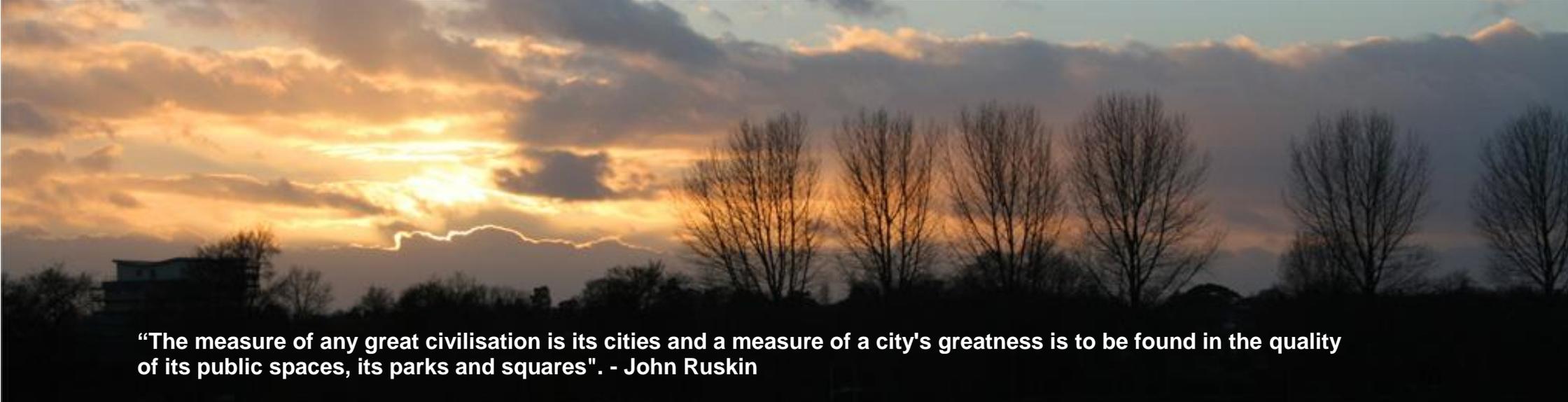


# Milton Keynes Council

## Public Open Space: Management Framework for MK: 2013 -2023



**“The measure of any great civilisation is its cities and a measure of a city's greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and squares”. - John Ruskin**

## Background

Public Open Space (POS) <sup>1</sup> in Milton Keynes is owned and managed by many organisations, with the largest managers being Milton Keynes Parks Trust and Milton Keynes Council.

Within the city of Milton Keynes POS covers approximately 2,895Ha - over 30% of the total City area, placing it among the highest local authorities in terms of open space per resident. In the coming years this is set to grow as new housing areas develop. Almost 65% of the Borough remains typically rural with villages, farmland and woodland.

The generous provision of POS in Milton Keynes contributes to the high quality of life in Milton Keynes; it is a fundamental component of what makes Milton Keynes a great place to do business and live in. The residents of Milton Keynes have told us how much they value their public open space<sup>2</sup> but condition or location may prevent them from visiting it more often.

The wider benefits of green and open spaces are nationally recognised by government and a host of national organisations.

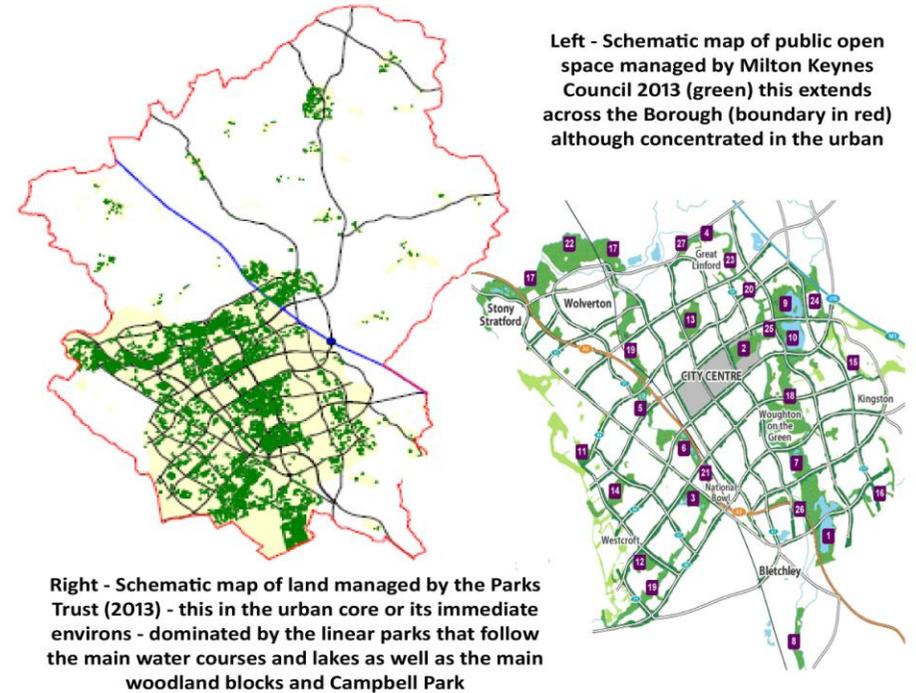
This framework has been developed by key stakeholders and partners to address the many challenges facing POS in 2013 and take it forward for the next ten years. This has included a period of public consultation in late 2012/early 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as “any land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground”, and with powers laid out in Open Spaces Act 1906. This strategy includes not only land, but also water and civic open space - any space that is held by a public body or available for public use, including footpaths, towpaths, playing fields etc.

<sup>2</sup> Milton Keynes Council Citizens Survey – November 2010 – January 2011 – Citizen satisfaction with Parks and Open spaces 78.55 - 2010

## Public Open Space in Milton Keynes



The framework sets out the vision and the overarching principles for the management and operation of public open space, in turn four strategic themes have been developed and to each theme priorities and actions developed to deliver the vision:

**Community:** *Spaces for faces - ensure present and future public open space meets the needs of residents of MK and contributes towards the prosperity of the Borough*

**Place:** *Public open space creates identity and contributes to vibrant communities and regeneration*

**Environment and sustainability:** *Enhancing the well being of citizens, wildlife and the wider environment and sufficiently funded for future sustainability*

**Quality Management:** *We agree and ensure consistent quality, accessibility and range of public open spaces*

## Stakeholders

A large range of stakeholders have interests in POS. Key partners can be broadly grouped into Owners/Managers and Users/Volunteers:

### Owners/managers:

- **Milton Keynes Parks Trust** – a charity owning and managing over 2,000 hectares of POS in Milton Keynes, including the network of linear parks, Campbell Park in the City Centre and the landscaped grid road corridors. The Trust's portfolio is continually increasing as it is identified as the adopting body for new open spaces in the City's expansion areas. The Trust is an independent body governed by a Board of Trustees and its operations are funded through its portfolio of endowed investments. The Trust's primary object is to provide, maintain and equip green spaces in and around Milton Keynes
- **Milton Keynes Council** – managing 1200 ha of POS which is generally more fragmented with many small pieces of land spread throughout the borough, but also including some larger areas such as Emberton Country Park. The Council has some statutory responsibilities (rights of way, tree preservation orders). It is the planning authority, and the key enabler and facilitator.
- **Town and Parish Councils** – these have a range of powers and responsibilities, including allotments.

### Users /Volunteers:

- **The general public** are all users of POS
- **Milton Keynes Play Association** - runs play events in POS.
- **Non Governmental Organisations** (NGO's) - a number of national open space charities work in MK. (e.g. Groundwork and The Conservation Volunteers)
- **Friends Groups** – These groups tend to have a very local focus on particular POS, attracting local people to take part in practical conservation activities.

## Challenges and Opportunities for POS management

The challenges in 2013 include:

- A particularly strong need for budget restraint by all organisations
- A growing city, with an ageing and more diverse population, which, due to increases in obesity and other diseases has even greater need of the health and social benefits of accessible quality open space than in the past. There is also a need for more POS as the population grows.
- Ageing infrastructure (some now over 30 years old) needing considerable investment, which, partly because many aspects of POS management are not statutory, sometimes does not receive high priority. In addition, adequate sums have not always been achieved from S106 agreements in the past to maintain new POS.
- Changing needs of users - future POS will need to be flexible. There are currently deficiencies and surpluses of different types of POS.
- There is a demand for facilities such as play areas and teen areas in rural areas isolated from the main urban core.
- Recent changes to the national policy context with the introduction the Localism Act (November 2011) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, March 2012).
- Fragmentation - the public open space network is being managed, owned and financed by a number of organisations which need to work together sharing skills, knowledge and other resources where possible. Multiple land managers create confusion for public open space users. Public open space needs to be managed strategically as a network to maximise the benefits.
- A need to set consistent measurable standards of quality across the borough, to obtain continuous improvement.

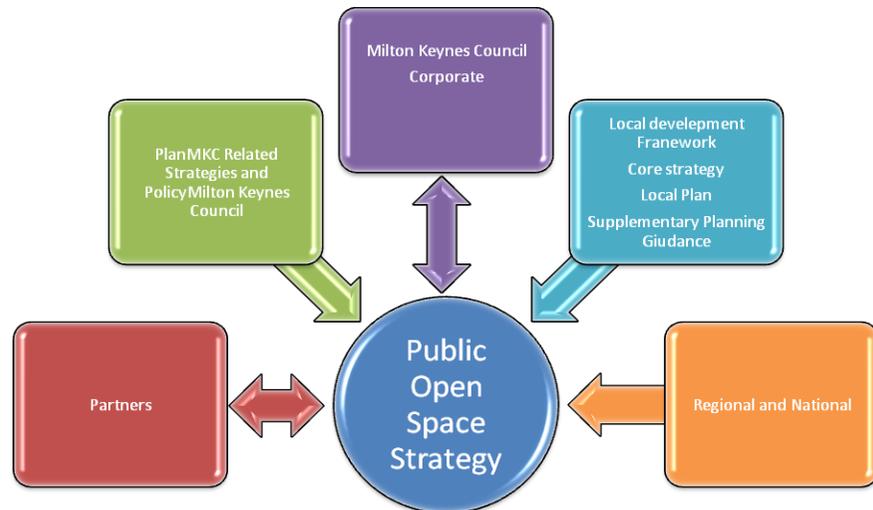
## Links to other Strategies

### Milton Keynes Council Corporate Plan 2012 – 16

The POS is aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan and contributes to all high level themes, and particularly the outcome "Milton Keynes will be a place which is clean and has high quality open, green public space and buildings". Additionally the Framework supports the Organisational Transformation Programme, strand 4, Alternative models of service delivery<sup>3</sup>.

### Local Planning Policy – Core Strategy

The Public Open Space Framework sits beneath the Core Strategy which acknowledges that high quality open space supports growth and the importance of green infrastructure. The Local Plan sets out the standards for open space. These standards are primarily quantitative, including sizes, catchment areas and numbers of play equipment. What is required in addition to this is qualitative guidance on design and implementation schedules.



<sup>3</sup> [http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/performance/documents/Corporate\\_Plan\\_2012\\_-\\_16\\_Final\\_Version\\_16.01.2012.pdf](http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/performance/documents/Corporate_Plan_2012_-_16_Final_Version_16.01.2012.pdf)

## Where do we want to be? – the Vision

Those implementing this framework – the owners/managers -draw upon this vision:

*“Public open space in Milton Keynes reflects and supports the positive participation, aspirations and activities of the community. We will all work to sustain a thriving green network that can adapt to change, supports the eco-system and contributes to a prosperous community”.*

### How will we get there?

To achieve our biggest ambitions, green and open spaces need to be managed not only as individual sites but also collectively.

Through this Framework we will:

- Identify and map all public open space.
- Set quality standards and commit to meeting them.
  - Identify areas of deficiency and surplus
  - Develop plans to address imbalances
- Milton Keynes Council seeks to devolve POS where a suitable organisation exists to manage it.
- Work collaboratively with the partners, service providers and communities.
- Identify opportunities to ensure POS can be managed sustainably, bringing in income and managing resources.

### Key outcomes

The desired outcomes of this framework are

- A visible improvement in the quality and safety of public open spaces, recognisable to residents and resulting in greater participation.
- Communities participating actively, getting involved in management and decisions on their local spaces.
- A public open space that works holistically and contributes on a regional scale to managing climate change and conserving biodiversity.

## Priorities for action

These are grouped under four themes - community, place, environment and sustainability, and quality management:



**Community:** *Spaces for faces - ensure present and future public open space meets the needs of residents of MK and contributes towards the prosperity of the Borough*

All people and communities are able to enjoy their public open spaces and that these spaces reflect their needs and aspirations, they should be safe, well maintained and support a range of vibrant activities that support their health and wellbeing.

- By 2014 engage the community and publish the results of their perceptions and satisfaction of public open space.
- By 2014 establish a public open space information hub where the community can find out what is happening, report and rate public open space
- By 2014 establish a Public Open Space Community Panel
- By 2013 offer Public Open Space for community transfer

**Place:** *creates identity and contributes to vibrant communities and regeneration.* Improve the experience of citizens and the communities they live in by listening to, and asking questions of them to discover their needs and aspirations. Balance traditional and contemporary design, integrating existing cultural assets, respecting traditional practices to create a sense of place.

- By 2015 – Up date and review planning documents that deliver and determine public open space design
- By 2016 – Produce a Public Open Space design guide.
- Continue to safeguard the route of the MK to Bedford canal

**Environment and sustainability:** *Enhancing the well being wildlife and the wider environment and sufficiently funded for future sustainability*

Public Open Space is part of a larger environmental, social and economic system, the processes and interactions that take place within one area effect will impact on others. The POS is a key part of the drainage system, helping to alleviate flooding and is a vital resource for wildlife offering a range of habitats and linkages.

- By 2020 - One additional Local Nature Reserve designated.
- By 2016 - Climate change adaptation initiatives developed.
- By 2023 - Plan and manage public open space to maximise its Green infrastructure potential and the carbon storage capacity.

**Quality Management:** *We agree and ensure consistent quality, accessibility and range of public open spaces*

Management must recognise that change is inevitable: a balance must be struck between reacting, anticipating and leading change. The planning and management of POS should optimise sharing of services, facilities and infrastructural networks, while increasing affordability, productivity, access and civic viability.

- By 2013 - Public open space partnership group established – Core Management Groups.
- By 2014 – Core Management Groups to develop a quality standard that defines a baseline of expectations for POS.

## Monitoring and delivery

Milton Keynes Council as the democratically elected body will take a leadership role to drive this Framework. Steering will be provided by a **Public Open Space Partnership Group**, consisting of the key owners and managers. The Partnership Group will monitor progress of actions plans, targets and outcomes. They will set quality indicators to provide measures for monitoring improvements. Strategic priorities will be reviewed on a five year basis.

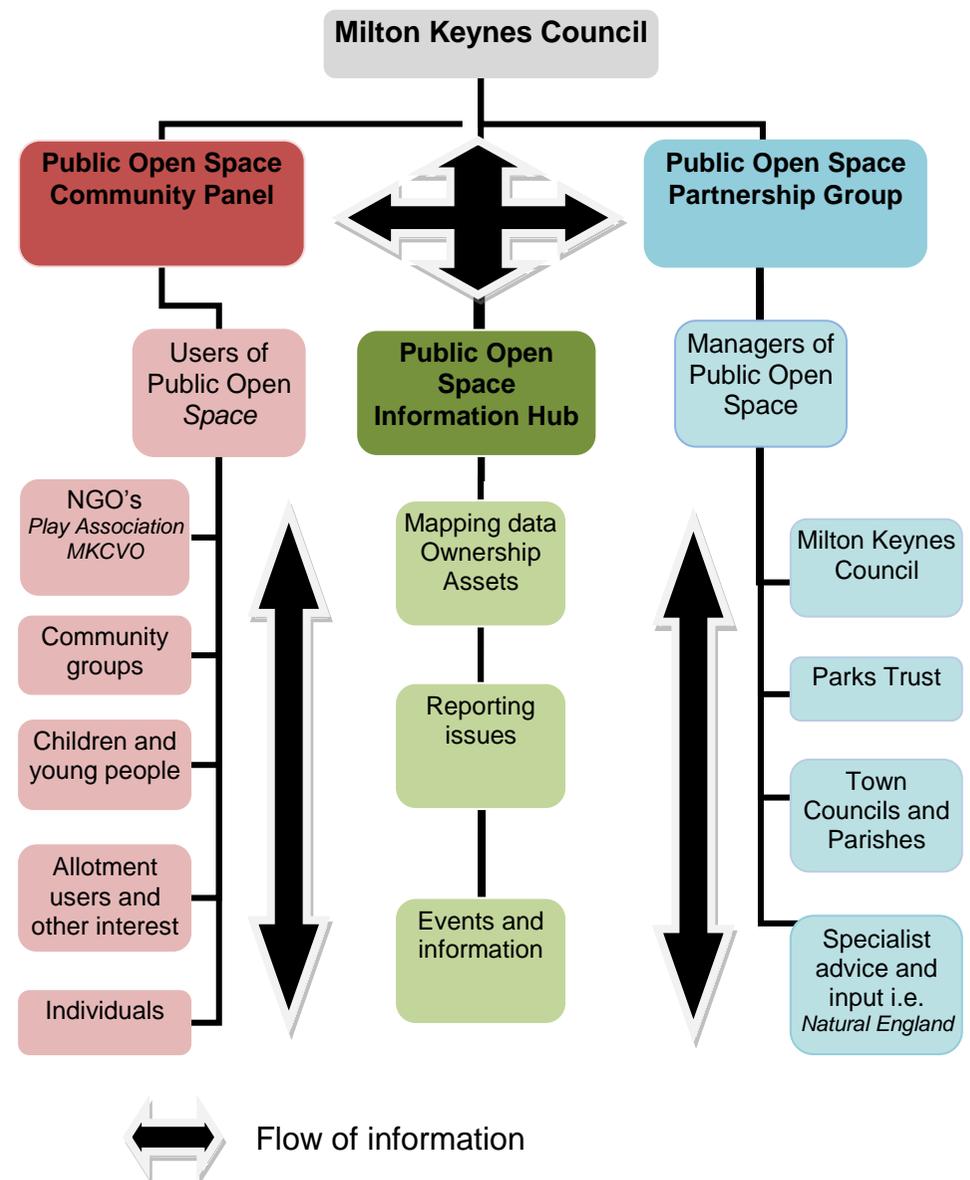
## Communication

There are many groups and organisations that play a role in the public open space of Milton Keynes. Some of these groups directly manage sites to varying degrees whilst others influence how they are used. All groups are important partners in realising the vision set out in this Framework. To ensure the voice of those not directly owning or managing public open space is heard a **Community Panel** will exist to ensure their thoughts and ideas are articulated. Both the **Community Panel and Partnership Group** will contribute to the **Information hub** to ensure the wider community is informed

## Resources

The implementation of the framework will require significant resource not only in terms of time and enthusiasm but also in financial contributions. Where possible the pooling of data and seeking synergies with other initiatives and groups will be pursued. Financial contributions towards strategic projects will be possible through development whilst third party funding, such as the National Lottery and Entrust will also be explored. However, it is clear that a financial contribution from those owning and managing public open will be required if the outcomes are to be met within the timescales set in the Action plan.

## Milton Keynes Public Open Space Strategy Organisational overview



Theme	Action priority	Policy	Task
Community	Promoting health and activity	<b>PHA1 Promote the use of public open space by all members of the community to improve physical and mental health.</b>	By 2014 establish a public open space information hub. Work with the merging Health and Well Being board on joined up strategic approaches by 2014. Promote all partner activities through a shared Public Open Space Hub by 2014 Target activities at the at – risk groups as identified by health professionals by 2014.
		<b>PHA2 Promote existing and new cycling and walking routes to increase the use of, accessibility of and choice of public open space.</b>	Work with the cycling officer and others to promote redway routes and map connections with public open space by 2016 Promote the role public open space can play as safe routes to school, work or community facilities by 2016
	Places for play	<b>PPA1 Provide high quality, accessible play opportunities for all age groups and abilities</b>	Audit all play spaces for accessibility and play value by 2014 Publish a comprehensive list of play area provision across the Borough by 2014 Develop a costed plan to provide strategic large scale play sites across the Borough by 2014
		<b>PPA2 Involve children and young people in the design and development of play spaces</b>	Establish a young person's forum (potentially part of the Youth cabinet) to inform the location and design of play spaces and create new methods of delivery by 2014. Establish qualitative guidelines for the design of play spaces and wheeled sports by 2014
	Safe and secure	<b>PSS1 Ensure POS is welcoming and high standards of cleanliness, maintenance and repair are upheld</b>	Key spaces are identified and signage that supports problem reporting is in place by 2016 Work with all agencies to tackle ASB by 2014
		<b>PSS2 Promote community involvement in local spaces</b>	Seek funding to set up a Public Open Space Community Panel as a forum for community groups and others with an interest in public open space in Milton Keynes Develop a framework of supporting material for local groups by 2016
	Life long learning	<b>PLL1 Promoting public open space as outdoor classrooms</b>	Develop strategic approaches with the education sector by 2014 Identify suitable sites to support out door learning / forests school locations by 2016
		<b>PLL2 Develop environmental skills opportunities for maintenance of public open space</b>	Develop a shared program of events and activities by 2014 Develop a range of resources and skills to support these activities and promote best practice by 2015
	Inclusive spaces	<b>PIS1 Develop thriving inclusive community spaces</b>	Share best practice with managers and communities about the creation of successful spaces by 2013 Work with communities to develop initiatives and events that diversify and broaden the appeal of POSby 2014
		<b>PIS2 Promote the use of Public Open Space to groups who are currently not using them</b>	Working with all agencies to establish areas of exclusion by 2013 Undertake outreach work or other appropriate activation work to promote the widest possible use by 2014
	Participation	<b>PAR1 Explore the transfer of public open space to communities or other appropriate organisations</b>	Develop an asset register and transfer protocol, and seek community interest by 2013 Develop a common standards framework for the management and maintenance of spaces with Public Open Space Partnership Group by 2015
		<b>PAR2 Promote greater participation of communities and local groups in their public open space</b>	By 2014 engage the community, carry out a repeatable satisfaction survey and publish results. Develop a community quality assessment tool for public open space by 2015 to be used by Parish and Town Councils and other bodies representing users.
		<b>PAR3 Maximise the role and opportunities of volunteering within public open space.</b>	Develop a protocol with all strategic partners to cover volunteering and participation by 2014 Develop a shared portal for volunteering opportunities with all strategic partners by 2014
	Places	Accessi-bility	<b>PL AC1 Enhance access, safety and security as part of the design of new spaces</b>
<b>PL AC2 Carryout access, safety and security audits as part of management planning of existing sites</b>			Develop audit methodology with access advisory groups and other user groups to inform site management plans by 2015 Phased implementation of findings
Planning		<b>PLP L1 Ensure all planning documents are fit for purpose and ensure sustainable new development</b>	The Public Open Space Management Group will review planning documents and recommend changes where required by 2015 Take forward the recommendations of the Over and Scrutiny Committee on Play areas – Jan 2013
		<b>PLP L2 Ensure all Public Open Space is mapped accurately with detail of ownership and type of space and information is available to managers and the public.</b>	Establish a process and record all public open space regardless of owner by 2014. Agree typologies with key open space managers and open space types by 2016.

		<b>PLP L3 Ensure Public Open Space adoption process is fit for purpose and ensure sustainable new development</b>	The Public Open Space Management Group will review the adoption process for public open space by 2015	
		<b>PLP L4 Review strategic projects with public open space connotations</b>	Safeguard the route of MK – Bedford canal route Scope Ouse Valley and other strategic long term projects by 2016	
	<b>Supporting the Economy</b>	<b>PL SE1 Promote the role of high quality public open space as a key component of Milton Keynes thriving communities and business.</b>	Develop a Marketing Strategy by 2015 to promote the value of, variety of and events in public open space in Milton Keynes. Work with regeneration to promote the enhancement of public open space as part of the regeneration approach.	
		<b>PL SE2 Encourage and seek interest from business to set up tourism or leisure enterprises within the public open space network</b>	Promote opportunities to business to invest within the open space network, create a joint business / promotion framework by 2015 By 2018 - key sites operating as net income generators or becoming self sustaining through productive land-use.	
		<b>PL SE3 Develop partnerships with business to carry out sustainable production or other forms of commerce within the open space network</b>	Draw upon present experience and carry out a Milton Keynes wide feasibility study into sustainable production by 2016 Pilot income generation opportunities within key public open space by 2018	
	<b>Quality of Design</b>	<b>PL QD1 Ensure all new proposed public open space is of good design and meets the needs of the community</b>	The Public Open Space Management Group will critique all proposed schemes by 2013 Create an Integrated MK Design Guide for Public Open Space by 2016	
		<b>PL QD2 Require that planning contributions to support local heritage, public art and biodiversity be part of the Public Open space design and development</b>	Develop by 2016 an Integrated MK Design guide for Public Open Space. Promote adoption by planners, developers and community groups by 2017.	
	<b>Sense of place</b>	<b>PL SP1 Protect and enhance key landscape features: natural, cultural, character and views.</b>	Incorporate heritage and character elements in to management plans as they are developed by 2016. Ensure appropriately specialists inform the design and management of spaces	
		<b>PL SP2 Protect and enhance key landscape features: natural, cultural, character and views.</b>	Incorporate guidance in to the Integrated MK Design Guide for Public Open Space.	
		<b>PL SP3 Protect, enhance and interpret key landscape features: natural, cultural, character and views.</b>	Ensure key features are mapped and recorded Carry out condition surveys as part of management plans List important and interesting features on the Public Open Space information Hub by 2014 Incorporate Sense of place in to learning resources by 2015	
	<b>Environment and sustainability</b>	<b>Healthy environment</b>	<b>ENH E1 Ensure all aspects and agents of service delivery are carried out in the most environmentally sustainable way.</b>	Environmental management and maintenance guidelines to be developed by 2015
			<b>ENH E2 Ensure all of the POS network contribute towards the environmental quality of MK</b>	Identify key sites that require environmental enhancement by 2016 and work towards their improvement
<b>ENH E3 Maximise the environmental educational potential of public open space</b>			Develop a shared education resource with open space partners by 2016 Seek opportunities for Forest Schools in public open space by 2016	
<b>Biodiversity</b>		<b>ENB I1 protect and enhance priority wildlife species and habitats.</b>	Establish management plans for Local Nature reserves, SSSI and other key sites by 2018 Work with the Local Nature Partnership to implement Biodiversity Action Plans Work with the biological records office to map and identify species and habitats across the POS network.	
		<b>ENB I2 Increase awareness and understanding of nature and the important role public open space plays in this.</b>	By 2016 – Develop a shared education resource with land managers, schools and colleges. Seek opportunities through Communities Infrastructure Levy or other funding arrangements to Plan and implement one additional Local Nature Reserve by 2020. Promote initiatives for enhancing the biodiversity value of gardens to communities by 2015	
<b>Adapting to climate change</b>		<b>ENC C1 Manage public open space so it is able to respond to climate change and threats from invasive species or pathogens</b>	Draw upon present experience both in Milton Keynes and from outside to develop locally suitable techniques to reduce carbon use by 2020 and delivered for priority areas. Climate change adaptation -trial new plant species, varieties and cultivation techniques to create locally suitable methods and stock types by 2016. Develop a collective response to invasive species and pathogens, insuring a coordinated response ensuring the community is fully informed of the impacts by 2014	
		<b>ENC C2 Support the collective contribution to Milton Keynes Climate change agenda</b>	Public Open Space Partnership Group are represented on climate change initiatives. Planning and managing landscape, corridors and habitats by 2023 to maximise their green infrastructure potential and carbon storage capacity.	

<b>Quality management</b>	<b>Direction</b>	<b>QM DI1 Promote this Framework as the principle framework for POS across all areas, managers, owners and providers</b>	Integrate the Framework into service planning by 2013 By 2014 cross sector sub strategies established or revised for key topics and themes
		<b>QM DI1 set a collaborative partnership approach towards the management and maintenance of POS led by MKCI</b>	Establish the Public Open Space Partnership Group made up of the core management partners by 2013, to drive Framework implementation
		<b>QM DI2 Centrally coordinate, monitor and review the progress of the Framework</b>	Develop rolling two year action plans from 2013 Monitor and review progress of key projects by Public Open Space Partnership Group by 2015
	<b>Quality standards</b>	<b>QM QS1 Develop a local benchmark standard for Milton Keynes public open space, relevant to the type of space, their users and maintenance.</b>	Public Open Space Partnership Group to develop a quality standard that defines a baseline of expectations by 2014 Identify and write specific management plans for key sites as identified by Core management group and community panel 2016
		<b>QM QS2 Adopt quality indicators and drive quality improvements across the Borough.</b>	Develop POS evaluation methodology with all partners by 2015 Periodic quality audit in place and cross referenced to resident satisfaction – see policy <b>PAR2</b> . Progressively improve all sites to baseline quality level by 2023 Develop a common management framework to support planning across site types and managers by 2014
	<b>Lifelong learning Skills and knowledge</b>	<b>QM SK1 Maximise existing skills from management partners to meet quality standards in public open space</b>	Undertake a skills assessment across open space partners by 2014 Prepare a skills Framework to address the present and future needs of the sector to ensure quality and service requirements are met sustainably – 2015
		<b>QM SK2 Develop community and volunteering opportunities across Milton Keynes</b>	Market volunteer opportunities from all public open space managers and owners centrally on an information hub by 2014 Develop links with colleges and university to become involved in POS in Milton Keynes through training or research.
	<b>Funding and investment</b>	<b>QM FI1 Develop a programme of public open space transfer</b>	Develop a protocol and process for offering public open space to the Parks Trust, Town and Parish Councils or other suitable bodies.
		<b>QM FI2 Carryout a Borough wide assessment of public open space.</b>	Develop a process to identify areas of excess public open space with development potential by 2014.
		<b>QM FI3 Maximise income generation as a key funding stream</b>	Investigate and research innovative funding opportunities and share with partners by 2014.
		<b>QM FI4 Secure long term sustainable management as an integral part of capital investment</b>	Ensure incomes from Public Open Space and adoption sums are ring fenced. Ensure the benefits of public open space to other sectors, such as health are fully recognised and supported

Neighbourhood Services

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