

# GREENSPACE STRATEGY

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Greenspace Strategy 2020-2023 aims ensure that all Stockport Homes (SHL) greenspaces are high quality areas for all current and future generations to use and enjoy. This will be achieved through collaborative working with existing and new customers, key stakeholders and partners.
- 1.2 Communities are defined by the place they live and the physical characteristics of that place. Greenspaces are amongst the most noticeable of physical features, they are diverse in the type, size and quality, contributing to social inclusion by bringing communities together, creating a sense of place and providing focal points for customers to come together and interact.
- 1.3 SHL continues to successfully manage a network of both formal and informal greenspace spaces from individual gardens and communal gardens to trees, woodlands, garages sites, play areas and grazing land. This is achieved through traditional grounds maintenance, landscape and tree management, playground maintenance services, environmental improvements and a range of social, educational and physical activities.
- 1.4 The Greenspace Strategy 2020-2023 sets out the future strategic vision for supporting the delivery of the multi-functional benefits of greenspace, for customers and ensuring the long-term sustainability of places.
- 1.5 This will be achieved through two overarching objectives;
  - To continue to manage a network of high quality greenspace to meet the needs of customers and achieve the wider social, environmental, economic and wellbeing benefits.
  - To work collaboratively to maximise resources and support the growth in development of greenspace services.

## 2 NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

- 2.1 National Context
  - 2.1.1 Factors at a national and local level have and will continue to change. Over the last five years significant changes have taken place, which will continue to impact directly and indirectly on the existing and future network of greenspaces. The Strategy takes account of the challenges arising from this, in ensuring the appropriate management and maintenance of these spaces continues.
  - 2.1.2 The strategic importance of greenspace, whilst historically limited in social housing strategy and policy, is now recognised in national and regional policy as integral part of ensuring the long term sustainability, health and wellbeing of communities. These benefits are highlighted in Homes England Strategic

Plan<sup>1</sup>, the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>2</sup> and 25 Year Environment Plan<sup>3</sup>

- 2.1.3 The Strategy will support the delivery of the new regulatory framework standard the “Neighbourhoods and Community Standard<sup>4</sup>, through ensuring that by working together with customers and partners, greenspaces are managed and maintained effectively and that neighbourhoods are safe and clean. In addition, the Strategy will support the wider strategic housing, social, economic and wellbeing objectives through delivery of greenspace projects and activities.
- 2.1.3 The Greater Manchester Green Infrastructure<sup>5</sup> provides the regional strategic framework for the outdoor environment as one that is multi-functional and brings both social and economic benefits and also helps to contribute to climate change mitigation and improve the quality of life and place. Housing Providers are key partners in enabling the maintenance management and improvement of elements of the green infrastructure, by improving and creating place as part of existing neighbourhoods and through the creation of new spaces.
- 2.2.4 The physical appearance, image and attractiveness of a neighbourhood is strongly influenced by people’s perception of its greenspace. In recent research over 90% of respondents agreed that it is important to have a greenspace in their local neighbourhood<sup>6</sup> and living near to greenspaces was more important than income or employment.<sup>7</sup> Housing providers have a key role in ensuring practically, and through investment, the long term sustainability of their neighbourhoods.
- 2.2.5 Greenspaces provide physical and mental health benefits. The World Health Organisation identify that greenspaces can reduce health inequalities, with access to quality greenspace being associated with positive health outcomes including, obesity levels, improved mental health, longevity in older people and overall well-being. Research by Fields in Trust<sup>8</sup> demonstrated that the UK greenspaces provided over £34 million of health and well-being benefits and that greenspaces save the NHS around £111 million per year in reduced GP visits. Greenspaces are also spaces where people come together and are important in promoting social cohesion and integration.
- 2.2.6 Children and young people, on average, spend time outdoors more regularly than adults aged 25 or over. During 2017/18, 70% of children and 64% of

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<sup>1</sup> Homes England Strategic Plan 2018-23 Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government

<sup>2</sup> National Planning Policy Framework 2012

<sup>3</sup> A Green Future - Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment -

<sup>4</sup> Homes and Communities Agency “Neighbourhood and Community Standard” 2012

<sup>5</sup> Towards and Green Infrastructure Framework for Greater Manchester – AGMA, Natural England 2008

<sup>6</sup> Greenspace Use and Attitudes Survey 2017 Greenspace Scotland

<sup>7</sup> www.enivonmentjournal.online 2019

<sup>8</sup> Revaluing Parks and Greenspace Fields in Trust 2019

young people (16-24) spent leisure time outdoors at least once a week, with majority of children (72%) having visited urban greenspaces in the last month. Children and young people reported positive feelings towards nature, with 67% of children and 56% of young people agreeing strongly with the statement 'being in nature makes me happy'. Investing in greenspaces can help set people on healthy life pathways such as participating in health walking or attending a community growing scheme. Moving one percent of people with mental health issues onto these pathways would save £1.44 billion a year.

- 2.2.7 A National Trust survey stated that 80% of happiest the people in the UK said they had a strong connection with the natural world compared with less than 40% of the unhappiest.<sup>9</sup>
- 2.2.8 Greenspaces provide opportunities for communities to “grow their own”, in allotments, spaces within communal areas or individual gardens. Such spaces are recognised as catalyst for healthier living not only because they are a resource for growing healthy food, but also by helping people keep fit, reducing “food miles”, saving money and providing opportunities to address issues of isolation by increasing social interaction.
- 2.2.9 A network of well-designed and cared for open spaces adds to the character of places where people want to live, work and visit. Open spaces also provide for the vital green infrastructure that enables housing providers, other organisation and landowners to deal with floods, or mitigate to and adapt to climate change<sup>10</sup>. Greenspaces can help to alleviate urban flooding, by providing areas for the creation of sustainable drainage systems and space for water run-off, which has been undermined in urban areas with the installation of hard landscaping and paving of driveways. Research shows that an increase of just 10% in the current area of green infrastructure in Greater Manchester, in areas with little or no green cover, could result in a cooling of the surface of up to 2.5.<sup>11</sup>
- 2.2.10 Greenspaces can help to minimise the impact of air and noise pollution. Effective and appropriate planting of a combination of trees and shrubs can reduce both noise and air pollution. This, in turn, alleviate health concerns such as anxiety, tension and illness<sup>12</sup>.
- 2.2.11 The biological diversity of greenspaces depends on the functions of the particular place, but each space makes a contribution and can help to offset climate change as well as providing habitats for different species. Urban

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<sup>9</sup> Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (March 2019) The national survey on people and the natural environment Children and Young

<sup>10</sup> Cabe Space 2009 Open Space Strategies – Best Practice Guidance

<sup>11</sup> DEFRA (2011) “The UK National Ecosystems Assessment”

<sup>12</sup> Noise Abatement - Forestry Research 2019

greenspaces provide valuable and diverse habitats, due to the range of spaces provided, from grasslands, parks, gardens and allotments to rivers, ponds and woodlands. Within these sites particular species may be protected under legislation such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act<sup>13</sup>. The Strategy will seek to continue to increase and protect the biodiversity of spaces through appropriate management, improvements, new projects and activities.

- 2.2.12 There are economic benefits to greenspace, in that its quality affects decisions made by residents about where they want to live, and by businesses on where they chose to locate. Recent research by the Office for National Statistics identified that homes within 100 metres of public greenspace were on average £2,500 more expensive than they would be 500 metres away.<sup>14</sup> Similarly the demand for greenspace from office workers is rising, research by Savills<sup>15</sup> identified the demand for increasing the provision for greenspace inside and surrounding the development.
- 2.2.13 Greenspace can provide employment, training and volunteering opportunities both through direct employment of staff and contractors in the management of greenspace and indirectly through associated services providing products to improve greenspace. The voluntary and community sectors continue to play a crucial part in helping to support the management, maintenance and improvement of greenspaces. This trend looks set to continue for the foreseeable future, there has been a growth in resident engagement with a 47% increase in membership of 'Friends of' groups and a 6% growth in numbers of groups since 2018.<sup>15</sup>
- 2.2.14 The National Federation of Friends Group estimates that there are over 5000 groups who volunteer, use and care about their local greenspaces. APSE identified a 6% increase in number of volunteers, including friends and residents' groups involved in local parks since 2018. Each group raises on averages of £6,900 per year, representing over £30million raised annually. It is estimated that economic value of volunteering is £23.9 billion, aligned with evidence that there is a link between volunteering and improving mental health and well-being<sup>16</sup>
- 2.2.15 The ongoing public service reforms have historically seen dramatic cuts to expenditure on greenspaces, however recent research by ASPE noted that this decrease had stabilised and that there had been increase in opportunities to access funding for greenspaces<sup>17</sup>.

## 2.2 Local Context

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<sup>13</sup> Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

<sup>14</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk) October 2019

<sup>15</sup> What Works Want Savills 2019

<sup>16</sup> "Strategic Plan 2016-2021" National Federation Parks Groups "

<sup>17</sup> APSE" State of the Market Survey 2019: Local Authority Parks and Greenspace Services"

- 2.2.1 The local context mirrors national changes and presents SHL with both challenges and opportunities over the next three years. The Strategy has clear links to SHLs mission and aims, in particular;
- Support customers in all aspects of their lives through effective partnership working
  - Grow by making the best use of our resources and diversifying into businesses that complement what we already do
  - Develop our thriving, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods, maximising our contribution to meeting housing need
- 2.2.2 The Strategy reflects and supports SHL wide strategic social, economic, health and environmental aims as set out in the 30 Year Asset Management<sup>18</sup>, Climate Change,<sup>19</sup> Customer and Community Engagement<sup>20</sup> and Inclusive Growth<sup>21</sup> Strategies.
- 2.2.3 Locally the Strategy reflects objectives of the Stockport Council Plan 2020-21<sup>22</sup> and “Investing in Stockport 2015-2020”<sup>23</sup> which establishes a vision for the deployment of public resources in the Borough that business and community leaders can support. It focuses on investing in economic and demographic growth and in the reform of public services to continue to ensure the following outcomes are delivered:
- People are able to make positive choices and be independent and people who need support will get it;
  - Stockport will benefit from a thriving economy
  - Stockport is a place where people want to live.
  - Communities in Stockport will be safe, resilient and inclusive
- 2.2.4 Greenspace can contribute to these outcomes in a number of ways:
- providing spaces and places which are high quality, safe, fit for purpose and accessible for all;
  - providing a place where customers have opportunities to undertaken physical activity, improve overall wellbeing and therefore reduce reliance on other services;
  - creating places to be used to reduce social isolation, narrowing the gap between neighbourhoods in terms of life chances and building the resilience of individuals;
  - providing a green infrastructure and setting for regeneration and development;

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<sup>18</sup> 30 Year Asset Management Strategy – SHL

<sup>19</sup> Climate Strategy – SHL

<sup>20</sup> Customer and Community Engagement Strategy – SHL 2018

<sup>21</sup> Inclusive Growth Strategy – SHL 2019

<sup>22</sup> Stockport Council “Stockport Council Plan 2020-21

<sup>23</sup> Investing in Stockport 2015-2020

- providing spaces where customers can get involved in management of local spaces, helping to increase ownership, responsibility and pride in a neighbourhood;
- creating opportunities to increase skills, employment and training;
- creating opportunities to share and reshape services, to improve long term sustainability of greenspaces and create economies of scale

- 2.2.5 In addition the Strategy will support Stockport’s “Active Communities Strategy”<sup>24</sup>, as greenspaces positively contribute to ensuring Stockport is a place people want to live and where communities are safe and resilient. The Strategy will also support Stockport’s “Local Development Framework” ensuring that future new build programmes maximise the opportunities to improve and create new high quality greenspaces.<sup>25</sup>
- 2.2.6 In a recent report “Planning for Green Infrastructure”<sup>26</sup> a review of all greenspace and accessibility for customers identified wards within the Borough where there was a lack of sufficient greenspace. To address the deficit, opportunities to enhance garden spaces, develop more natural spaces and incorporating well designed and accessible greenspace in new developments will be explored.
- 2.2.7 SHL will continue to work with Stockport Council, other partners, customers, businesses and the voluntary sector to maintain and enhance the network of greenspaces.
- 2.2.8 The Strategy is reflective of best practice and benchmarking with other housing providers, industry experts, contractors and key stakeholders, including APSE, Housemark, Natural England, City of Trees and the Greater Manchester Environmental Services Group.

#### 4.0 **MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT OF GREENSPACES**

- 4.1 SHL manages over 75 hectares of greenspaces for 7,503 customers as part of greenspace maintenance and tree management contracts. In addition, as integral elements in SHL neighbourhoods, greenspaces are used by and are accessible and visible to not only SHL customers, but also other citizens living in these neighbourhoods and their visitors. It is important to ensure the continued maintenance and management of the spaces, which is achieved in partnership with customers and external contractors through prescribed specifications. These spaces are managed in variety of ways, to reflect the customer needs and demands and also to meet SHL requirements.

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<sup>24</sup> Stockport Activities Communities Strategy “Stockport COUNCIL 2019-2021

<sup>25</sup> Local Development Framework, - Stockport COUNCIL

<sup>26</sup> Planning for Green Infrastructure – A GIS based approach evaluating greenspace provision support health and biodiversity” Conor Wardle MSC Manchester University 2019

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- 4.2 The greenspace contract includes the management and maintenance of grass, hedges, shrub, rose beds, flowerbeds and weed and hard surface treatment. The frequency of visits differs across sites dependent on location and activities on the site, but the overall principle of the contract is to ensure that all sites are clean, tidy, and well maintained. A robust set of processes and systems are in place to ensure that the contract is effective, efficient and value for money. This has ensured a continued increase in customer satisfaction, from 43.2% in 2007 to 88% in 2019. Effective contract management has over the last three years, generated £394,000 of efficiencies. These have been reinvested into greenspace to ensure the standards and quality of these spaces.
- 4.3 In addition to the above contract management, SHL works in partnership with Manchester Groundwork Trust to deliver “Blue Sky”. An initiative which provides support to ex-offenders to improve skills, knowledge and provide sustainable employment opportunities. The focus of the project is to undertake Environmental improvements and works on sites that sit outside of traditional contracts and to support improvements in customer’s individual gardens.
- 4.4 SHL tree stock is managed in partnership with Stockport Council and an external contractor. SHLs Tree Policy sets the context for day to day management of the stock. Over the last three years a £300,000 investment has been made, including a programme of surveys, planned maintenance and replacement planting where appropriate. In addition, during 2019, as part of the celebration of a “100 years of Social Housing”, 100 mature trees were planted across neighbourhoods managed by SHL. Working in partnership with City of Trees as part of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund a further 155 semi mature trees were also planted at eleven locations. This continued investment ensures that tree stock remains safe, healthy and contributes to the wider sustainability of neighbourhoods.
- 4.5 Working in partnership with customers, partners and community groups, £115,087 funding has been secured over the last three years, to improve greenspaces. This has included the provision and improvement of play spaces, the creation of new sports facilities and the delivery of community events, sports and coaching sessions. The funding was secured in partnership with customers, community groups and key stakeholders. The funders include the Big Lottery, Sport England, Marks and Spencer, Greater Manchester Airport, Veolia and David Hopkins. There will be further opportunities to secure funding through various sources including a range of charities and foundations that will help to support greenspace improvements and activity.
- 4.5 Within the greenspaces are a network of play spaces managed by SHL. The facilities aim to provide experiences for all children and young people to develop and learn through safe and age appropriate play. The maintenance and improvement of these spaces is delivered in partnership with Stockport Council. The strategy aims to enhance these spaces and create new ones as opportunities arise, particularly as part of new build schemes.

- 4.6 The diversity of greenspaces managed by SHL means that there are some areas which sit outside the core grounds maintenance contact. These are managed in a variety of ways such as through leases, grazing licences and as part of tenancy agreements. These spaces are managed in partnership with Stockport Council,
- 4.7 SHL will enable and empower community participation, promote community ownership and support the national policy towards the 'Big Society' and the Localism Act 2011. Acting as broker and catalyst for communities to improve greenspaces, by supporting and motivating individuals and groups to engage and lead in future provision and investment in greenspaces. The quality of the neighbourhoods, including the greenspace is regularly monitored through site visits, attendance at community events and meetings and estate walkabouts. Customers attending these events provide invaluable information, helping to identify issues of litter and graffiti or raising concerns about quality of the services being provided.
- 4.8 Work will continue to take place with active Community Groups, Friends of Groups, the Greenspace Forum and in partnership with Stockport Council. To support continued improvement and engagement with customers SHLs Customer Scrutiny Panel undertook a review of the greenspace contract during 2020. The results noted the high levels of customer satisfaction, engagement opportunities and customer's clear understanding of the contract. In addition, areas for improvement relating to marketing and customer communication, have been identified and included in the Action Plan.
- 4.9 As part of SHLs commercial offer, opportunities to grow and develop greenspace services have taken place, with the delivery of tree and grounds maintenance services to schools throughout the borough and individual customers who pay for services
- 4.10 SHLs greenspace profile continues to develop through a number of forums, including Green Flag (Keep Britain Tidy), Greater Manchester Environmental Services Forum, Housemark Estate Services Network. SHLs innovative approach to green space continues to be recognised, with a growing number of housing organisations seeking advice on management of green space, particularly where grounds maintenance services are being re-procured.

## **5.0 CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The Strategy and Action Plan have been shaped through:
- engagement with customers, staff and stakeholders,
  - feedback from customer groups
  - following review during 2019-2020 by Stockport Homes Scrutiny Panel the findings have been incorporated into Action Plan
  - estate walkabouts, neighbourhood events and activities,
  - customer satisfaction surveys
  - site inspections

- benchmarking with other public sector and housing organisations

The action plan reflects their priorities for action over the next three years.

## 6.0 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

6.1 The Action plan in Appendix 1 sets out the strategic objectives, outcomes and timescale for implementation. The following provides a summary of the key actions.

6.2 Objective 1:

**To continue to manage a network of high quality greenspace to meet the needs of customers and achieve the wider social, environmental, economic and wellbeing benefits.**

The aim of the objective is to continue to manage, maintain and enhance the diverse network of greenspaces across the borough, by encouraging greater use of these spaces through raising awareness and understanding of the multiple benefits of greenspaces

This will be achieved by;

- A review and option appraisal exercise of the current grounds maintenance and tree management services in consultation with customers and partners.
- Implementation of new tree and grounds maintenance service
- Identification and implementation of investment programme across greenspaces assets including opportunities to increase the biodiversity of greenspaces
- Carrying out of a cyclical tree survey across SHL managed land and implementation of a maintenance and management programme of all stock
- A review of all playgrounds managed by SHL in partnership with Stockport Council and customers and implementation of maintenance and improvement programme.
- Ensure all greenspaces with new build schemes are designed and implemented to excellent standards

6.3 Objective 2:

**To work collaboratively to maximise resources and support the growth in development of greenspace services.**

By working in partnership with existing and new customers, partners and stakeholders SHL will ensure resources are effectively and efficiently used and

the benefits maximised, including seeking to secure future capital and revenue investment in greenspaces and commercial opportunities to increase services to customers

This will be achieved by;

- Identifying opportunities and secure contracts to deliver greenspace services in the private sector.
- Continuing to deliver and seek opportunities to work in partnership with schools to deliver greenspace services
- Working in partnership with Stockport Council to identify alternative and mutually acceptable ways of management and maintenance of greenspace services
- Maximisation of using web based information to increase awareness and understanding of greenspace activities
- Providing training and volunteering opportunities to customers
- Maximise opportunities to increase use of greenspace for projects and activities
- Identify and maximise opportunities to secure additional resources for greenspace investment, activities and projects.

## **7 LINKS TO POLICIES**

7.1 The Strategy links to the following strategies and action plans

- Asset Management Strategy
- Customer and Community Engagement Strategy
- Inclusive Growth Strategy
- Funding Strategy
- Climate Strategy

## **8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)**

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Greenspace Strategy to ensure the Strategy will support the equality of opportunity for all to be involved in the consultation, engagement and delivery of greenspace projects and activities.

## **9 OWNERSHIP, MONITORING & REVIEW**

9.1 The strategy will be delivered through the three year Action Plan. It will be monitored and updated by the Environmental Services Manager

9.2 Monitoring of the annual priority project plan and progress against the following indicators will be carried out through on a quarterly basis:

<b>Key Measures</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
Customer satisfaction with grounds maintenance service	85%	85%	86%
Amount of external funding secured for greenspace projects and activities	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000
Estate Inspections graded at least good	95%	95%	95%