

# Open Space Strategy for Swansea

## Introduction

The variety of open space provision across Swansea provides opportunity for all people to play, exercise, socialise and enjoy contact with nature. As a focal point of any community, parks and open spaces can contribute to building community spirit and community cohesion and provide an environment where community action and involvement is encouraged. Parks and open spaces also have an important role as a home to wildlife and natural habitats. These roles may complement each other.

Swansea's diverse and extensive open space and green infrastructure network needs to be maintained, protected and enhanced to ensure that the extent, quality and connectivity of this multi – functional resource and the many valuable ecosystems are safeguarded and sustainably managed for the use and enjoyment of all residents and visitors into the future.

The Open Space Strategy will set out a strategic vision and a series of aims and objectives for all types of open space in the ownership or management of City and County of Swansea Council. Based on these objectives and an assessment against the agreed standards a prioritised Action Plan will be produced. The Strategy will set out a vision up to 2025, providing a strategic framework for the protection, development and improvement of existing open spaces and to increase the provision of, or access to such facilities, where it is shown there are deficiencies against the agreed standards. In addition it will;

- Identify which open spaces will be included.
- Advise, as appropriate, on opportunities for rationalisation and change of use of current open space provision within the City and County.
- Highlight good practice and case studies from across the Country
- Detail how the Council can encourage greater community involvement and ownership in the management, maintenance and development of open spaces.
- Recommend how to maximise the effective use of physical and financial resources in improving the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space
- Establish a robust monitoring framework to assess the effectiveness of the Strategy

This Strategy should be understood and utilised in conjunction with a number of other strategies and plans currently in place or under development for the City and County of Swansea, including but not limited to: the Council's Corporate Plan; the Local Development Plan and any associated Local Area Plans and Planning Guidance; the Cultural Development Framework, Tourism, Beaches and Destination

Management Plan; Environment Strategy; Green Infrastructure Strategy; Tree Policy; Early Years and Poverty Strategies; Creating an Active and Healthy Swansea plan and the Council's actions in meeting its obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Its aims and objectives are underpinned by the Council's Corporate Priorities for: a Vibrant and Viable City and Economy;  
Tackling Poverty;  
Building Sustainable Communities;  
Education Attainment;  
Safeguarding.

- and informed by the Council's values which will guide the way that we work, how we develop as an organisation and our decision making through the years ahead:

### **People focussed**

We need to focus on community needs and outcomes and on improving the lives of the people who live and work in Swansea. We will also respect, value and support our employees and demonstrate the highest standards of integrity.

### **Working together**

We need to promote a whole partnership approach, working across services to maximise resources and knowledge and joining forces with others outside the Council to ensure we prioritise our resources and get the best for our communities.

### **Innovation**

We promote and support a culture of innovation. We need to think and work differently to improve our ability to deliver and to meet the financial, demographic and societal challenges we face.

### **Definition of Open Space**

Open spaces are valued community assets which help improve public health, mental and physical well-being and quality of life, and which bring biodiversity and regeneration benefits to an area.

Open space is defined as land in public ownership that is regularly available for recreational or sporting use by the community and can also act as a visual amenity.

The following list illustrates the broad range of open spaces in Swansea that are of public value:

- parks and gardens – including urban parks, country parks, and formal gardens;
- outdoor sports facilities (with natural or artificial surfaces)– including tennis courts, bowling greens, sport pitches, golf courses, athletic tracks, school and other institutional playing fields;

- amenity green space (most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas) – including informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing;
- provision for children and teenagers – including play areas, kickabout areas, skateboard parks and outdoor basketball hoops;
- green corridors – including river and canal banks, amenity footpaths and cycleways;
- wetlands, heathland and grasslands (eg. meadows);
- beaches and foreshore
- local Nature Reserves and designated wildlife sites
- civic spaces, including civic squares and other hard surface areas designed for pedestrians.
- allotments and community gardens;
- cemeteries

### **Current Provision of Open Space in Swansea**

52 Parks  
 32 Playing field sites  
 22 Bowls Greens  
 85 Children's Playgrounds  
 9 Fitness and Trim trails  
 16 Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA)  
 16 Skate and BMX sites  
 12 Tennis Court sites  
 16 Allotments  
 5 Beaches  
 7 Cemeteries  
 4 All Weather Pitches  
 6 Local Nature Reserves  
 4 National Nature Reserves  
 27 other Nature Reserves  
 98 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)  
 14 Sites of Special Scientific interest (SSSi)

### **Open Space standards and statutory duties**

The following standards have been adopted to determine whether Swansea meets nationally recognised guidelines in terms of Open Space provision;

Fields in Trust (FIT), formerly the National Playing Fields Association, has prepared 'Benchmark Standards' for outdoor sport and play. The standard recommends that in terms of overall provision per 1,000 population there should be 1.2ha of land for playing fields, 1.6 ha for all outdoor sports and 0.8 ha for Children's playing space, with 0.25ha of the total provision relating to equipped playgrounds and with variations between rural and urban areas.

Natural Resources Wales has developed a toolkit to ensure everyone in Wales has access to Accessible, Natural Green Spaces (ANGS) It recommends that provision should be made for at least:

- 2ha of accessible natural greenspace per 1,000 population

- That no-one should live more than 300m from their nearest natural green space That there should be at least one 20ha site within 2km of all homes
- That there should be one accessible 100ha site within 5km
- That there should be one 500ha site within 10km

The City & County of Swansea has a statutory responsibility to assess Play every 3 years to 'ensure sufficient play opportunities as far as is reasonably practicable'.

The City & County of Swansea has also embedded the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into its practice, therefore all policies and procedures must give due regard to children's rights.

Under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 (section 23), the Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of allotment plots.

Environment Act 2016

Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty

Section 6 of the Act places a duty on public authorities to 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity' so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In so doing, public authorities must also seek to 'promote the resilience of ecosystems'. The duty replaces the section 40 duty in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act 2006), in relation to Wales, and applies to those authorities that fell within the previous duty.

### **Strategic Vision**

'By 2025 the City & County of Swansea will have a vibrant and diverse range of quality parks and open spaces, well distributed across the County. Sites will reflect local needs and historical, recreational and natural characteristics. The spaces will form a network which maximises opportunities for everyone to enjoy and interact within their local community and the wider area whilst also attracting people into the City and County'

### **Strategic Objectives**

- To address deficiencies in open space provision across the County in order to improve opportunities for local people to access a variety of open space environments
- To create, develop and sustain safe open space environments which can be enjoyed by all sections of the community;
- To involve the whole community: residents, public, private and voluntary organisations to ensure that parks and open spaces contribute fully to the development of sustainable and cohesive local communities;
- To develop the educational role of open space, particularly for young people, in order to promote greater knowledge and understanding of the importance of being active in the outdoors and of the natural environment;

- To provide a range of opportunities and facilities for active and passive recreation which can contribute to improved mental and physical health and wellbeing;
- To manage and develop parks and open spaces in order to promote social inclusion and usage by all of the County's diverse communities;
- To develop and promote an increased range of opportunities for people to enjoy cultural experiences and activities;
- To promote biodiversity and the conservation, protection and enrichment of species and habitats and to protect and enhance ecological connectivity and ecosystem resilience.

### **Key Priorities**

To deliver the vision and objectives we will focus on the following five key priorities:

#### **Increasing accessible open space and people's access to it**

##### **To achieve this we will;**

Identify a City & County of Swansea access standard  
 Encourage and promote opportunities for greater diversity of use  
 Facilitate additional usage of open space  
 Facilitate and develop safer routes to enable access  
 Promote and encourage social inclusion  
 Enhance the quantity and quality of existing provision  
 Develop the educational role of open space  
 Develop closer relationships with schools  
 Develop and promote the use of open space for improved health and well-being  
 Develop the role of open space for cultural experiences and play  
 increase the opportunities available to learn about the natural environment and biodiversity  
 Ensure opportunities are designed in consultation with partners and target groups.

#### **Delivering new developments - Based on LDP sites**

##### **To achieve this we will:**

Improve Co-ordination of planning for open space involving all relevant services and stakeholders  
 Ensure accessible open space is included in all developments  
 Ensure new developments contribute to any deficiencies in open space assessment standards  
 Ensure development proposals will maintain, enhance and create new green infrastructure, where appropriate.  
 Consider improvement of existing local provision in the locality or the creation of new on site facilities  
 Create safer and more accessible open space environments  
 Improve community safety through design  
 Maintain and improve ecological connectivity and healthy functioning ecosystems

#### **Designating and protecting open space**

**To achieve this we will:**

Retain Fields in Trust designation for existing sites and consider new opportunities  
Retain Green Flag status for existing sites and consider new opportunities

**Encouraging Community involvement/management**

**To achieve this we will:**

Actively encourage and support community engagement and ownership of open spaces.

Encourage, support and facilitate appropriate self-management or Community Asset Transfer

Facilitate and extend community involvement in the management and development of open spaces

Develop and expand the number of Friends of Parks groups

**Promoting biodiversity and nature conservation**

**To achieve this we will:**

Manage the County's Tree Stock

Actively support the protection, retention and enhancement of biodiversity and natural open space

Facilitate the improvement of existing habitats for Biodiversity

Facilitate the creation new habitats and features for biodiversity

Publicise and promote the importance of nature conservation and biodiversity

Ensure nature conservation and biodiversity issues are fully taken in to account in any new developments

**Action Plan**

Following the adoption of the Open Space Strategy an Action Plan will subsequently need to be developed to identify areas for prioritisation, together with level of priority and recommended action. The Action Plan will be a working document with the priority actions regularly monitored and updated.