



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Parks Development Strategy 2024-2044

DRAFT

Contents

Foreword 3

The importance of parks and green spaces 4

Introducing our parks 7

Our vision and objectives 12

How are we going to do it 15

Legacy Strategy actions 25

Delivery and Finance..... 28

Appendix: Action Plan 29

Our Vision is for West Northamptonshire’s parks to be places for people of all backgrounds to thrive through exercise and relaxation in the open air, enjoying nature and heritage, building communities, and supporting biodiversity.

Foreword

West Northamptonshire Council owns and manages 154 parks and green spaces. Of these, over 140 are less than 10 hectares in size and 75 are less than 1 hectare. Sites include country parks, meadows, recreational parks, play areas, linear parks, memorial gardens, and a war memorial.

Our aim over the coming years is to protect, maintain and enhance our parks ensuring they meet the current and future needs of our communities whilst also delivering the Council's wider aspirations as described in its Corporate Plan and supporting Vision. The Council recognises that parks are a priority for our residents' wellbeing, biodiversity, and habitats; they play a role in enabling local people to 'Live Your Best Life'.

We value the work of our volunteers who fulfil a vital role in keeping our parks and green spaces clean and well maintained so that we can all enjoy them. Volunteering provides new skills and helps communities keep healthy while giving something back and improving our environment.

All our parks are important, but the major parks have a particular role to play. These receive large numbers of visits from people across West Northamptonshire, which means it is possible to provide facilities and opportunities which are not viable in those parks which serve more localised communities.

This Strategy represents the framework for the management of the Council's parks. It will help the Council focus its resources on attracting the additional funding needed to provide a variety of features and facilities that will enrich our residents' lives. These resources include staff resource, time, and financial investment.

In setting out our ambition for what we want to achieve, this Strategy describes the approach we will adopt to maximise return on our investment and how over the coming years we will work with partners, communities, and businesses to explore opportunities to support the development of our parks. In order to achieve this, we must continually improve and innovate, building on what makes each park unique and special.

Our parks remain an important asset for local communities, and we aim to ensure that West Northamptonshire parks offer something for everyone.



Councillor Rebecca Breese
Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling & Waste

The importance of parks and green

Who we are and what we do

We are West Northamptonshire Council, a most-purpose council covering Northampton, Daventry, Brackley, Towcester, Brixworth, and many other villages and across rural West Northamptonshire. We manage numerous important parks, including country parks, town parks and other green spaces.

West Northamptonshire has an area of 1,377 km². Within this our managed parks and green spaces cover approximately estimated 11.2 km².

Individual sites vary from 0.02 hectares up to 80 hectares in size and include war memorials, linear parks and town and country parks. Whilst our parks cover less than 1% of the area of West Northamptonshire, they have an impact much greater than that proportion would suggest.

How our parks positively impact communities

Our parks provide vital opportunities for our residents' health and wellbeing, and opportunities for volunteering, connecting communities and developing a sense of pride in local places.

These local green spaces are important, in varying degrees, as habitats, supporting biodiversity. Improving biodiversity is one of the most important things we can do to counter the effects of climate change and nature depletion. They can also help mitigate climate change through carbon retention in plants and soils and help manage its impact by slowing the flow of flood waters.

Living in a greener environment promotes and protect health and wellbeing. Every 10 per cent increase in exposure to green space translates into a reduction of five years in age in terms of expected health problems. People who use parks and open spaces are three times as likely to achieve the recommended level of physical activity than non-users. Increasing access to parks and open spaces can reduce obesity and mental health admissions, resulting in health and social care-related savings¹.

We can help by providing new, good quality greenspace that is inclusive, improving, maintaining, and protecting existing greenspace, and by providing routes linking areas of greenspace for active travel. Greener environments can also bring communities together, reduce loneliness, and mitigate the negative effects of air pollution, excessive noise, heat, and flooding².

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the vital role our parks play, as they became a lifeline for many communities whilst lockdown and travel restrictions were in place. We are fortunate to see this increase in use continue, although at a slightly lesser extent, as people can again travel further afield to visit and explore other parks and green spaces.



¹ Groundwork 2011, Wheeler et al 2007a, b.

² Public Health England 2020.

About our localities

In the 2021 Census³, 425,725 people lived in West Northamptonshire, of which 176,632 lived in rural areas with 249,093 living in the Northampton urban area.

We are projected⁴ to see a 7% increase in our population by 2030, with our rural areas growing at a faster rate than that expected for Northampton. Analysis of 2021 census data has identified there are 172,643 households across West Northamptonshire, a total which, by 2030, is projected to increase by 12%⁵. To support this growth, we are planning several large, but sustainable urban extensions⁶.

Currently 17.3% of the people who live in West Northamptonshire are aged 65 or over. This total is predicted to grow. Conversely, almost 22.7% of the population is under the age of 18 years.

According to Census 2021⁷ data, 64,876 residents (15.2% of the population) reported a disability or long-term health problem that restricts their day-to-day activities 'a little' or 'a lot'.

The 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)⁸ data show that 13.7% of the population live in the 20% most deprived areas of England (55,825 people). 9.6% of people (37,318) living in West Northamptonshire were defined as living in income deprivation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our most deprived communities are less likely to have ready access to green spaces close to home. Whilst this is proportionately lower than the 12.9% recorded national average for England, it still indicates a large group of people in need of good access to green space.

It has also been identified that by school year 6, 34.3% of children are overweight or obese, whilst 69.4% of our adult population is defined as being overweight or obese⁹. Although 65.3% of adults living in West Northamptonshire, in 2021/22, were physically active this total is below the corresponding average for England (67.3%). Our parks and green spaces provide an opportunity for us to work in partnership with our communities to address these challenges¹⁰.

Our changing environment

Climate change is affecting the United Kingdom, and we now face an increased risk of flooding, droughts, and heat waves. Metrological data suggests that our country has warmed at a broadly consistent but slightly higher rate than the change in global mean temperature. Between 2012 and 2021 it has been on average 0.2°C warmer than the 1991 to 2002 average and 1.0°C warmer than the 1961 to 1990 average¹¹. Whilst climate change will affect our landscapes and wildlife, with considered management, our range of habitats including grasslands, woodlands, and wetlands, can help combat its impact. They also have potential to help reduce net CO₂ emissions.

The Met Office is predicting that climate change will result in the UK experiencing warmer and wetter winters; hotter and drier summers and more frequent and intense weather extremes. Not only will our weather continue to be variable, but we are also likely to experience more of these extreme types of weather¹².

³ ONS - Census 2021

⁴ www.nomisweb.co.uk

⁵ www.ons.gov.uk

⁶ West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan

⁷ www.ons.gov.uk

⁸ GOV.UK, 2020.

⁹ West Northants Public Health, 2022

¹⁰ West Northants Public Health, 2022.

¹¹ GOV.UK, 2019.

¹² Met Office, 2022.

Our aspirations

This strategy sets out our vision for the Council's parks and the actions we will take to deliver them. In developing this approach, we have not only been influenced by the outcomes of our consultation and engagement but have also ensured our park-specific plans support the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Board's "Live Your Best Life" ambitions.

Fundamental to this strategy is the exploration of increasingly sustainable ways of managing and funding our parks and green spaces so they support the delivery of our broader organisational priorities; continue to meet the evolving needs of our residents and communities, and positively contribute to making West Northamptonshire a great place to live, work and visit.

How we contribute to the Corporate Plan

To support our organisational vision of making West Northamptonshire a great place to live, work, visit and thrive, our underpinning Strategy prioritises six goals which will deliver wide-ranging improvements across our communities. Our approach to parks and green spaces will actively support many of our Council's anticipated strategic outcomes, including increased wildlife species and more trees; high quality parks; and accessible green spaces for all.

Our parks and green spaces provide local communities and visitors with fantastic opportunities to enjoy our local habitat; preserve and protect our natural environment, including delivering ecological and environmental benefits and support and develop our communities and the local economy.

Equally, we understand the role our parks and green spaces play in enhancing the quality of life and liveability experienced by our residents. This, alongside the wider changes that will occur across West Northamptonshire, will be at the forefront of our thinking during the lifespan of this strategy. It will ensure we influence those areas we need to focus on as we plan, develop, and manage our network of parks.



Introducing our parks

Overview

We currently own and manage 154 parks and green spaces. These include country parks, meadows, recreational parks, play areas, linear parks, memorial gardens, and a war memorial. Covering approximately 1,098 hectares, our estate varies from major parks covering over 40 hectares to small open spaces covering less than 0.05 hectares. In fact, over 140 locations are less than 10 hectares in size, with 75 of these covering less than one hectare.

We are rightly proud to be the custodians of many and varied parks and green spaces across West Northamptonshire. However, without the significant contribution made by our colleagues in the Environment, Parks and Countryside Team, our partners, and our local community stakeholders it would not be possible for us to deliver the varied offer we do. The role and contribution our key stakeholders continue to make is described below.

Introducing our Environment, Parks and Countryside Team

Our parks and country parks are managed by our Environment, Parks, and Countryside Team in the Assets & Environment service. The team includes Rangers, specialist technical staff, and support staff, whilst at the Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre we have a dedicated group of Educational Rangers led by the Centre's Manager.

The Outdoor Learning Service, based at the Everdon centre, located in the west of West Northamptonshire, offers residential and day outdoor learning activities for schools and groups, as well as various forest school courses for leaders. Currently it is largely primary-age children who benefit by attending programs run by the service. Located in the grounds of the old school, the surrounding countryside provides a variety of contrasting landscapes and habitats, which make it an ideal place to study geography and science, whilst the easy access to woodlands, ponds, rivers, and meadows also enables ecosystems of varying complexity to be studied. The service has since the creation of West Northamptonshire

Council extended its offer and delivers some courses in other parks across West Northamptonshire. Recently a new outdoor classroom has been added to Everdon, allowing a greater number of children to enjoy time at the centre.

During the 2021/22 financial year, it cost £792,000 to operate our Parks and Country Parks service. We also generated £530,000¹³ income, reducing the net cost of service delivery to £263,000. Through being able to reduce our operating costs to £648,000, alongside income generation of £458,000 we have managed to reduce our costs further, which saw the net cost of delivering this service during 2022/23 financial year fall to £190,000. Additionally, costs under the Council's environmental services arrangements were approximately £68,000 per year for works in the parks¹⁴. Therefore, the range of benefits delivered by the parks only cost local taxpayers around £250,000 – around 62p per resident per year.

Introducing our partners and key stakeholders

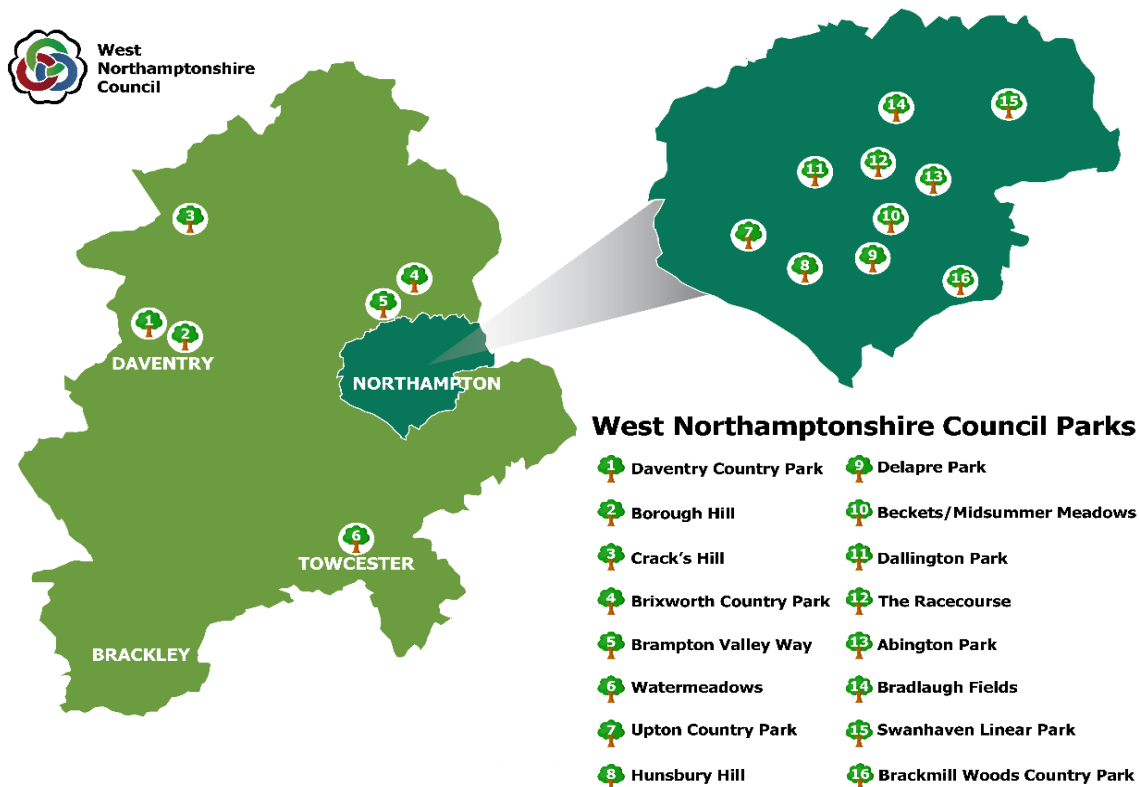
The management and delivery of our parks and green space service represents a team effort. We work closely with a range of partner organisations which includes Idverde, West Northamptonshire Norse and Continental. These partners deliver grounds maintenance and play inspection services on our behalf. Our in-house Park Ranger service complement this offer by delivering wide ranging management, maintenance, and educational functions. These colleagues represent the "glue" which make our parks, but especially our major parks, places our residents want to visit and enjoy. There are also park management committees and friends of groups who help to deliver activities and improvements. These bring key stakeholders and local representatives who have an interest in a particular park together. Working in partnership they manage these parks and plan their future. Helping to care for these spaces, these partnerships enable the people who actively use them to have a greater say as to what goes on and positively contribute to their local area.

¹³ This included £178,000 generated from car parking charges and £127,000 from property rental income.

¹⁴ These are the Environmental Services Contract in Northampton, West Northamptonshire Norse in Daventry, and an arrangement via Cherwell District Council in Towcester. The costs are not clearly distinguished between parks and other landscaping; therefore, this figure is an estimate.

Introducing our Major parks

1: West Northamptonshire's major parks



West Northamptonshire benefits from a range of major parks, which are outlined here, with locations shown on Figure 1.

Abington Park, Northampton

Abington Park is perhaps Northampton's oldest and most popular park. Covering 47 hectares its many features include an aviary, rose garden, mature trees and lake.

The Abington Museum is based in what used to be the Manor House for the Abington estate. Lady Wantage gifted land and buildings to the Corporation of Northampton in 1892. It opened as a park in 1897. Following the acquisition of additional land, the park was extended in 1903. The park includes a children's play area, bandstand, and lake.

The division of the park into Eastern and Western sections by Park Avenue South is a particular challenge, making it hard to see the park as a whole. We are currently pursuing plans to improve walking and cycling routes in the Abington Park area to encourage more active ways of travelling.

Becket's Park and Midsummer Meadows, Northampton

Separated by Nunn Mills Road, these represent two separate but closely linked parks. Located

between the town centre and the River Nene, Becket's Park is one of Northampton's classic town centre parks.

Extending to around 10 hectares, this park is now also adjacent to the University of Northampton's Waterside Campus. Covering around six hectares, Midsummer Meadow sits north of the River Nene.

Becket's Park provides a children's play area, tennis courts and public art, whilst Midsummer Meadows contains car parking, skate and BMX park, park café and floating restaurant.

Borough Hill County Park, Daventry

Borough Hill has a history of human use stretching back to at least the Bronze Age, when it was a fortified encampment. More recently the BBC used the site as a transmission station until the 1990's, when the then Daventry District Council acquired the site and opened it as a Country Park.

As Borough Hill is a scheduled ancient monument there are limitations as to the work that can be carried out there, so to protect the ancient structures and remains buried beneath the surface. Alongside being an ancient scheduled monument, there are exceptional views of the local countryside. On-site car parking is also provided.

Brackmill Woods Country Park, Northampton

Covering 77 hectares, including the tree belt, Brackmill Woods Country Park is located to the east of the Brackmill industrial estate. In close proximity to the disused Bedford to Northampton railway, it provides visitors with an on-site car park and hard-standing paths. Major housing development is proposed around the south of the park; this is both an opportunity and a challenge.

Bradlaugh Fields, Northampton

Developed from a former golf course, Bradlaugh Fields is a 60-hectare site which opened in 1998. Rich in flora uncommon in Europe, this park is home to one third of British butterfly species and has a protected area for badgers. It includes the following facilities: parking bay, community café, community garden, forest school, and children's play area. The park has a number of ponds, but as natural water supplies have reduced following development of the surrounding area, these are gradually disappearing. This is causing a loss of ecological value.

Brampton Valley Way Linear Park

The Brampton Valley Way is a 14-mile trail built on the former Northampton to Market Harborough Railway line. Following the closure of the railway line in 1981, the former Northamptonshire County Council purchased the 13-mile Northamptonshire section, which was subsequently developed into a Linear Park. Leicestershire County Council owns the 1-mile section north of the county boundary. The two ownerships thus allow a complete off-road cycle route between Northampton and Market Harborough.

This park includes two former railway tunnels, Kelmars Tunnel and Oxendon Tunnel, which are approximately 480 metres and 414 metres long, respectively. The park provides a great opportunity for individual and family experiences, particularly on cycles. The tunnels are both an exciting feature and a significant maintenance obligation.

Brixworth Country Park

Developed with access for the disabled in mind, the 16 hectare 'Countryside for All' Brixworth Country Park opened in 1997. Its three accessible walks range from 0.5 miles to 1.25 miles. It also has easy access to the cycling friendly 7-mile Pitsford Water walk. Sharing a common boundary with Anglian Water's Pitsford Reservoir Brixworth Country Park has a car park, café, toilet facilities,

cycle hire and children's play area. There are also public facilities at the nearby Pitsford Reservoir.

Cracks Hill Country Park, Crick

The former Daventry District Council acquired Cracks Hill in 1999. We manage the site in partnership with the Friends of Cracks Hill. Crick Millennium Wood Pocket Park, the Jubilee Wood and the canal towpath are all nearby. Situated between the villages of Crick and Yelvertoft, near bridge 14 of the Leicester Line of the Grand Union Canal, Cracks Hill offers fantastic panoramic views of the surrounding area.

Dallington Park, Northampton

Gifted to Northampton by Messrs C.E. and T.D. Lewis in 1921, the 23-acre Dallington Park represents a pleasant open space with large trees and shrubberies. It is believed that the history of this park includes acting as an area where cattle grazed due to the evidence of a ha-ha wall on the park's north-eastern boundary with what was once the former Dallington Hospital. This park is home to football and cricket pitches.



Daventry Country Park

Surrounding the Daventry Reservoir, the 65 hectares Daventry Country Park was designated a Country Park in 1978. Expanded in 1994, following the construction of Northern Way, it was possible to open up areas to the public that had previously been inaccessible. Most of the existing park is both a local nature reserve and the Daventry Reservoir conservation area. The park is being further extended, which will result in it being connected to the Grand Union Canal to its north. In addition to its three accessible walks, which range from 0.3 miles to 2.5 miles, Daventry Country Park has a car park, café, toilet facilities and children's play area. Development of housing to its east will see it largely enclosed by urban development. As with Brackmills Country Park, this is both an opportunity and a challenge, as the park responds to its new context.

Delapre Park, Northampton

Delapre is one of the most beautiful public gardens in Northampton and its grounds and the gardens can be enjoyed at all times of the year.

The park comprises gardens of around 3 hectares, with open parkland of about 200 hectares adjoining the gardens. This attractive Park is located in the southern part of the town just off London Road. Delapre Woods can be found at the southern end of the Delapre estate. In addition to being the setting of grade II* and II listed buildings, the park is the registered battlefield of the 1460 Battle of Northampton, part of the Wars of the Roses, and forms the Delapre Abbey conservation area. This limits the changes and works which are possible on the site.

Delapre Park includes Delapre Abbey and Orangery café, which are hosted by the Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust (DAPT), car park, lake, a large walled garden, a miniature railway run by NSME (Northampton Society of Model Engineers), and small arboretum. Fishing and water-skiing take place on the lake. We are delivering improved foot and cycle routes in parts of the park, creating better connections between the town centre, University, and other localities.

Challenges for the site include having sufficient parking, particularly for larger events associated with the Abbey. Proposed housing development to the north, off Ransome Road, may bring some challenges but also opportunities. DAPT plans to develop the Victorian Stable Yard, to the north of the park. This should add further attractions to the area, although it is likely to add to parking pressures.

Noise from the A45 Nene Valley Way badly affects the park, particularly in the east. This diminishes the sense of peace and tranquillity. This road is part of the trunk road system managed by National Highways.

Hunsbury Hill Park, Northampton

Hunsbury Hill Park is a 38 hectares site, a few miles from Northampton town centre. Dominated by the crown of an Iron Age hill fort, which is a scheduled ancient monument, the park is bordered on the west and south by the Ironstone railway system. Facilities include the Ironstone Railway and railway museum, children's play area, café, and car park. However, the Ironstone Railway is in poor condition and has not operated rail trips for some time.

Swanhaven linear Park, Lings Wood & Billing Arbours, Northampton

The park represents around 50 hectares of open space in eastern Northampton, including Swanhaven linear park and associated artificial lakes; Kingfisher, Cygnet and Dragonfly along Billing Brook. 20 hectares of the park have been designated as a local nature reserve managed by the Wildlife Trust incorporating woodland, scrub, ponds and acid grassland.

Whilst much valued by the community, the parks are affected by the closeness of development and busy roads, making it difficult to enjoy the space as somewhere away from the business of modern life. There have also been issues with silting of the lakes, which engineering works have sought to address by narrowing the main flow channel.



The Racecourse, Northampton

The Racecourse is, as its name suggests, a former racecourse. Located in a dense area of central Northampton and extending to 47 hectares, it is a vital green lung for the surrounding communities. It also provides space for community activities such as circuses. The Racecourse is equipped with football pitches, tennis courts, bowling greens, and a basketball course. A former park depot towards the centre of the site is now a valuable community garden but requires more work to maximise its use.

At the southern edge of the park is a large building, known as the Pavilion, a car park and changing rooms. There are various smaller buildings including former public toilets. The buildings are not, overall, currently well used as public habits and needs have changed.

Historically the Racecourse had issues with crime and anti-social behaviour, but careful landscape work, improved lighting, and CCTV have significantly improved this position. The park is now enjoyed by people of all ages.

Upton Country Park, Northampton

Upton Country Park is a large park, comprising three areas. The eastern section is 36 hectares between Upton Way and Upton Mill; the central section is around 74 hectares in size running up to Upton Valley Way and the western section is 47 hectares. Totalling around 158 hectares the park includes large reservoirs designed to manage the flood risk to this area of Northampton. Parts of the park are grazed, helping to ensure it retains an open character.

Whilst very large, the park is divided by a major road, Upton Valley Way, between its central and western sections.

Watermeadows, Towcester

Watermeadows is a large public park serving Towcester and the surrounding area. The River Tove runs along its western edge and much of the park is flood plain for the river. The site forms part of the grade II registered park and garden of Easton Neston, which was influenced by Christopher Wren and implemented by Nicholas Hawksmoor. Iron Age remains have been found on site, and the Watermeadows sits adjacent to the scheduled ancient monument of the Bury Mount and the grade II listed Towcester Mill.

Our local facilities

In comparison to our major parks, our local parks and informal green spaces do not possess the same scope, however they remain a significant part of our green infrastructure. We will manage these spaces in accordance with this strategy's core principals and themes, seeking opportunities to increasingly engage and work with our local communities and our partners.

Play areas and outdoor sports facilities within our parks represent important assets helping children, young people and adults remain active, build confidence, and improve social skills. We aspire to ensure these facilities are accessible and they help make our parks an inviting destination for recreation and quality time.



Our vision and objectives

Introduction

This section of the Strategy considers the context for the parks and considers how they can best contribute to a thriving West Northamptonshire. It then sets out a vision and objectives.

Our strategy is underpinned by an aspiration to utilise our parks and green spaces as an asset that will enable us to effectively work with our colleagues, partners, and local communities to leverage and deliver our shared objectives. In doing so, we also want to ensure we capture the thoughts of our residents, thereby creating greater local participation in shaping our plans.

Related local policies and strategies

As part of the Council's Corporate Plan, we have set ourselves ambitious environmental, sustainability, and health and wellbeing goals. Our "Green and Clean" objective will see us focus on a number of aspirational outcomes to which this Strategy will facilitate, including Net zero carbon by 2030; Increased wildlife species and more trees; High quality parks and Accessible green space for all.

The Council is also preparing a new Local Plan for West Northamptonshire, which will replace the existing West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy and part 2 local plans. This plan will guide development until 2041, setting out our long-term vision and objectives for our locality. It aims to identify locations for developing new housing and employment, changes to our transport infrastructure and other supporting community facilities.

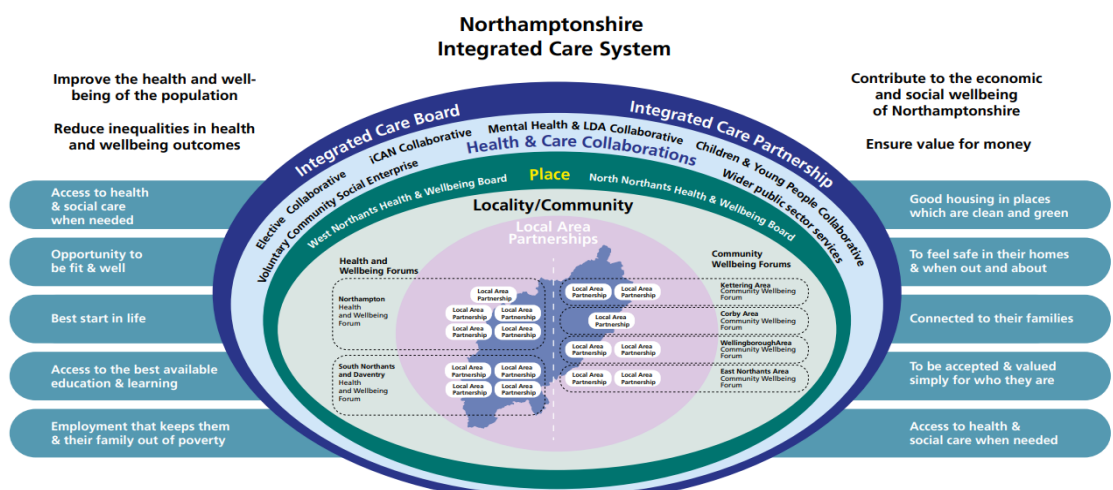
The Council is developing a Playing Pitch Strategy and a Sports Facilities Strategy. In providing a strategic framework, they will ensure we have sufficient provision of outdoor playing pitches and sports facilities to meet the evolving needs of our communities until 2041. Many of these facilities lie within parks.

The Council is developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Northamptonshire. This, with the statutory backing provided by the Environment Act 2021, will specify priority areas for delivering and enhancing habitats across the area. In some cases, existing or new parks will be suitable locations for this work.

The Council's Estate Climate Strategy and Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy call for the Council to explore creating a new productive woodland. The core purposes would be carbon capture and timber production, but the strategies call for the benefits to be maximised, identifying public access and biodiversity gain as being potential ancillary benefits. Such a woodland, if found to be viable, would form part of the Council's parks network.

We are also a partner in the delivery of the countywide Integrated Care Strategy. This Strategy seeks to ensure all Northamptonshire residents receive fair opportunities to be the best version of themselves, whilst delivering the best health and wellbeing outcomes for all. We have adopted these principles on a local level in West Northants with our Joint Health and Wellbeing Board's Live Your Best Life Strategy (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Northamptonshire Integrated Care System delivery approach



We believe that every child should have the best start in life, whilst everyone should have a good experience of ageing and at the end of life. This strategy recognises that no partner can achieve these aims alone. Key park-related outcomes included within this strategy encompass connecting communities, creating safe environments, and maximising opportunities to be fit well and independent. Move Northamptonshire¹⁵ is an integrated care system-wide framework for developing more active lifestyles in Northamptonshire. Our parks will play an important role in achieving the outcomes it seeks. In many cases parks will also contribute to the priorities of our Local Area Partnerships.

In July 2021, we adopted the Oxford – Cambridge Arc Environmental Principals for protecting, restoring, and enhancing the environment. These principals aim to double economic growth along the OxCam Arc by doubling nature and ensuring it leads the way in the “zero-carbon living and working of the future”. We will achieve this by committing to greener transport, doubling the number of trees and acreage of accessible managed green spaces and supporting local green energy production.

Our parks also have a role to play in supporting the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy, both by helping create the setting for other tourist attractions, and in some cases being attractions in their own right.

Supporting wider national and global initiatives

Delivering against the outcomes identified above will improve the environment and quality of life for our residents and visitors. However, they also form part of a larger national and global¹⁶ approach to protecting and rejuvenating our planet.

Nationally, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has launched its environment plan, “A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment”, which seeks to improve the environment within a generation. Its goals are cleaner air and water; plants and animals which are thriving; and a cleaner, greener country for us all¹⁷. As part of our package of Council-wide measures, which includes the intentions included in this Strategy, our local

activity will also contribute towards many of central government’s environmental aspirations.

As well as contributing to the government’s twenty-five-year environmental plan, the actions we take will also support the delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Whilst we recognise the scale of the seventeen goals the UN has set (see Figure 3), by delivering the many local initiatives, which include those contained within this Strategy, the Council would be supporting the global response. Our organisation has a key role to play locally in discussing, shaping, and leading how the various communities, including the business sector, across West Northamptonshire respond to the challenges posed. However, our contribution does not end there as there are clear synergies between this Strategy and the SDGs 3, 13, 14 and 15¹⁸, whilst it can also play a part in supporting a number of others too.

3: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



In addition to its provisions relating to local nature recovery strategies, the Environment Act 2021 creates requirements for all new developments to deliver a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity. As local planning authority the Council is responsible for securing this. However, it can also play a role in making sure that net gain is delivered locally, potentially including in its parks.

¹⁵ <https://movenorthamptonshire.org>

¹⁶ e.g. [Urban green spaces: a brief for action](#) World Health Organisation, 2017; [Assessing the value of urban green and blue spaces for health and well-being](#) World Health Organisation, 2023; [Green Infrastructure Principles](#) Natural England.

¹⁷ HM Government (2018) A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment.

¹⁸ SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing. SDG 13: Climate Action. SDG 14: Life Below Water. SDG 15: Life on Land.

The vision and objectives

Drawing from the Council's vision and corporate priorities, the results of our consultation informing the development of this strategy, the local, national, and global initiatives outlined above, and the existing and projected context of West Northamptonshire, our vision for our parks and green spaces is:

"West Northamptonshire's parks are places for people of all backgrounds to thrive through exercise and relaxation in the open air, enjoying nature and heritage, building communities, and supporting biodiversity."

Fleshing out the vision, our objectives have been developed to make sure that any changes made to our parks are appropriate, affordable, sustainable, and clearly deliver against our strategic aspirations. These objectives will be used when considering any changes that affect the current or future management or maintenance of our parks.

They are to:

We will develop and market our major parks as a network of destinations, which cater for the local community they serve, but also attract residents and visitors from further afield. We aim to maximise the range of facilities provided at these parks so we can enrich the visitor experience. This includes as appropriate providing parking, toilets, and café, alongside the potential to host larger scales events.

01 Provide a network of safe and accessible parks serving the whole of West Northamptonshire

Create spaces for health and wellbeing to flourish **02**

03 Preserve and develop the biodiversity, her-itage, and landscape values of all sites

Encourage engagement and participation of communities and partners to develop a sense of pride and community cohesion **04**

05 Secure investment in our parks

Make good use of public money and assets **06**

How are we going to do it

Delivering our vision

Our major parks represent places people from across West Northamptonshire and beyond can come to enjoy. They provide wide ranging facilities and opportunities for fun, relaxation, and personal development. Each of our major parks possesses its own character and identity, reflecting their specific heritage. Together they offer many ways of enjoying nature and the outdoors.

Our parks also present potential economic opportunities, which could contribute to the wider West Northamptonshire economy by making it a destination people want to visit, live and spend time in.

This Strategy focuses on our major parks including their amenities, such as car parks, cafés, toilets, signage, lighting, benches, and play equipment. It does not include town and parish council managed parks and green spaces, pocket parks, allotments, or public rights of way, although in some cases there are relationships with these spaces and those who manage them.

Delivery actions form three types:

- Overarching interventions, where actions relate to all parks or several of them.
- Delivery of new or renewed parks, to fill gaps, meet needs, and take advantage of opportunities.
- Enhancing our existing parks.

Overarching actions

Purpose

Some actions relate to all, or a number of, parks and to the way we approach the parks as a whole. These are described here.

Good land management

The Green Flag Award scheme recognises well managed parks and green spaces, setting a benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces. It is an international standard for parks and green spaces. Holding a Green Flag Award is an excellent example of achievement and should provide communities with a great sense of local pride. We are proud to hold six awards and are looking to increase the number of Green Flag Award winning parks in the future.

Some of our parks have specific management requirements such as conservation areas,

stewardship agreements, scheduled ancient monuments, and listed and other historic buildings. These requirements will impact and influence how we can develop and use these sites, as we must adhere to specific management arrangements. Compliance with these arrangements will enable us to demonstrate that we are protecting and enhancing the heritage and natural environment of these sites. The Council will:

- a) Seek to retain existing Green Flag awards and secure additional ones.
- b) Ensure parks are managed in ways which are consistent with stewardship agreements, conservation area management plans, and other relevant documents.



Safe and accessible parks

It is vital our parks remain in good order, and that, as far as practical, they can be enjoyed by all. Therefore, we will:

- a) Develop plans for proactive maintenance of the parks estate.
- b) Ensure projects or improvements are, as far as practical, accessible to all. This includes both physical accessibility and measures designed to encourage use by those who may otherwise feel unsafe or that the parks are 'not for them'. This may include:
 - Engagement with women and girls when designing new facilities to identify the specific requirements for women and girls.
 - Improvements to sight lines, visibility and escape routes when designing and installing new facilities, developing tree planting schemes, etc.
 - Ensuring adequate lighting, that is low and even rather than lights that create strong contrast and glare.

- Delivering good path networks that are easy to understand and navigate.
- c) Explore possibilities for delivering new and enhanced toilet facilities, including 'changing places' toilets for those with the greatest needs.

Freedom to enjoy

We recognise the detrimental effect nuisance and anti-social behaviour can have on the enjoyment of our parks and other open spaces. This ranges from littering to use of unauthorised motor vehicles. We are particularly aware of the need to ensure our parks are accessible to all, including women and girls¹⁹, and those from minority backgrounds. Actions which will be taken include:

- a) Creating a single, up to date, set of park by-laws, to clearly set out what not permitted and the consequences of breaching the bylaws.
- b) Where bylaws are not a practical solution, use of public spaces protection orders (PSPOs). Currently in use in open spaces across West Northamptonshire with specific provisions in use in Daventry Country Park and Upton Country Park. Current PSPOs provide for direct enforcement against specific problematic behaviours and can be considered as an enforcement option for a range of anti-social behaviour.
- c) Appropriate physical measures, where these can prevent some types of nuisance or anti-social behaviour without materially harming the interests of other park users.
- d) Where this can be done, encouraging informal surveillance. This may involve, for example, letting out disused buildings so the occupiers have an interest in observing and reporting unsuitable behaviour.
- e) Additional CCTV, where this is practical and justified.
- f) Making parks where there are known problems a focus for deployment of Park Rangers and Neighbourhood Wardens.
- g) Work through the community safety partnership to seek Police support as needed.
- h) Ensuring regular parks surveys include questions designed to understand factors which may inhibit the use of parks by women, girls, and people from minority backgrounds.

Together these actions should reduce issues of anti-social and nuisance behaviour and thus allow legitimate uses of the parks to flourish.

Additional means of physical exercise and enjoyment

The parks offer a range of means of enjoying being outdoors, including walking, cycling, open water swimming and water-skiing. However, to maximise their attraction it would be good to offer a wider range. For these purposes, the following are considered; all of them combine physical exercise with a 'reward' in the form of sensations of motion or (safe) risk, and of achievement. This benefits physical and mental health, and overall wellbeing. Such activities are also often undertaken in groups, helping to build social inclusion and cohesion.

High ropes and allied activities

There are a range of activities people enjoy involving climbing, walking along, or controlled falls from ropes. These activities typically involve a degree of excitement which results in people being willing to exercise, including upper body muscle groups not engaged in many other activities.

Alpine Coasters

Alpine coasters are single-person rides driven by gravity, on tracks. A sufficiently steep hillside is needed but the other requirements are relatively modest. Users experience an adrenaline rush going down and get exercise walking (or running) to the top.



Grass bobsleigh

Grass bobsleigh works similarly to alpine coasters, but without the track. A sufficiently steep hillside is needed.

¹⁹ Having regard to the factors described in, for example, Barker, A and Fox, R (2023) Women and Girls' Safety in

Velorail

Velorail is the use of – typically – old rail alignments with pedal-driven vehicles, typically for up to four people. The track can be in a condition completely unsuitable for traditional rail or tram vehicles, as the velorail carriage (draisine) is very light. Users experience the sensation of quick movement in the open air, as well as, often, enjoying the heritage of the site.



Boat hire

Providing boats for hire is a traditional arrangement in many parks. It is not currently on offer in West Northamptonshire. Many people enjoy the experience, which typically involves a moderate degree of exercise.



Large slides

Slides suitable for adults and children offer the experience of 'falling', in a safe context. As with Alpine coasters and grass bobsleighs, Users experience an adrenaline rush going down and get exercise walking (or running) to the top.

Strategic concession agreements

The additional forms of physical exercise and enjoyment would doubtless be welcomed by many residents of West Northamptonshire. However, the Council is not particularly familiar with running any of them and the nature of the business models involved. Therefore, to manage the risk it is proposed that one or more concession partners be

sought. These would bring operating experience and private capital for installation.

The procurement of these concessions would include the options for operators to make proposals for such facilities in Northampton town centre.

Biodiversity enhancement and a habitat bank

If we are to leave our natural environment in a better state than we found it so that our children and their children can truly enjoy this inheritance, we must ensure we respect the intrinsic value of nature. Whilst it is imperative that our parks and green spaces evolve and adapt so to meet the changing needs of our communities, it is also important that they do not lose the character and heritage that made them so special in the first place. To this end we will safeguard our varied landscapes, ensuring they are not unduly exploited and protect our indigenous wildlife, including protecting and preserving native and endangered animals, woodland and plant life.

Our parks are already important reservoirs of habitat supporting biodiversity. However, they could support more, both within their existing boundaries and in potential extensions and new parks. In particular, there is potential for the Council to establish a 'habitat bank'. This involves creating or enhancing biodiversity value, the value of which is converted into credits which can be used by developers who need to meet their biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements. Whilst sometimes it is best for BNG to be delivered on development sites, it can enhance the benefits if the effort is focused on areas where a significant difference is made.

We will:

- a) Identify where our parks can most effectively support biodiversity including critical species, and carry out maintenance and improvement works with this in view.
- b) Explore setting up a West Northamptonshire Habitat Bank, enabling investment to enhance the parks estate through sale of biodiversity credits.
- c) Take opportunities for increasing tree planting and tree cover in our parks, where is In line with the Tree Policy & Strategy and enhances the overall ecological benefits.

Contributing to active and sustainable transport

Sustainable and active travel addresses many of the Council's duties and policy goals, including supporting good public health, reducing carbon emissions, and making thriving, engaging places. Therefore, we will seek both to encourage active travel within our parks, and active and sustainable travel to them. We will:

- a) Support appropriate provision of active travel routes within our parks.
- b) Support the provision of active and public travel routes between our parks and places where people live and work, including where practical providing public transport routes which serve parks (whilst recognising the financial and practical constraints on what may be possible).
- c) Explore delivering further cycle and mobility aid hire in parks.

Cycle and mobility aids hire

We want to encourage people of all kinds, ages, and levels of ability to enjoy our parks, and to spread use across them. To facilitate this, it would be helpful for visitors to be able to hire cycles, mobility aids, and potentially other forms of mobility device, mixing pleasure and practicality. Such services may form part of strategic concession agreements.

We will therefore:

- a) Identify sites potentially suitable for one or more type of hire service.
- b) Seek to procure suitable partners to deliver them.

Enhancing the café offer

Our parks are great places for physical exercise, whether vigorous or gentle, but also for sitting, enjoying the surroundings, and eating or drinking. We will therefore review the provision of catering across the parks, seeking to increase provision and secure maximum benefits for the parks.

We recognise this will need to be a long-term plan, as some existing facilities have many years of contracted presence.

Working with users, residents, and partners

If we are to ensure our parks and green spaces are managed for the benefit of all, it is important that local people and our partners are provided with the ability to input into how they are being used and developed. By giving our communities a voice, we can assure ourselves that our plans are reflective of their aspirations for their local environment. Likewise, working with partners helps us ensure the widest set of benefits are achieved from our parks. We will:

- a) Work collaboratively with local communities, including 'friends of' groups, and businesses to secure public value through volunteering, community engagement, consultation and partnership working.
- b) Encourage new partnerships to develop park activities and greater participation opportunities, supporting local communities to use parks and create opportunities to improve wellbeing, physically, mentally, and socially.
- c) Increase the range of volunteer opportunities to build skills, create social cohesion and instil a sense of pride and ownership.
- d) Work with health partners to ensure parks and green spaces provide relevant opportunities for health and wellbeing interventions e.g., social prescribing and activity on referral.
- e) Work with local educational institutions to increase opportunities for learning and development which also contributes to the character and condition of the parks.
- f) Work with Local Area Partnerships to ensure our parks and green spaces support the relevant priorities that emerge in each area.
- g) Undertake regular visitor surveys to understand the wants and needs of park users and evaluate the outcomes to contribute to plans and proposals.



Encouraging use and enjoyment

Whilst our parks are an amazing resource, they are used to different degrees by our residents. This partly depends on location but is also affected by awareness. People are sometimes unaware of what parks offer, and in particular may miss out on the heritage preserved and presented in them. We want to maximise the ability of everyone to enjoy what the parks offer. Therefore, we will:

- a) Develop a marketing and communication plan for parks and green spaces.
- b) Develop web content to maximise the use of the internet as an information resource.
- c) Work with partners to deliver local heritage events and displays.
- d) Develop and support a programme of community open days and family activities, including activities designed to encourage women and girls, and those from minority backgrounds.

Developing the team

Delivering the Strategy and the ongoing parks operations requires a team – both WNC staff and volunteers – who have the right skills, knowledge, and experience. The Council will:

- a) Seek to retain a fully staffed Environment, Countryside & Parks service, promoting parks and green spaces as an attractive career option.
- b) Continue to facilitate and encourage volunteering opportunities, including:
 - Encouraging and supporting a network of sustainable volunteer groups which are formally constituted and follow best practice guidance, including induction training and continuous development.
 - Maintaining a volunteer database.
 - Running staff-led volunteering sessions to increase volunteer hours.
 - Hold a community or volunteer celebration event at least every two years to acknowledge the contribution of the voluntary and community sector.
- c) Offer development opportunities to staff and recognised volunteers to expand their abilities and minimise skill gaps.
- d) Provide and publicise opportunities for businesses to realise corporate social responsibility goals by carrying out improvement works in the parks.

New and renewed parks

Introduction

There are noticeable gaps in park coverage in West Northamptonshire, as well as varied access to good quality parks within Northampton specifically. It is therefore proposed to address these issues as set out below. Any new or renewed parks would reflect its specific context, environment, and cultural heritage.

Battle of Naseby Country Park

Naseby is a site of significant historical importance in the English Civil War. Representing the final key battle, Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentarian (Roundhead) New Model Army decimated the Royalist (Cavalier) army of King Charles I. Our proposed Country Park would seek to commemorate the battle site and the impact it had on the course of British history and Parliamentary democracy. It would also provide country park access for the north-east of West Northamptonshire.

A Battle of Naseby Country Park should provide a valuable addition to the area's attraction to tourists, encouraging people to come into and spend time in West Northamptonshire. Currently there is no real way to appreciate the battle, which is a noticeable omission given its importance to English history and indeed to that of these islands as a whole.

The Council will:

- a) Conduct a feasibility study to establish the likely level of demand, appropriate type of facilities, environmental impact, sources of funding, and overall proposal viability.
- b) Where the viability of providing facilities is confirmed, develop business cases to seek approval to progress.

Brackley Country (Linear) Park

There is a noticeable gap in major park coverage in the south-west of West Northamptonshire, serving Brackley and its surrounding villages. Brackley has grown substantially, and further growth is expected. This makes addressing this issue of increasing importance. Whilst Brackley is surrounded by countryside, it is not generally accessible to the public, with only seven rights of way emerging from the town.

Working in partnership with our planning colleagues, we aim to identify a suitable location for a new country park. Whilst it would not be appropriate to restrict choices in this strategy, an attractive option appears to be to create park

which includes a linear section utilising part of the former Great Central Railway, perhaps through the West Northamptonshire countryside to Helmdon.

The Council will:

- a) Conduct a feasibility study to establish the likely level of demand, appropriate type of facilities, environmental impact, sources of funding, and overall proposal viability.
- b) Where the viability of providing facilities is confirmed, develop business cases to seek approval to progress.

Houghton Linear Park

Substantial growth is planned for south-east Northampton. The Council already owns the basis of a potential linear park, which would help provide for both existing and new residents. This is the former Northampton to Bedford railway running from London Road, Northampton, into the West Northamptonshire countryside near Horton.

By also assessing the viability of incorporating part of the former Northampton to Wellingborough railway, this park would potentially run between Delapre Park and Becketts Park, through Brackmills and Great Houghton, past Little Houghton, out towards Horton. We envisage the length of this proposed park to be 9.2km, however, there is currently a 0.5 km break in our ownership, which occurs circa 7.8km outside Northampton. Whilst this site is currently largely inaccessible, it does give us the opportunity to enhance accessibility to open spaces for all Northampton's communities, especially those living on the south of the town.

As part of this emerging development, we are assessing the viability of introducing velorail. However, our ability to do so will be influenced by the outcome of further surveys of the site, which can confirm both the existence and condition of the old track, and assess how practical it would be to restore track to missing sections.

The Council will:

- a) Conduct a feasibility study to establish the likely level of demand, appropriate type of facilities, environmental impact, sources of funding, and overall proposal viability.
- b) Where the viability of providing facilities is confirmed, develop business cases to seek approval to progress.

Marefair Heritage Park

This new green space will incorporate a play area, new safe pathways, flowerbeds, and seating areas. In celebrating the area's rich heritage, it will also include archaeological remains, protect heritage assets and help enhance the settings of Northampton Castle and Mound, Grade 1 listed St Peter's Church and Grade 2 listed Castle Hill Reformed Church.

Costing £2.2million, we anticipate the work to create this park being completed by the Winter 2024/25. The Council will progress this scheme as part of its ongoing regeneration of Northampton town centre.



Eastern Northampton Park

Recognising the social and economic challenges faced by parts of eastern Northampton, it is proposed to explore the possibility of bringing together areas of open space to create a more cohesive Eastern Northampton Park. This would involve reducing the impact of the roads which currently separate these areas, introducing visitor facilities and improving security. At the same time questions around the maintenance and management of the Billing lakes would be addressed.

The Council will:

- a) Conduct a feasibility study to establish the likely level of demand, appropriate type of facilities, environmental impact, sources of
- b) Where the viability of providing facilities is confirmed, develop business cases to seek approval to progress.

West Northamptonshire productive woodland

In its Estate and Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategies, the Council has identified the potential for a new woodland to capture residual carbon emission from its operations. The same woodland may, in time, provide timber and other wood products for use in construction. By 'locking up' carbon from the atmosphere and then allowing

the use of the same land to extract more carbon through fresh planting, this would secure additional benefits. Clearly, it would take some time to reach a point where trees were a size whereby using timber from the woodland would be practical, but these issues require long-term thinking.

The same woodland should secure additional benefits, which should include public access – hence creating essentially a new woodland park – and may also provide biodiversity gains and, depending on location, flood risk mitigation.

The Council will:

- a) Prepare a business case for productive woodland.
- b) Seek to create new woodland as soon as possible, so that impact on carbon capture is being delivered by 2030.
- c) Seek grants and other external funding for tree planting.

This work will be done in alignment with work on the Council's Tree Policy & Strategy and Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Northampton town centre

As part of its plans for the regeneration of Northampton town centre, the Council will be improving open spaces. It sees the future of all the town centres in West Northamptonshire as places where people go to enjoy themselves, with shopping only as part of the experience.

Therefore, whilst it has many purposes, one perspective on the centre of Northampton will be as a 'park'. Of course, this does not literally mean central Northampton would be a park in the traditional sense. However, in particular, we will look for opportunities to create new outdoor physical leisure attractions. When people come to use these, some will stay longer and spend time and money in shops, cafés, or other attractions.

The Council will include Northampton town centre as a potential location when procuring strategic concession agreements.

Enhancing our existing parks

Introduction

Earlier in this strategy we provided an overview of our current portfolio of parks and green spaces. We are committed to maximising the value these assets provide to our communities. Working in partnership with our partners and wider stakeholders we will seek to capitalise on site-specific opportunities capable of generating increasing footfall, whilst retaining their individual character.

Abington Park

As identified earlier in this strategy, Abington Park is currently divided into two sections by Park Avenue South. Whilst when traffic consisted largely of people on foot or cycle, horses, and carriages, this was not a major issue. With current traffic is a significant one. Working in partnership with our key stakeholders we aim to reduce the impact this major thoroughfare currently has on this major, historical site.

We also aim to improve the park's existing infrastructure by:

- a) Installing a new toilet block to serve the eastern section.
- b) Making improvements to the lake.
- c) Reviewing the current security measures, including options to increase informal surveillance.
- d) Delivery of Abington area active travel scheme.



Bradlaugh Fields

The key issue to address at Bradlaugh Fields is the loss of natural water supply to the ponds. The Council will work with partners to explore ways this might be overcome, including whether storm water drains serving nearby developments could be reconfigured to discharge into the park.

Brampton Valley Way

We are aware of tentative proposals to reinstate a railway line and rail services between Northampton and Market Harborough. Bearing this in mind our proposals for the Brampton Valley Way will seek to ensure that the facility is resilient and would still offer an attractive facility and biodiversity value if the railway was re-opened. In particular we will:

- a) When opportunities arise, look to widen the corridor for both nature and people.

As part of our continued development of our Brampton Valley Way Linear Park we will assess the viability of:

- b) Creating a new “focal point” in the northern part of the route, perhaps at the former station site next to the former the Harrington airfield site. The concept would be to develop refreshment and providing other supporting amenities, which could potentially include a cycle hire facility.
- c) Developing a new car park at Draughton Crossing.
- d) Improving the surface in the tunnels and providing low-level lighting in them. If this is not possible, we will seek to improve the above ground ‘bypass’ arrangements.
- e) Improving the connection to Brixworth Country Park by cycle. This would probably involve improvements to Merry Tom Lane and improved cycle route from this to the country park.

We will also:

- f) Seek to improve connections from the southern end of the route into Northampton, helping people to access it by foot and cycle, and to access local shops and amenities in Northampton from the route.
- g) Encourage Leicestershire County Council to improve the connection from the end of the Brampton Valley Way into Market Harborough town centre. This should make the far north of the route more attractive to users.

Brixworth Country Park

We aim to enhance our offer at Brixworth Country Park and make it a premier destination in Northamptonshire and the wider area. Key actions will be to:

- a) Remove unnecessary barriers between the WNC-owned country park and Anglian Water-owned Pitsford reservoir, so people can enjoy the space more freely.
- b) If practical, extend the park, so it is better able to accommodate increasing numbers of people. It may also be appropriate to extend the car park.
- c) Explore enhancement of the play park. This is already a very popular attraction and is often very busy on days with good weather. Further enhancement would increase the enjoyment of children and their parents or carers and should increase parking income and secondary spend.
- d) Explore delivery of an alpine coaster and/or grass bobsleigh. This would add a new class of attraction, widening the user base and generating both direct and indirect income.
- e) Working with the newly formed wild swimming group to improve arrangements for swimming in Pitsford Water using facilities at the country park.
- f) Work with Anglian Water to deliver, as a joint project, a beach in Pitsford Reservoir, with swimmers using facilities in the country park nearby. This would enable more enjoyment of the open water.

Through effectively engaging and collaborating with our communities, partners and wider stakeholders we believe our plans will create a destination of choice in the heart of our locality.

Daventry Country Park

We have numerous plans to enhance Daventry Country Park. In addition to the on-going work to extend the Park to the Grand Union Canal to its north, we are looking at potentially introducing a range of activities that would enhance our offer to visitors:

- a) Investigating the viability of working with a partner to create a high rope activity space enabling visitors to get close with nature whilst also completing a variety of activities such as zip wires, cargo nets, Tarzan swings, flying tra-peze, suspending logs and wobbly bridges.
- b) We are also exploring the possibility of enabling visitors to bring out their inner medieval warrior by introducing an axe throwing activity where tools such as Angel axes and Norse tomahawks are thrown at targets. Many high ropes operators consider this a good paring, as it allows them to operate for more of the year.
- c) For those visitors who prefer to engage in more sedate and leisurely activities we will explore the feasibility of introducing a boat hire offer to the reservoir.

In conjunction with the Outdoor Learning Service, we will also assess the viability of developing an existing outbuilding in the park to support the Service's outreach pilot, which will assess the impact increasing the centre's reach on our communities has.

Delapre Park, Northampton

Delapre Park is unique in its relationship with Delapre Abbey and DAPT which operates the Abbey. Plans for Delapre Park will be worked on in partnership with DAPT.

Addressing the issues and taking the opportunities, the Council will:

- a) Support DAPT's proposals for regeneration of the Victorian stable block.
- b) Work with DAPT to enhance car parking in suitable locations, ideally at Ransome Road.
- c) Work with DAPT to enhance historic assets and to reduce inappropriate modern intrusions on the historic site.
- d) Continue to work with the Active Quarter partnership to deliver active travel project plans.
- e) Develop, in partnership with NSME, a strategy to develop and promote the miniature railway. Explore if there are income-generating opportunities arising from this.
- f) If it can be accommodated given the presence of water ski activities, explore boat hire on Delapre lake.
- g) Seek support from National Highways in addressing the noise from the A45 Nene Valley Way.



Hunsbury Hill

We are keen to explore opportunities as to how the onsite railway could be better utilised. Ideally this would be in partnership with the Northamptonshire Ironstone Railway Trust. We will:

- a) Support appropriate proposals by the Trust to extend its running track, conditional on the site being managed in a safe manner.
- b) Work with the Trust to develop its offer to the community, including a marketing strategy. Explore if there are income-generating opportunities arising from this.
- c) Look to introduce velorail using the track (on days it is not used by the Trust to running trains).

Upton Country Park

Our plans to enhance the facilities at Upton Country Park include creating a new café, perhaps starting with a mobile concession site. In addition to providing visitors with access to on-site refreshments, we are also exploring the viability of making further improvements to the Park's facilities, including installing toilets. These improvements should enhance the visitor experience and increase footfall.

Development of the Outdoor Learning Service

As described above, the Outdoor Learning Service provides valuable and enjoyable experience for children, currently largely of primary school age. The Council recognises the benefits the service has; not only does it deliver valuable education, but it also helps people reconnect with the natural world. Post Covid-19, the importance of this in alleviating anxiety and stress is particularly obvious. We will therefore:

- a) Continue to develop the programme of activities run by the service for primary-age children, both on site at Everdon and in parks across West Northamptonshire.
- b) Work with colleagues in Children's Services and in schools to explore developing an offer for both primary and secondary-age children and young people who are struggling with mainstream education, and for whom learning in a natural setting may be valuable.



Legacy Strategy actions

Purpose and sources

Introduction

Whilst this Strategy supersedes the previous strategies developed by the predecessor Councils, we have reviewed the aspirations our legacy councils committed to deliver on behalf of their local communities. Where we have identified actions which align to our goals and objectives, they are taking into this Strategy's delivery framework. The documents are:

- Daventry District Council: Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy (2009)
- Northampton Borough Council: Parks and Open Spaces Strategy Refresh (2013)
- South Northamptonshire Council: Open Space Strategy (2007 to 2021)

Each of our predecessor councils took a different approach to setting their locality-specific direction of travel. Whilst the intention of this strategy is to set the priorities and direction of travel for West Northamptonshire, we also want to acknowledge the status of any outstanding actions, especially where their continuation and completion are of relevance to what we want to achieve.

Daventry District Council: Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy (2009)

Published in 2009, this Strategy contained numerous recommendations alongside a supporting Action Plan. Split into three phases, Phase 3 was described as covering "2015+". Those actions which comprised "Phase 3" of Daventry's Action Plan have been included in the update below.

Northampton Borough Council: Parks and Open Spaces Strategy Refresh (2013)

This strategy referenced numerous policies and included a suite of statements which would provide a framework within which Northampton's open spaces could be improved. However, it did not include any specific actions or supporting timescales.

South Northamptonshire Council: Open Space Strategy (2007 to 2021)

Published in 2009, this Strategy contains a green space Action Plan, which indicated that actions would be completed over "the short term", "the medium term" or "the long term". Some actions were described as being "on-going". Those actions which were described as either "long term" or "on-going" have been included in the update below.

Legacy Actions Status Update

Having reviewed the three preceding strategies, we believe that the actions identified below represent those which align to and contribute to our new authority's strategic intentions. We have also provided an overview as to the actions taken by either the legacy authority, or ourselves to deliver them.

We said

Provide a further six play facilities and one facility for young people in Towcester in light of the anticipated growth in this area. Decisions regarding the appropriate location of these facilities should be informed by the location of any new development.

We did

To date we can report that a new play facility has been incorporated into the park at Watermeadows, with a further two forming part of new developments within the Towcester locality. We encourage developers to incorporate play facilities into their developments, with the associated site management typically being devolved to the relevant parish council in line with the Council's Adoption of Assets policy.

We said

Identify (and implement) opportunities for the provision of three additional facilities for children and an additional facility for young people in Brackley.

Continue the use of the mobile skatepark in rural areas, particularly targeting larger villages with resident populations exceeding 5,000. The availability of this facility should be promoted through leaflets to parish councils.

Coordinate activities at parks and green spaces across the district for children (aged up to 11) and young people (up to 16). These events should be promoted through schools and be delivered through multiple agencies.

Work with the Community Safety Partnership to help implement their strategy to combat anti-social behaviour, criminal damage and graffiti and dog fouling at green space sites. This will improve quality and the perception of safety at green space sites.

Ensure the provision of at least one informal area in villages exceeding 250 people - this should be a minimum of one amenity green space area.

Negotiate with schools to secure community use of school facilities outside school hours for informal recreation purposes. Efforts should be concentrated on areas where the school facilities are the only form of recreational green space in the village.

Reinstate dismantled railway lines to provide new green corridors linking rural areas. Community involvement and ownership in these projects should be encouraged.

Given the reliance on the limited number of parks and gardens in the district, and particularly in rural areas, the creation of a green corridor network should be sought.

Ensure that all new housing developments contribute appropriately to the provision of green space through the effective implementation of developer contributions.

We did

We have delivered one facility as part of a new development within the Brackley locality. A further facility is currently being planned. Brackley Town Council will be providing a new youth centre alongside a new stake park.

As identified in this strategy we are exploring opportunities to identify a new Linear/Country Park within the Brackley area, which will also include either a natural play or more generic play facilities.

The skatepark is being donated to a suitable group. We would grant access for the suitable use of the mobile skatepark use within our parks.

We will continue to work with Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre to offer opportunities for activities across our parks and green spaces. We will also grant access for other agencies to deliver such activities where appropriate.

We have delivered various campaigns across our sites to support the Partnership's work.

As identified in this strategy we will continue to support the Partnership to combat issues within our parks and green spaces.

This has been actioned by our Leisure Services team with the goal of increasing informal recreation and activity.

We are considering this as part of the proposals for new linear parks at south-east Northampton and at Brackley. Such corridors will also be considered when the Council prepares local cycling and walking plans and reviews rights of way.

The proposed new country parks at Brackley and for the Battle of Naseby will contribute to this. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will also address aspects of it.

This is addressed through the Councils planning policies.

We said

New developments should include the provision of those facilities which normally meet user needs in Parks and Gardens, i.e. play, formal and informal recreation.

Continue to support and develop the 'green gym' initiative at allotment sites, helping to raise awareness of the wider benefits of allotment provision across local communities.

In light of the importance placed on the provision of quality facilities, strive to achieve a Green Flag award at least one site in the district.

Discussions should also take place with bus service providers with a view to improving the routing and increasing the frequency of bus links from rural areas to parks and gardens.

We did

This is addressed through the Councils planning policies.

Allotments are largely managed by parish councils or are run privately. We will therefore not be pursuing such initiatives within this Strategy.

This action remains a corporate priority and we aim to increase the number of Green Flag Awards held by parks across West Northamptonshire.

This is not something the Council can make a priority given pressures on bus service budgets. However, where there are opportunities to make such connections within other routes they will be taken.

Delivery and Finance

Delivery mechanisms

For this Strategy to have value, it must be delivered. Accordingly, an action plan is appended. This identifies for each action which part or parts of the Council is responsible for delivery and the planned timescales.

Approach to finance

The Council operates within tight financial constraints; these were considered in drawing up the proposals in this Strategy. It therefore seeks to:

- Make best use of existing resources (physical, human, and monetary).
- Open up opportunities for private investment to deliver the Strategy's aims, noticeably in the strategic concession proposals and for catering.
- Provide a structure within which developer contributions (planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), the future Infrastructure Levy (IL), and any new or replacement system) can be secured and used to best effect, allowing the parks estate to contribute to meeting the need for sustainable development.
- Proposing a biodiversity bank, which would allow the parks estate to be developed through the use of biodiversity credits from developers seeking to deliver biodiversity net gain.
- Exploring a business case for a productive woodland which, at least in part, should be self-financing. To the extent it was not, this would be meeting the Council's carbon offsetting requirements in a cost-effective manner.

Where new parks are proposed, the intention would be that the business cases for each one would look to achieve operational nil or better financial impacts on the Council. Similarly, initial provision of these would be funded from grants or developer contributions, with Council capital only used if there was likely to be sufficient operational surplus to meet the financing costs.

Appendix: Action Plan

This section sets out the actions in the Strategy together with delivery arrangements. This plan will undergo regular review and refinement as part of the overall management review cycle. The abbreviations for service areas are 'A&E' for Assets & Environment, 'CM' for Communications, 'H&C' for Housing and Communities, 'HR' for Human Resources, 'H&T' for Highways & Transport, 'PH' for Public Health, 'PS' for Place Shaping, 'RS' for Regulatory Services, 'WS' for Waste.

No.	Service Areas	Action	Target delivery date	Resources
1.	A&E	Seek to retain existing Green Flag awards and secure additional ones.	Ongoing	Staff time, existing budgets
2.	A&E	Ensure parks are managed in ways which are consistent with stewardship agreements, conservation area management plans, and other relevant documents.	Ongoing	Staff time, existing budgets
3.	A&E	Develop plans for proactive maintenance of the parks estate.	2025	Staff time, existing budgets, potential new finance
4.	A&E	Ensure projects or improvements are, as far as practical, accessible to all. This includes both physical accessibility and measures designed to encourage use by those who may otherwise feel unsafe or that the parks are 'not for them'.	Ongoing	Staff time, relevant budgets
5.	A&E	Explore possibilities for delivering new and enhanced toilet facilities, including 'changing places' toilets for those with the greatest needs.	2025	Staff time, potential new finance (including government grants)
6.	A&E	Creating a single, up to date, set of park bylaws.	2025	Staff time, existing budgets
7.	RS	Where bylaws are not a practical solution, use of public spaces protection orders (PSPOs).	Ongoing	Staff time, existing budgets
8.	A&E	Appropriate physical measures, where these can prevent some types of nuisance or anti-social behaviour without materially harming the interests of other park users.	Ongoing	Staff time, existing budgets, potential new finance
9.	A&E	Where this can be done, encouraging informal surveillance.	2025 and ongoing	Staff time
10.	A&E	Additional CCTV, where this is practical and justified.	Ongoing	Staff time, existing budgets, potential new finance

No.	Service Areas	Action	Target delivery date	Resources
11.	A&E, RS	Making parks where there are known problems a focus for deployment of Park Rangers and Neighbourhood Wardens	Ongoing	Staff time
12.	A&E, H&C	Work through the community safety partnership to seek Police support as needed	Ongoing	Staff time
13.	A&E	Procurement of strategic concession agreements (including Northampton town centre).	2026	Staff time, possible consultancy costs
14.	A&E	Identify where our parks can most effectively support biodiversity including critical species and carry out maintenance and improvement works with this in view.	2026	Staff time, possible consultancy costs
15.	A&E	Explore setting up a West Northamptonshire Habitat Bank, enabling investment to enhance the parks estate through sale of biodiversity credits.	2025	Staff time, possible consultancy costs
16.	A&E	Take opportunities for increasing tree planting and tree cover in our parks, where is in line with the Tree Policy & Strategy and enhances the overall ecological benefits.	Ongoing	Staff time, existing budgets, potential new finance (including grants)
17.	A&E, H&T	Support appropriate provision of active travel routes within our parks.	Ongoing	Staff time, scheme costs (potential grant funding)
18.	H&T, A&E	Support the provision of active and public travel routes between our parks and places where people live and work, including where practical providing public transport routes which serve parks.	Ongoing	Staff time, scheme costs (potential grant funding)
19.	A&E	Identify sites potentially suitable for one or more type of cycle or other mobility aid hire service.	2025	Staff time
20.	A&E	Seek to procure suitable partners to deliver the cycle or other mobility aid hire service.	2025	Staff time
21.	A&E	Review provision of catering across the parks, seeking to increase provision and secure maximum benefits for the parks.	2026	Staff time
22.	A&E	Work collaboratively with local communities, including 'friends of' groups, and businesses to secure public value through volunteering, community engagement, consultation and partnership working.	Ongoing	Staff time
23.	A&E	Encourage new partnerships to develop park activities and greater participation opportunities, supporting local communities to use parks and create opportunities to	2025	Staff time

No.	Service Areas	Action	Target delivery date	Resources
		improve wellbeing, physically, mentally, and socially.		
24.	A&E	Increase the range of volunteer opportunities to build skills, create social cohesion and instil a sense of pride and ownership.	2026 and ongoing	Staff time
25.	A&E, PH	Work with health partners to ensure parks and green spaces provide relevant opportunities for health and wellbeing interventions e.g., social prescribing and activity on referral.	2026 and ongoing	Staff time
26.	A&E	Work with local educational institutions to increase opportunities for learning and development which also contributes to the character and condition of the parks.	2026 and ongoing	Staff time
27.	A&E	Work with Local Area Partnerships to ensure our parks and green spaces support the relevant priorities that emerge in each area.	2024 and ongoing	Staff time
28.	A&E	Undertake regular visitor surveys to understand the wants and needs of park users and evaluate the outcomes to contribute to plans and proposals. Ensuring these include questions designed to understand factors which may inhibit the use of parks by women, girls, and people from minority backgrounds.	Ongoing (annual)	Staff time
29.	A&E, CM	Develop a marketing and communication plan for parks and green spaces.	2024, 2027, 2031, 2034	Staff time
30.	A&E, CM	Develop web content to maximise the use of the internet as an information resource.	2024 and then ongoing (annual)	Staff time
31.	A&E	Work with partners to deliver local heritage events and displays.	2025 and then ongoing	Staff time
32.	A&E	Develop and support a programme of community open days and family activities, including activities designed to encourage women and girls, and those from minority backgrounds.	2026 and then ongoing	Staff time
33.	A&E	Seek to retain a fully staffed Environment, Countryside & Parks service, promoting parks and green spaces as an attractive career option	Ongoing	Staff time, potential consultancy costs

No.	Service Areas	Action	Target delivery date	Resources
34.	A&E	Offer development opportunities to staff and recognised volunteers to expand their abilities and minimise skill gaps.	Ongoing	Staff time, training budgets
35.	A&E, CM	Provide and publicise opportunities for businesses to realise corporate social responsibility goals by carrying out improvement works in the parks.	2024 and ongoing	Staff time
36.	A&E	Battle of Naseby Country Park: Conduct a feasibility study to establish the likely level of demand, appropriate type of facilities, environmental impact, sources of funding, and overall proposal viability	2029	Staff time, potential consultancy costs
37.	A&E	Battle of Naseby Country Park: Where the viability of providing facilities is confirmed, develop business cases to seek approval to progress.	2031	Staff time, possible new finance (including BNG credit income, developer contributions)
38.	A&E	Brackley Country (Linear) Park: Conduct a feasibility study to establish the likely level of demand, appropriate type of facilities, environmental impact, sources of funding, and overall proposal viability	2027	Staff time, potential consultancy costs
39.	A&E	Brackley Country (Linear) Park: Where the viability of providing facilities is confirmed, develop business cases to seek approval to progress.	2029	Staff time, possible new finance (including BNG credit income, developer contributions)
40.	A&E	Houghton Linear Park: Conduct a feasibility study to establish the likely level of demand, appropriate type of facilities, environmental impact, sources of funding, and overall proposal viability	2025	Staff time, potential consultancy costs
41.	A&E	Houghton Linear Park: Where the viability of providing facilities is confirmed, develop business cases to seek approval to progress.	2027	Staff time, possible new finance (including BNG credit income, developer contributions)
42.	PS	Marefair Heritage Park: Progress this scheme as part of its ongoing regeneration of Northampton town centre.	2028	Staff time, existing capital budget
43.	A&E	Eastern Northampton Park: Conduct a feasibility study to establish the likely level of demand, appropriate type of facilities, environmental impact, sources of funding, and overall proposal viability	2029	Staff time, potential consultancy costs
44.	A&E	Eastern Northampton Park: Where the viability of providing facilities is confirmed,	2031	Staff time, possible new finance (including BNG

No.	Service Areas	Action	Target delivery date	Resources
		develop business cases to seek approval to progress.		credit income, developer contributions)
45.	A&E	Prepare a business case for productive woodland.	2025	Staff time, potential consultancy costs
46.	A&E	Seek to create new woodland as soon as possible, so that impact on carbon capture is being delivered by 2030.	2025 and ongoing	Staff time, potential new costs (as cost-effective means of carbon offsetting)
47.	A&E	Seek grants and other external funding for tree planting.	Ongoing	Staff time
48.	A&E	Installing a new toilet block to serve the eastern section of Abington Park.	2024	Staff time, existing capital budget
49.	A&E	Making improvements to the Abington Park lake.	2028	Staff time, existing budgets, potential new finance (including grants)
50.	A&E	Reviewing the current security measures at Abington Park, including options to increase informal surveillance.	2024	Staff time, existing budgets, potential new finance
51.	H&T	Delivery of Abington area active travel scheme.	2025	Staff time, existing capital budget
52.	A&E	Work with partners to explore ways the reduced natural water supply to the ponds at Bradlaugh Fields might be overcome.	2026	Staff time, possible new finance (including BNG credit income, developer contributions, Anglian Water contributions)
53.	A&E	When opportunities arise, look to widen the Brampton Valley Way (BVW) corridor for both nature and people.	Ongoing	Staff time, possible new finance (including BNG credit income, developer contributions)
54.	A&E	Assess the viability of creating a new "focal point" in the northern part of the BVW route.	2026	Staff time, possible new finance (including developer contributions)
55.	A&E	Assess the viability of developing a new car park at the BVW Draughton Crossing.	2027	Staff time, new finance (including developer contributions)
56.	A&E	Assess the viability of improving the surface in the BVW tunnels and providing low-level lighting in them. If this is not possible, seek to improve the above ground 'bypass' arrangements.	2025	Staff time, new finance (including developer contributions)
57.	H&T	Assess the viability of improving the connection from the BVW to Brixworth Country Park by cycle.	2025	Staff time, scheme costs (potential grant funding)

No.	Service Areas	Action	Target delivery date	Resources
58.	H&T	Seek to improve connections from the southern end of the BVW into Northampton.	2025	Staff time, scheme costs (potential grant funding)
59.	A&E	Encourage Leicestershire County Council to improve the connection from the end of the BVW into Market Harborough town centre.	2024 and ongoing	Staff time
60.	A&E	Remove unnecessary barriers between Brixworth Country Park and Pitsford reservoir.	2024	Staff time, existing budgets
61.	A&E	If practical, extend Brixworth Country Park, so it is better able to accommodate increasing numbers of people. It may also be appropriate to extend the car park.	2025 and ongoing	Staff time, new finance (including BNG credit income, developer contributions)
62.	A&E	Explore enhancement of the play park at Brixworth Country Park.	2024	Staff time, existing budgets, potential new finance (including developer contributions)
63.	A&E	Explore delivery of an alpine coaster and/or grass bobsleigh at Brixworth Country Park.	2025	Staff time, operator capital
64.	A&E	Working with the wild swimming group to improve arrangements for swimming in Pitsford Water using facilities at Brixworth Country Park.	2024	Staff time, existing budgets
65.	A&E	Work with Anglian Water to deliver a beach in Pitsford Reservoir, with swimmers using facilities in Brixworth Country Park.	2026	Staff time, potential new finance (including developer contributions)
66.	A&E	Daventry Country Park: Investigate the viability of working with a partner to create a high rope activity space.	2026	Staff time, operator capital
67.	A&E	Daventry Country Park: Exploring the possibility of introducing an axe throwing activity.	2026	Staff time, operator capital
68.	A&E	Daventry Country Park: Explore the feasibility of introducing a boat hire offer to the reservoir	2026	Staff time
69.	A&E	Assess the viability of developing an existing outbuilding in Daventry Country Park to support the Outdoor Learning Service's outreach.	2025	Staff time, potential new finance (including developer contributions)
70.	A&E	Support DAPT's proposals for regeneration of the Victorian stable block.	As applicable	Staff time
71.	A&E	Work with DAPT to enhance car parking in suitable locations, ideally at Ransom Road.	2027	Staff time, possible new finance (including BNG credit income, developer contributions)

No.	Service Areas	Action	Target delivery date	Resources
72.	A&E	Work with DAPT to enhance historic assets and to reduce inappropriate modern intrusions on the historic site.	Ongoing	Staff time, possible new finance (including developer contributions)
73.	A&E, H&T	Continue to work with the Active Quarter partnership to deliver active travel project plans.	Ongoing	Staff time, scheme costs (potential grant funding)
74.	A&E	Develop, in partnership with NSME, a strategy to develop and promote the miniature railway. Explore if there are income-generating opportunities arising from this.	2025 and ongoing	Staff time
75.	A&E	If it can be accommodated given the presence of water ski activities, explore boat hire on Delapre lake.	2026	Staff time
76.	A&E, H&T	Seek support from National Highways in addressing the noise from the A45 Nene Valley Way affecting Delapre Park.	Ongoing	Staff time
77.	A&E	Support appropriate proposals by the Northamptonshire Ironstone Railway Trust to extend its running track.	As applicable	Staff time
78.	A&E, CM	Work with the Trust to develop its offer to the community, including a marketing strategy. Explore if there are income-generating opportunities arising from this.	2024	Staff time
79.	A&E	Look to introduce velorail using the track.	2026	Staff time, operator capital
80.	A&E	Creating a new café, perhaps starting with a mobile concession site, at Upton Country Park.	2025	Staff time, possible new finance (including developer contributions)
81.	A&E	Exploring the viability of installing toilets at Upton Country Park.	2028	Staff time, possible new finance (including developer contributions)
82.	A&E	Continue to develop the programme of activities run by the Outdoor Learning Service for primary-age children, both on site at Everdon and in parks across West Northamptonshire	Ongoing	Staff time
83.	A&E	Work with colleagues in Children's Services and in schools to explore developing an offer for both primary and secondary-age children and young people who are struggling with mainstream education	2025	Staff time, possible increase budget funded from charges to schools