Female 49%

Profile

The population of Redditch is predominantly White British
1 in 10 residents are from Black, Asian or Minority groups



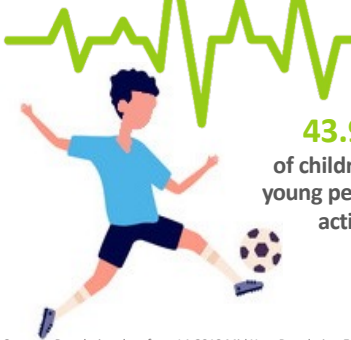
Deprivation

The 326 local authority districts in England are ranked for each domain, with 1 indicating the most deprived and 326 the least deprived. Redditch experiences a well-above average living environment, but above average barriers to housing and services and health deprivation and disability



£85.2% of 16-64 year olds are 'economically active' above national average of **£79.1%**

Health



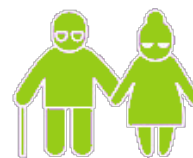
There are an estimated **21,100 people** undertaking significantly less than the recommended level of physical activity.

43.9% of children and young people are active



60.6% adults are active

Life expectancy at birth is in line with national averages



79.2 males

83.5 females

Sources: Population data from LA 2019 Mid Year Population Estimates (ONS)
BAME population data from 2016 estimates and Census 2011 (ONS)
Deprivation data from English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (ONS)
Economic data from NOMIS "Employment and Unemployment (Jan 2020-Dec 2020) (ONS)
Life Expectancy data from Public Health Profiles 2021
Activity data from Active Lives 2020 (Sport England)
Parks data from Redditch Community Survey 2020



2 Vision & Aims

2.1 Our Vision for Leisure, Heritage, Culture and Greenspace

We recognise what our communities have told us about leisure and culture provision: it is important to our places, it shapes identity and creativity, reduces health inequalities, and improves well-being and quality of life for our communities. Provision of good quality, sustainable and green leisure and culture services will also contribute positively to our net carbon reduction targets and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Our communities have also told us they want to be more involved in our leisure and culture provision - as participants, volunteers and deliverers. They want to see greater partnership working with the community and have more involvement in what is provided.

Redditch Borough Council wants to ensure provision of good quality leisure and culture services, which are sustainable, contribute to community health, are affordable, and meet local need.

Reflecting the above, our Vision for leisure and culture provision in Redditch is set out in the table below.

Vision
Healthier and happier communities actively engaged in leisure and culture
Aim
To improve community health and wellbeing through inclusive access to parks, open spaces, sport, physical activity, arts, heritage, culture and everyday creativity. This way we will inspire our communities to lead longer, happier, healthier and more successful lives.
Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To inspire residents and build their confidence to be more active and creative;• To work with partners to identify and remove the barriers to being safely involved with parks and open spaces, sport, physical activity, arts, culture, heritage, and events to improve health and wellbeing;

- To facilitate better connectivity between historic places, vibrant open spaces, culture and leisure facilities;
- To build the confidence and pride of individuals and communities through active participation and volunteering;
- To create improved collaborative and resident-engaged projects which focus on celebrating the relationship communities have with their landscape, culture and heritage;
- To build a healthy community that enables success in education, training and the workplace;
- To reduce the long-term financial pressures on our public services by getting communities more active, creative, and better connected to our natural environment;
- To manage, develop and maintain a biodiverse, and environmentally sustainable network of spaces and places contributing positively to reducing the impact of climate change;
- To generate a high profile, safe, inclusive, well-connected and managed network of active travel networks, green and blue corridors, heritage trails, leisure and culture facilities;
- To connect home grown talent with local employment and volunteering opportunities;
- To facilitate a vibrant, commercially viable and growing visitor and tourism economy;
- To better connect business with the leisure and culture sector; and;
- To adopt creative placemaking and active travel strategies.

2.2 Parks and Open Spaces Aims

Within the overall vision for leisure, culture, and open space this parks and open space strategy sets out the following aims:

- We will protect, enhance and promote our parks and open spaces;
- We will work to reduce inequalities in open space provision in terms of quality, accessibility and quantity;

- We will protect and enhance biodiversity and deliver Biodiversity Net Gain through the planning system and processes;
- We will work with partners to deliver a plan for nature recovery;
- We will manage our parks and open spaces as green infrastructure that contributes to the goals of climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- We will contribute to improving health and wellbeing of our communities through the management and provision of our parks and open spaces;
- We will provide a greater range of opportunities for all communities across the borough to participate and help activate our parks and green spaces;
- We will play a key role in developing and supporting partnerships that protect and enhance the green environment across the borough and the wider region.

3 Key drivers

3.1 *Why Parks and Open Spaces are Important*

High quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value. They are also highly valued by local people. Research¹ carried out by CABE Space suggested that 85% of people believed that the quality of public space and the built environment has a direct impact on their lives and the way they feel.

The State of UK Parks research published by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2014 and in 2016 found:

- Parks are used regularly by 37 million people in UK;
- With 57% of adults use parks at least once per month;
- Rising to 83% of households with children under 5 visit their park at least once a month;
- 2.6 billion visits made to UKs parks each year;
- £50 million raised annually by friends / user groups;
- £70 million annual value of volunteering.

As a result of the pandemic, there has been increased recognition of the value of parks and open spaces, which provided one of the few safe spaces where people could exercise and leave their own homes during lockdowns.

The health benefits of green spaces have been intuitively known by communities for a long period of time. In recent years there a substantial body of evidence has been produced which demonstrates the idea that parks and open spaces are integral for both our physical and mental health. Good access to open spaces can help support increased levels of physical activity leading to beneficial health outcomes (including reduced prevalence of dementia, cardiovascular disease,

¹ CABE Space (2004) The Value of Public Space

type two diabetes, breast cancer and hip fractures). Public Health England recently published “Improving access to greenspace - A new review for 2020” which provides an excellent overview.

Access to open spaces can also bring significant benefits in terms of mental health with evidence suggesting higher levels of life satisfaction; lower levels of self-reported stress; and lower levels of anxiety and depression. Contact with nature, or ‘natural connectedness’ improves mental health and provides us with a happier life, a worthwhile life, and a life without illbeing.

Well managed and accessible parks and green spaces, with programmes of activity to engage residents can be an effective part of a Whole System Approach to improved health outcomes. Indeed, public parks owe their existence to the recognition to improve the health of urban communities. In 1833 a report to parliament highlighted the benefits parks could bring to urban society. In 1848 the Public Health Act recognised that money spent on improving public health would save money in the long term.

3.2 External Factors Driving Change

3.2.1 Climate Crisis

The United Nations has declared that climate change is the defining crisis of our time, and it is happening even more quickly than we feared. Global temperatures are rising because of human activity releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This is already producing weather extremes and disasters that are becoming more intense and more frequent. This threatens food and water security globally and climate change is a major threat to international peace and security. Biodiversity across the globe is also threatened and this is exacerbated by climate change.

A report about the climate of the UK published in 2020 reveals that the most recent decade (2010 – 2019) has been on average 0.9 degrees Celsius warmer across the UK than the period 1961 – 1990. This warming has been predicted to increase, with the Met Office predicting that by 2070, winters will be between 1 and 4.5 degrees Celsius warmer and up to 30% wetter and summers will be between 1 and 6 degrees warmer and up to 60% drier.

The Independent Assessment of UK Climate Change Risk has just published its conclusions that continued change in the UK’s climate should be expected and that “very long-lasting policy and investment decisions being made today need to consider a wide range of changes in climate for the second half of the century”.

Urban areas are already 4 degrees warmer than surrounding areas a phenomenon known as the urban heat island effect. Climate change is likely to lead to more extreme weather events that will make towns and cities harder places to live.

3.2.2 Air Pollution

Air pollution is the biggest environmental threat to health in the UK, with between 28,000 and 36,000 deaths a year attributed to long-term exposure². There is strong evidence that air pollution causes the development of coronary heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and lung cancer, and exacerbates asthma. Children in high pollution areas are 4 times more likely to have reduced lung function when they become an adult.

Trees, parks and open spaces play an important role in helping to reduce air pollution by providing shade and reducing air temperatures in urban areas, directly removing pollutants and storing carbon.

3.2.3 Ecological Crisis

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in Europe because of industry, building and farming. It is estimated that over half of all biodiversity has been lost. While the UK has made some gains, natural landscapes have been so heavily degraded over decades and centuries that we are simply not doing enough to turn back the tide.

A recent UK Government report found that against 24 key biodiversity indicators, 14 are in long-term decline, including UK habitats of European importance, the abundance and distribution of priority species, along with farmland and woodland birds.

² Public Health England (2019) - Review of interventions to improve outdoor air quality and public health

3.2.4 Covid-19

The National Lottery Heritage Fund³ recognise that *“free-to-enter urban public parks and green spaces have been a lifeline for many during the pandemic and continue to be so during the current cost of living crisis”*.

Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns has had an impact with nearly half of people (46%) stating that that they were spending more time outside than they had previously. But some 60% of children were found to have spent less time outdoors.

The 2021 Redditch Community Survey found that older residents within the borough had tended to use parks and open spaces less frequently than in previous years.

National research indicated that Covid-19 has demonstrated the inequitable provision of green spaces and that urban populations often have less access to nature.

3.3 **National Policy Context**

3.3.1 *The UK Government 25 Year Environment Strategy*

“Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together.

“In the most deprived areas of England, people tend to have the poorest health and significantly less green space than wealthier areas. . . . Our aim is for more people, from all backgrounds, to engage with and spend time in green and blue spaces in their everyday lives.”

The UK Environment Bill was adopted in 2022 and this introduces:

³ National Lottery Heritage Fund (2022) – Evidence submitted to The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

- A mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain in the planning system, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and create new green spaces for local communities to enjoy. The requirements will supplement, but not replace or undermine, existing protections for protected sites or irreplaceable habitats.
- A requirement for the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies across England. Local Nature Recovery Strategies will help local authorities and other public bodies identify priorities and opportunities for conserving and enhancing nature. Whilst government will provide data, guidance and support for the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, each one will be produced locally ensuring local ownership and knowledge is embraced, and strategies are consistent and link together across England.

3.3.2 Public Health England Strategy (2020 – 2025)

Published by Public Health England in September 2019, the strategy sets out Public Health England's priorities for the next 5 years to deliver its key aims of keeping people safe, preventing poor health, narrowing the health gap and supporting a strong economy. The strategy sets out three key themes:

- Healthier diets, healthier weight;
- Better mental health;
- Best start in life.

3.3.3 Levelling Up the United Kingdom (2022)

The Levelling Up Agenda is a key national policy that recognises that there are significant geographical inequalities in economic, social and environmental outcomes. To genuinely 'level up' the country and tackle inequalities, there needs to be a recognition of the contribution of parks to supporting key national and local objectives, such as improving public health, carbon capture, increasing biodiversity, and enabling every child to be active.

In the Levelling Up White Paper the government promises to 'radically expand investment in parks'; however, just £30m has been provided to fund initiatives in thirty parks nationwide. This funding is relatively small scale and what has been provided is capital, rather than revenue funding which is needed to deliver and sustain long-term change.

3.4 Internal Factors

3.4.1 Redditch Borough Council Plan (2020-24)

Our vision is to enrich the lives and aspirations of all our residents, businesses, and visitors through the provision of high-quality services, ensuring that all in need receive appropriate help and support.

Purposes

- Run & grow a successful business;
- Finding somewhere to live;
- Aspiration, work & financial independence;
- Living independent, active & healthy lives;
- Communities which are safe, well-maintained & green.

Priorities

- Economic development & regeneration;
- Housing growth;
- Skills (young people & businesses);
- Improved health & wellbeing;
- Community safety & antisocial behaviour.

The Plan states that *"a green thread runs throughout our purposes and priorities"*.

Working to these purposes will help us to understand the needs of the borough and how, together with our partners, we can improve the lives of our residents & the prospects for Redditch Borough as a whole.

3.4.2 Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 (Adopted 2017)

The Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) has provided a foundation to develop a Vision for the Local Plan, specifically the Vision and priorities of the SCS have been considered in the formulation of the Local Plan's Vision. The SCS is built around a shared vision for the Borough. It

is envisaged that by 2030: *“Redditch will be successful and vibrant with communities that have access to good job opportunities, good education, good health and are communities that people will be proud to live and work in.”*

To deliver the Vision a set of 13 non-prioritised Objectives have been developed that reflect the aspirations of the vision and provide direction for the Local Plan policies. Those directly impacting parks and open spaces are:

1. To maintain and provide a high quality natural, rural, and historic environment with a multifunctional Green Infrastructure network which maximises opportunities for enhancing biodiversity value, wildlife, and ecological connectivity.
2. To ensure that all new development in Redditch Borough will work towards the achievement of being carbon neutral in line with the National Standards.
3. To reduce the causes of, minimise the impacts of and adapt to climate change.
4. To protect, promote and where possible enhance the quality of the Borough’s landscape and Redditch Borough’s other distinctive features.
5. To encourage safer, sustainable travel patterns, improve accessibility and maintain a balanced road hierarchy and reduce the need to travel.

And:

11. To protect and enhance water, air and soil and minimise flood risk.
12. Ensuring there is a range of health facilities that support existing and new communities and to promote the role of healthy living through good planning.

The Local Plan also states that *“Open space can perform a range of functions and as such makes a significant contribution to the Green Infrastructure (GI) network of the Borough. It is an invaluable formal and informal recreational resource, is beneficial for nature conservation and has a bearing on people’s quality of life. Policies 12, 13 and 14 ensure the protection of existing open space (both designated and incidental) and require the creation of new open space as part of new development, thereby helping to achieve this Plan’s Vision and Objectives to have a high-quality natural environment and to improve leisure opportunities”.*

3.4.3 Political Drivers

As part of the development of the strategy several engagement sessions were delivered with elected members to gain their views and establish some sense of direction for open spaces and their relationship to overarching council policy.

Some key quotes that relate directly to the key themes and drivers of this strategy are:

"We ought to be doing minimum events – they should be a conduit for the community"

"It is not the council's job to do events"

"People want to get involved"

Members also recognised that quantity of green space was not an issue but that quality across the Borough is variable.

3.4.4 Financial Drivers

Revenue

In recent years most local authorities have seen very significant reductions in revenue budgets for parks and greenspaces

The 2021 State of UK Parks report by APSE and CFP showed that around £190m had been lost from parks revenue budgets between 2016/17 and 2021/22

Others have also been hit hard by commercial losses due to the impacts of Covid-19.

The 2020 work by the Local Government Association and the National Lottery Heritage Fund showed that as much as 87% of external income had been lost due to Covid-19

Redditch Borough Council's Park service has experienced a reduction in the size of the team as a result of sharing services with Bromsgrove District Council. However, it has largely escaped the impacts of both austerity and Covid-19 when it comes to their annual revenue budget(s). There have been some losses of income around cancelled events during the pandemic, but these have

been more than offset by savings in not running the events programme in 2020 and reduced delivery in 2021. Likewise, the future financial pressure that most council's parks services are facing.

The 2021 State of UK Parks report showed that 61% of councils were expecting their parks revenue budget to decrease with around 39% expecting cuts of greater than 10%.

This has not translated to Redditch Borough Council's parks services which has had a relatively stable budget over the past three years is expected to remain so for the foreseeable future.

To balance the books most local authorities are looking at commercial income from cafés or events and activities. In Redditch Borough this is limited to around £12k of events income from sales or other income.

Capital

Capital funding is sourced through central capital programmes and through section 106 monies from housing developments and the authorities have significant sums to deploy here for green space improvements.

The other sources of income that are used by local authority parks services are grant aid e.g. lottery funding, which is largely for specific projects. In Redditch Borough, there has been investment in Arrow Valley Country Park with the redevelopment of the play area and amphitheatre and a new BMX Pump Track.

3.4.5 Community Drivers

Recent consultation in Redditch Borough has shown that about nearly seven out of ten (69.6%) of respondents to the 2019 Community Survey consider parks and open spaces in the Borough are good / very good. However, levels of dissatisfaction are higher among respondents from certain wards. Most notably, one in seven respondents from Batchley & Brockhill Ward were very dissatisfied with parks and open spaces in their area. In Central Ward, as many respondents were very dissatisfied (5.6%) as were very satisfied. (5.6%).

Satisfaction levels with play provision were typically lower at 40.4% (very good / good / adequate) than satisfaction levels for parks and open spaces.

The community places a high value on green space provision – the top values are:

- providing green lungs for the borough (99.2%)
- providing contact with nature, wildlife, and seasonal change (98.5%)
- somewhere to improve my mental and physical wellbeing (97.3%),
- A safe place for children and young people to develop independence (95.9%)
- a safe walking or cycling route (94.8%)

Residents also commented about the maintenance of parks, adding there was poor landscaping and litter, as well as little enforcement regarding litter, aggressive dogs and their mess. Several also said they tended to visit during daylight when it felt safer.

4 Analysis & Recommendations

This section brings together the findings of the various reviews, assessments, conversations and consultation that has taken place over the past year in the development of the strategy. The evidence based used has included:

- Open space mapping including analyses of quantity and accessibility – and highlights that some settlements lack access to particular types of open space provision;
- Green Flag Assessments - As part of the development of the management plans detailed site assessments were carried out by experienced Green Flag Award judges. Individual site recommendations are picked up in each plan and this strategy seeks to identify generic or council wide issues where the authorities need to make improvements to service delivery to raise the standards;
- Community consultation – in 2021 a community survey was undertaken, and results have been compared with 2018 and 2019 surveys;
- Elected member consultation events – consultants ran member workshops in 2022 and held specific meetings with senior politicians;
- Events analysis – looking at budgets, attendance, satisfaction and community views;
- Financial analysis – external funding secured, recent budgetary changes;
- Ongoing dialogue through the project steering group and individual officer and group consultation sessions;
- The Allotment Research Project (2019) found that the level of provision of allotments was marginally above the recommended national standard. There appears to be some unmet demand for allotments in some wards in the borough.

4.1 *The Big Issues*

4.1.1 *Biodiversity and Nature Recovery*

Worcestershire, like much of the UK, has suffered huge losses of natural habitats and species. The Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (2018-2027) identifies 17 habitats and 26 species which are of conservation priority in the county. Redditch Borough Council is committed to working with partners at a local and country-wide level to deliver the priorities set out in the Worcestershire BAP. At a national level there is increased recognition that nature recovery is a priority and Biodiversity Net Gain is now a requirement following the adoption of the Environment Bill in 2022.

Redditch Borough contains some key sites that are important for priority habitats and species, notably brown hair streak butterfly, great crested newts and slow worms. Whilst there has been some positive action in the past, and new initiatives such as reducing grass cutting in specific areas to support pollinators have been introduced, there is currently a lack of up-to-date survey information and no overall plan to drive habitat and species recovery. Nature recovery requires action at a landscape scale and Redditch Borough Council will positively engage in partnership working at a local and county level to deliver greater biodiversity.

This will include enhancing sites designated for nature conservation and other wildlife-rich places, newly created and restored wildlife-rich habitats, corridors and stepping-stones which will help wildlife populations to grow and move. The Council will also seek to improve the landscape's resilience to climate change, providing natural solutions to reduce carbon and manage flood risk, and sustaining vital ecosystems such as improved soil, clean water and clean air. The Council will also reinforce the natural, geological and cultural diversity of our landscapes, and protect our historic natural environment to allow people to enjoy and connect with nature where they live, work and play, in turn bringing health and wellbeing benefits.

The requirement to delivery Biodiversity Net Gain through the planning process, also represents a significant opportunity not only to enhance the habitats within green space but also to potentially secure significant investment.

Recommendation(s)
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop a better understanding of the biodiversity value of the borough's green assets.2. Positively engage in partnership working at a local and county level to improve biodiversity, nature recovery and deliver wildlife-rich landscapes.3. Develop a clear approach to Biodiversity Net Gain and Green Infrastructure to provide a measurable approach to develop and manage land.

4.1.2 Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

Redditch Borough Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and is committed to reducing our carbon emissions and influencing the reduction of carbon emissions in our area. The Council has developed a plan, called the Action to Reduce Carbon (ARC) Plan as route map to 'net zero' for our internal activities, contributing to the 'net zero by 2050' target set by the UK Government.

Parks and Open Spaces can make a positive contribution to carbon reduction, particularly contributing to the ARC plan themes of Transport and Travel, Community and Biodiversity. Parks and open spaces also provide key eco-system services that can help mitigate the impact of climate change. Parks and green infrastructure are significant carbon sinks, help mitigate against the urban heat island effect, slow and hold back excessive rainfall and flooding, and can help reduce air pollution. However, the scale of the contribution of the boroughs nearly 1,000 hectares of open space is not currently known. Further work to explore the opportunities for changes in landscape management and maintenance to deliver additional gains should also be explored. This should feed into to the development of climate change strategy in the near future.

Recommendation(s)

- 4. Carry out a natural capital assessment of the value of the borough’s parks and open spaces.
- 5. Develop a plan to identify priorities for delivering further carbon capture and natural capitals gains.

4.1.3 Health and Wellbeing

Overall, residents of Redditch Borough enjoy health outcomes broadly in line with the national average. Whilst nearly half the population of children and young people are active, data shows that there are 21,100 people that are undertaking significantly less than the recommended level of physical activity. Parks and open spaces provide accessible, free to use facilities for walking, jogging and informal sports. The Council should consider targeted interventions at those neighbourhoods and wards that have the lowest health outcomes and lower levels of physical activity.

Recommendation(s)

- 6. Develop targeted programmes of activity in parks and open spaces that contribute to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.

4.1.4 Planning and Development

The population of the borough is predicted to remain relatively static over the period to 2030, increasing only slightly to 2043. However, development within the borough provides the

opportunity to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain, introduced as a statutory requirement through the Environment Act 2022. Redditch Borough Council as a major landowner, can provide land for Biodiversity Net Gain where this cannot be delivered onsite as part of the development. This is a new process and it is recommended that a pilot project is developed to apply the principles of Biodiversity Net Gain and to test and refine the approaches in practice.

The Open Space Study for Redditch Borough, carried out in parallel with the development of this strategy considers the supply of open space by ward and identifies deficiencies in the accessibility and quantity of particular types of open space.

Overall, there is a good level of access to some form of open space at a local level. Within Redditch all residential areas have access to some open space within 400 metres, approximately 10 minutes walking time. Similarly, Astwood Bank and Feckenham (village centres) are reasonably well served by some form of accessible open space provision.

Much of Redditch has good access to natural and semi-natural spaces, or spaces that are managed primarily for biodiversity. Arrow Valley Country Park is also a significant space that can be accessed by all residents. Generally, the level of provision and access to parks and gardens is good, although there is an area of deficiency in West ward. Arrow Valley Country Park is important in providing accessible open space to those resident in central ward (Greenlands, Lodge Park and Winyates).

There are, however, some deficiencies in access to some forms of open space. Outdoor Sports Facilities are not provided in many wards and there appears to be some deficiencies in provision for some sports. More granular level analysis on a sport-by-sport basis is contained in the Playing Pitch Strategy (2022).

Redditch has 43 open spaces with some form of Provision for Children and Young People. This includes equipped and natural play areas at:

- 29 toddler play spaces
- 38 junior play spaces
- 18 teen / adult fitness facilities

There is provision in all wards except for Crabbs Cross. In terms of accessibility, many areas of Redditch have good access within a reasonable walking time. However, some residential areas lack good access to existing provision in particular the following wards: Abbey, Central, Crabbs Cross,

and Headless Cross and Oakenshaw. Consideration should be given to creating new areas of Provision for Children and Young People where there is a demonstrated need. Investment should otherwise be directed to upgrading and enhancing existing facilities. A more detailed is recommended to consider the play value, quality and accessibility of equipped play spaces across the Borough.

Recommendation(s)

- 7. Apply robust approaches to the Local Standards in relation to planning development to address deficiencies in the accessibility and quantity of open spaces across the borough.
- 8. Carry out a detailed assessment of the play value, quality and accessibility of equipped play spaces across the Borough.
- 9. Deliver a pilot project to test how Council managed land can deliver offsite Biodiversity Net Gain through the development process.

4.1.5 Quality of Parks and Open Spaces

There is limited data available about the quality of parks and open spaces. In developing Management and Maintenance Plans for Arrow Valley Country Park, Morton Stanley Park, Overdale Park, Brockhill Park and Batchley Pool quality assessments have been carried out and the findings used to inform the recommendations set out within the management plans. To better develop a future plan for preventative maintenance and investment it is recommended that a larger scale programme of quality assessments is carried out (using the Green Flag Award criteria) with a focus on borough and neighbourhood spaces (85 spaces). Other quality assessments will be required on an ad hoc basis in response to development in the borough to provide evidence for securing offsite planning gain.

4.2 Future Service Delivery

4.2.1 Developing a Capital Investment Plan

This strategy highlights opportunities for investing in parks and open spaces to deliver benefits for the environment, society and people and places. Addressing service wide issues and delivering the recommendations for the priority parks will require planned investment. This capital investment will come through existing resources, planning gain (s106, CIL and Biodiversity Net

Gain), external funding and through the development of new partnerships. New sources of funding are also currently being announced from central government in the form of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other funding associated with Levelling Up. These funding sources often have competitive bidding processes with relatively short timescales. The Council should develop a Capital investment plan that identifies how the key priorities set out in this strategy and the recommendations contained within the Management and Maintenance Plans can be delivered and how it might respond to new opportunities for capital investment.

Redditch is eligible for the Levelling Up Parks Fund announced in August 2022 and has the opportunity to secure £85k for the creation or enhancement of green space in areas where less affluent communities are experiencing deficiencies in the accessibility of natural green space.

Recommendation(s)

- 10. Develop an overall capital investment plan for enhancing parks and open spaces to provide a more strategic approach to the use of s106 funding.
- 11. Develop an application to the Levelling Up Parks Fund by October 2022.

4.2.2 Environmental Management

The management planning assessment work found that the relevant services involved in managing and maintaining the council’s green space do not have a clear strategy to address environmental management. Whilst some good work has been progressed around reducing the use of peat, reducing pesticide use and around green waste there is no overall plan, no baseline assessment and no targets to improve performance in this area.

Recommendation(s)

- 12. Develop an environmental management strategy for parks and environmental services.

4.2.3 Marketing and Promotion

Currently marketing of green spaces is sporadic and inconsistent and would benefit from a thorough review and the development of a new approach to promote the biodiversity and health benefits of the green spaces across the local authority area.

There are good examples of websites that promote parks and open spaces at a county wide scale in [Hertfordshire](#) and [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#).

Networks of parks and open spaces can provide accessible and safe active travel routes that reduce car use and bring health and wellbeing benefits. Redditch through its development as a new town has good green infrastructure and extensive traffic free routes linking parks and open spaces with local neighbourhoods. These should continue to be promoted to encourage active travel as the preferred method for local journeys under 2 miles in line with national government policies.

Recommendation(s)

13. Develop a clear marketing plan for green spaces that includes new web pages, social media and targeted work with key audiences.
14. Promote active travel routes within parks and open spaces.

4.2.4 Community involvement

The engagement of local communities in their local green spaces is a key area of improvement for Redditch Borough Council. The council previously worked with a small number of Friend of Parks groups, but these have all now folded, in part due to a lack of resource to proactively support volunteer activity. There is a well-established mid-week volunteering programme in Redditch focuses on Arrow Valley Country Park, Morton Stanley Park and other semi-natural spaces.

The Council should begin to develop a meaningful dialogue and engagement with its communities and a plan is needed along which clearly sets out roles and responsibilities, levels and sources of support. It is also recommended that dialogue with other organisations who could help the authority commences to develop a stronger partnership approach to improving parks and open spaces across the borough. Being able to demonstrate sound approaches to community involvement is also a requirement of the Green Flag Award.

There are a range of useful resources including ‘How to’ guides available through the National Lottery Heritage Fund “Parks Community UK” (<https://parkscommunity.org.uk>).

Recommendation(s)

- 15. Develop a volunteer plan and a clear approach to working with Friends groups tied to its aspirations for Green Flag Award across its priority parks.

4.2.5 Management of Allotments

Allotments and Community Gardens provide opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion. There are 17 allotment sites across the borough and whilst there may be some gaps in terms of accessibility to allotments in some wards, the level of provision is near national standards.

The allotments sites are currently managed by Redditch Borough Council who manage lettings, non-cultivation, and shared infrastructure. There are local allotment associations at most sites which bring together ploholders. Nationally, there has been a significant shift towards giving allotment associations a greater role and supporting the self-management of allotment sites. This can deliver significant benefits for ploholders, with a greater sense of ownership, quicker response times for addressing issues on site, and reduced levels of vacant plots and non-cultivation. It is recommended that the Borough Council starts a process of investigating the feasibility of transferring allotment sites to local management organisations and starts this process through the delivery of one or more pilot projects. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/>) can provide advice and support to newly established allotment associations and further resources are available online.

Recommendation(s)

- 16. Carry out a feasibility study to establish a roadmap for the self-management of allotment sites across the borough.
- 17. Start a pilot project to explore the process of transfer to self-management and share this learning across the borough.

4.2.6 Signage and Interpretation

Across the key parks and open spaces in the borough there is no consistent approach to signage and interpretation. Even a simple approach based on key visitor arrival and orientation information at primary entrances would be a positive start. Some sites have significant biodiversity and heritage interest which could either be summarised in the welcoming signage or interpreted at the location of interest on site.

Recommendation(s)

18. Develop a consistent approach to signage across all priority parks.
19. Develop engaging interpretation on those sites of significant biodiversity or heritage interest.

4.2.7 Events and activities

The council has for some time been running a programme of subsidised events and activities in parks and in 2021/22 it spent £63k (excluding officer time) on this and generated £48k of income. Officer time has been estimated to be in the region of a further £140k. A typical year of events would be around 12 events, the majority of which take place in Arrow Valley Country Park and Morton Stanley Park. Data suggests the average annual attendance is in the region of 19,000 to 24,700, but no accurate figures exist. Community surveys show that satisfaction with events is low, with around 45% of those surveyed rating events as good or very good. However, there is very limited participant survey data to build an accurate picture.

Directly delivering events within parks and open spaces is a resource intensive process. Participant feedback and qualitative evidence suggests that the events offer is not particularly engaging or innovative and does not necessarily meet the needs of the boroughs' communities.

There is a strong case for the community, voluntary sector and commercial sectors playing a greater role in event planning, management and delivery in the future with the council adopting a more enabling role. Providing funding through a grants programme would support local organisations to develop innovative programmes of activity and help leverage in additional resources through grant and crowdfunding. The council would need to develop support mechanisms to ensure that adequate planning was in place for events and that health and safety

requirements were met, but this has been achieved in other areas. This would mark a key change from the current model of delivery and this strategy recommends that the new model is piloted in 2023/24.

Recommendation(s)

- 20. Pilot an approach to establish a new model for event delivery that allows local organisations to deliver programmes of events and activities.
- 21. Develop programmes of support to increase skills and capacity amongst local organisations and to ensure the successful delivery of new programmes of events and activities.
- 22. Evaluate the success of the pilot projects and implement any required changes to the new delivery model.

4.2.8 Partnership working

The parks and events service needs to develop more partnership working to be more effective in delivering large scale change for green spaces. There are a range of organisations within the county that are potential partners including the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and North Worcestershire Water Management and the Environment Agency. Worcestershire Country Council are also a significant local authority partner that works at a county wide scale to develop policy and strategy particularly around Green Infrastructure and biodiversity. In addition, environmental projects are now being developed at a landscape scale and sub-regionally through the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The National Trust’s 8 Hills concept presents a significant opportunity for biodiversity, climate change and the health and well-being residents of the surrounding area and the authority needs to engage more with its development. There is a need to separate out ‘designation’ and ‘collaboration’, the advantages and disadvantages of designation are not part of the scope of the strategy but the idea of the borough council proactively collaborating with the National Trust and its partners is a principle that should be adopted.

The authority should start collaborating with the National Trust including establishing a Memorandum of Understanding between both organisations which includes provision for:

- Sharing green space mapping data;

- Sharing community consultation results;
- Contributing officer time;
- Planning joint consultation and project related activities.

Recommendation(s)

- 23. Engage more regularly with potential partners at a county wide level.
- 24. Develop a partnership with the National Trust to deliver the 8 Hills project.

4.2.9 Measuring Success

There is a lack of management and performance data relating to the delivery of services around parks and open spaces. The development of a toolkit with a concise set of meaningful key performance indicators would be beneficial and allow progress to be demonstrated.

Recommendation(s)

- 25. Develop service wide Key Performance Indicators to reflect service plan priorities.

4.3 Priority Parks

As part of the preparatory work to develop the Leisure and Culture Strategy the Council identified four key sites as 'priority parks'. These sites are:

- Arrow Valley Country Park
- Morton Stanley Park
- Overdale Park
- Brockhill Park and Batchley Pool

These priority parks each have a Management, Maintenance Plan and a Masterplan in place. These have been developed based on site assessments, discussions with key officers and stakeholders and the results from the wider community consultation.

The Management and Maintenance Plans have a five-year action plan for the council to take forward with a view to improving the management, maintenance and development of each space and securing the national quality standard, the Green Flag Award for each space as part of a rolling programme.

The four priority parks provide accessible green space to local people including those that experience some of the highest levels of deprivation within the borough, tend to be less physically active and experience some of the lowest health outcomes. This includes parts of Church Hill, Batchley, Redditch Town Centre, Smallwood, St George’s, Winyates, Matchborough, Woodrow and Oakenshaw. Enhancing the range of provision, activity programmes, developing community involvement and volunteer participation and delivering the recommendations set out in the Management and Maintenance Plans will contribute to delivering positive outcomes for some of the communities experiencing disadvantage and would be consistent with the national policy of targeted intervention through ‘Levelling Up’.

Recommendation(s)

26. Develop a rolling programme of applications to the Green Flag Award:

- Morton Stanley Park (2023)
- Arrow Valley Country Park (2024)
- Overdale Park (2025)
- Brockhill Park & Batchley Pool (2026)

5 Action Plan

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
1. Develop a better understanding of the biodiversity value of the borough's green assets.	✓	✓				Parks Development Officer	Planning / WCC	Staff time
2. Positively engage in partnership working at a local and county level to improve biodiversity, nature recovery and deliver wildlife-rich landscapes.	✓	✓				Parks and Events Manager / Parks Development Officer	WCC / Worcestershire Wildlife Trust	Staff time
3. Develop a clear approach to Biodiversity Net Gain and Green Infrastructure to provide a measurable approach to develop and manage land.		✓	✓			Parks Development Officer	Planning / WCC	Staff time
4. Carry out a natural capital assessment of the value of the borough's parks and open spaces.				✓		Parks and Events Manager	External Specialist	Revenue

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
5. Develop a plan to identify priorities for delivering further carbon capture and natural capitals gains.				✓		Parks and Events Manager	External Specialist	Revenue
6. Develop targeted programmes of activity in parks and open spaces that contribute to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.		✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Public Health	Staff time
7. Apply robust approaches to the Local Standards in relation to planning development to address deficiencies in the accessibility and quantity of open spaces across the borough.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Planning	Staff time
8. Carry out a detailed assessment of the play value, quality and accessibility of equipped play spaces across the Borough.	✓					Parks and Events Manager	External Specialist	Revenue
9. Deliver a pilot project to test how Council managed land can deliver offsite Biodiversity Net Gain through the development process.		✓				Parks Development Officer	Planning	Staff time

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
10. Develop an overall capital investment plan for enhancing parks and open spaces to provide a more strategic approach to the use of s106 funding.		✓				Parks and Events Manager	-	Staff time
11. Develop an application to the Levelling Up Parks Fund by October 2022.	✓					Parks and Events Manager	-	Staff time / Revenue
12. Develop an environmental management strategy for parks and environmental services.	✓					Operations Team Leader	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
13. Develop a clear marketing plan for green spaces that includes new web pages, social media and targeted work with key audiences.	✓					Parks and Events Manager	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
14. Promote active travel routes within parks and open spaces.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Comms Team	Staff time
15. Develop a volunteer plan and a clear approach to working with Friends groups tied to its aspirations for Green Flag Award across its priority parks.	✓	✓				Parks and Events Manager	Parks Development Officer	Staff time

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
16. Carry out a feasibility study to establish a roadmap for the self-management of allotment sites across the borough.	✓	✓				Parks Development Officer	-	Staff time
17. Start a pilot project to explore the process of transfer to self-management and share this learning across the borough.		✓				Parks Development Officer	-	Staff time
18. Develop a consistent approach to signage across all priority parks.		✓				Operations Team Leader	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
19. Develop engaging interpretation on those sites of significant biodiversity or heritage interest.			✓	✓	✓	Parks Development Officer	Operations Team Leader	Revenue
20. Pilot an approach to establish a new model for event delivery that allows local organisations to deliver programmes of events and activities.	✓	✓				Events Team	Parks Development Officer	Staff Time / Existing Revenue Budgets
21. Develop programmes of support to increase skills and capacity amongst local organisations		✓	✓	✓	✓	Events Team	Parks Development Officer	Staff time

Recommendation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Lead Officer(s)	Partners	Resource Implication
and to ensure the successful delivery of new programmes of events and activities.								
22. Evaluate the success of the pilot projects and implement any required changes to the new delivery model		✓				Events Team	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
23. Engage more regularly with potential partners at a county wide level.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Parks and Events Manager	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
24. Develop a partnership with the National Trust to deliver the 8 Hills project.	✓	✓				Parks and Events Manager	Parks Development Officer	Staff time
25. Develop service wide Key Performance Indicators to reflect service plan priorities.	✓					Parks and Events Manager	-	Staff time
26. Develop a rolling programme of applications to the Green Flag Award	✓	✓	✓	✓		Operations Team Leader	Parks Development Officer	Revenue