

**Open Space in South Canterbury**

Draft strategy and action plan – consultation version

***What is Open Space and why is it so important?***

There is no universal definition of open space, but it might be described as recreational land without buildings which can be accessed by the public or used for their benefit. Open space has a wide range of uses and includes playing fields, parks and public gardens, allotments, green corridors and even civic areas with hard surfaces such as market squares. It therefore provides vital services to local communities and there is a lot of evidence to show that it makes a big contribution to people’s mental and physical health and wellbeing. Children need outside areas in which to play freely and elderly people appreciate, and benefit from, peaceful open-air sites. In addition, green spaces in cities are crucial habitats for wildlife and help to maintain the biodiversity of flora and fauna. This is why Local Authorities are legally required to provide open space and to have a strategy to assess needs and make suitable provision for it.

***Where does Open Space fit in local strategies?***

Canterbury City Council’s Open Space Strategy for the district, supported by an Action Plan, has the overall aim to ‘….*protect and enhance the existing quality of our public open space and promote its usage*’. An important element in the sustainability strategy of all Local Authorities is the need to provide facilities that are very local, to promote healthy activity and reduce car travel. The Council acknowledges that open space connects with other issues such as air quality and biodiversity conservation; and so, for example, the Open Space Strategy is linked to the Transport Strategy and the Green Infrastructure Plan. Each of these strategies and plans support the commitment in the Local Plan to safeguarding and improving open spaces. Moreover, in July 2019 Canterbury City Council declared a climate change emergency and set a target to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. A climate change strategy and action plan will be developed, and open space should be a key feature in the approach.

***What is the current state of open space in South Canterbury?***

In Canterbury City we have Westgate Parks and Dane John Gardens which are easily accessible for city centre residents and visitors. However, some local districts of the city have very limited open space; in particular, South Canterbury where the City Council has highlighted a deficit of amenity green space in the southern sections of Wincheap and Barton wards. The standard adopted by the City Council is that there should be 1.3 ha of amenity open space for every 1000 people. In South Canterbury the available area of open space is negligible and falls far short of this target. As a result, children lack outdoor facilities to play and the community at large is deprived of a vital resource. Voluntary groups such as the Oaten Hill and South Canterbury Association (OHSCA) are working hard to maintain and enhance the small areas of existing open space through activities such as tending public gardens and planting trees. But this does not address the larger issue of missing space.

***What can be done to improve the situation?***

***Quick Wins, Long term Aims,***

Canterbury City Council has noted that, since the deficit in open space provision in South Canterbury is historic, it would be challenging to address this, and it has no plans to do so. We accept that it is difficult to create new open space within the existing street pattern. However, we do believe that there are things that can be done to ameliorate the problem.

**Quick Wins**

Firstly, there are areas where, in spite of the limited space available, positive action could be taken; for example, by establishing sensory gardens. We need to identify such **‘quick wins’** which can be achieved at limited cost and with active community support. But we also need to create larger areas of open space and this is more challenging to do.

**Long-term Aims**

Secondly, excellent opportunities do arise when residential or commercial areas are re-developed or new developments occur. We are aware of several sites where development will take place with a short period of time, and the CCC needs to secure the best developers’ contribution for residents, a reasonable proportion of which we would like to see channelled into open space projects.

For sites such as Mountfield Park, or Ridlands Farm, to mention just the two most advanced in their planning, we want to press CCC to revise their prescriptions to the developer for play and recreation space within sites, to ensure that they can be used by the general public.

***Working together***

Underpinning the City Council’s Open Space Strategy is a commitment to work in partnership with communities to enhance public open space and instil a sense of civic pride and community cohesion (CCC Open Spaces Strategy, para 3.21). OHSCA is ready to work with the City Council within the context of an Action Plan, to help it deliver on its objectives and realise its stated vision ‘To develop an interconnected network of diverse, high quality open spaces which meet the needs of local people and make a significant contribution to raising the quality of life for all residents and visitors to the Canterbury district’. Connecting green spaces is crucial as this provides ecological corridors which enhance biodiversity and allow wildlife to disperse. It has also been shown that green corridors in cities can improve ventilation and help to reduce the urban ‘heat island’ effect.

***Conclusion***

South Canterbury has almost no open space for residents to enjoy and this has a negative impact on their quality of life. It also creates a significant gap in the interconnected network of open spaces envisaged by the City Council and should be remedied.

**ACTION PLAN**

We propose the following outline Action Plan for adoption after consultation

[1] By the Association Committee

[2] By the Association Membership

We would then propose that Canterbury City Council recognise the Action Plan Objectives and commit to working in partnership with the Association over a period of time to pursue its Objectives.

**OHSCA OPEN SPACE STRATEGY PROSPOSALS**

ACTION PLAN

 October 2019 – Members Consultation

1 **MEMBERS SURVEY**

 Questionnaire to establish/update residents’ priorities to OHSCA Members

2 **OHSCA Strategy**

 Update incorporating input from members

 Publish results to whole of OHSCA catchment area occupants

**3 Feasibility and Design Stage - Small scale projects, quick wins.**

 Review possible sites for small scale projects

 (sensory gardens, planted verges etc) Consult Landowners

 Costings and permissions Identify Funding

4 **Action Stage – 'Quick Wins' - Small scale projects**

 Delivery stage OHSCA groups/volunteers Funders/Landowners

5 **Feasibility and Design Stage -Long-term**

 **Development Sites generating Developers Contribution**

 **Identify schedule and timetable** with CCC, of suitable development sites coming forward, among which are

 • Ridlands Farm (included in the Local Plan, CCC owned)

 • Mountfield Park (outline/detailed planning application. Appeal has failed- further action awaited)

 •..K&C Hospital site (subject of various land swop/reconstruction options, included in early versions of the Local Plan)

 • Rhodaus Town Mound site (refused, currently at Appeal)

 • Telephone Exchange (refused permission 2017)

 • KCC Police Station site

 **Clarify issues and agree with CCC policies re**

• Long term and South Canterbury – wide strategy for Open Space

 • Relationship with complementary policies, funding streams (e.g. Air Quality, Sport for All)

 • Appropriate level of developer contribution

 • Development Brief mix of facilities for the sites

 **Engage with Developers**

 **Agree specific plans for sites**

 **Review and publish improvements over time.**

Tim Carlyle, Tim Chancellor for OHSCA 17 Oct 2019

**OPEN SPACES STRATEGY Members Questionnaire: September 2019**

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE

1 **Do you agree with the proposed Open Spaces Strategy (OSS**) **YES NO OTHER/PARTLY**

2 **If you circled "Other/Partly" please advise what are your concerns?**

3 **Do you have any suggestions for the Quick Win small sites referred to, if so do you know who owns the land in question?**

4 **Are you willing to supply your name and address? If so please add here**

5 **Are you interested in joining an Open Spaces Action Group,**

 **or in volunteering to assist in other ways?** **YES NO**