

## National Policy Context

### National Planning Policy Framework

This framework<sup>1</sup>, from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, sets out the government's planning policies and expected application. Chapter 8 'Promoting healthy and safe communities' requires that planning policies:

- Promote social interaction
- Enable places to be safe and accessible
- Support healthy lifestyles
- Provide social, recreational and cultural facilities that enhance communities
- Enable access to high quality open spaces, sport and recreation facilities

The framework clearly states that existing open space may not be built on, unless:

- An assessment shows that the open space is surplus to requirements
- The loss from the development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision
- The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision where the benefits outweigh the loss of the current / former use

The Local Plan for Portsmouth adopts national planning policy to prevent the loss of open space.

The National Model Design Code (NMDC) was formally published in 2021 alongside updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (focussing on design). The NMDC expands on the National Design Guide which provides ten characteristics of good design, reflecting the government's priorities. A pilot was set up for fourteen authorities to test the NMDC and apply to their area; in Portsmouth, the pilot focussed on design coding for estate renewal.

The countryside charity, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) recommends as part of the levelling up agenda that parks and open spaces in urban areas be given the same protections as national parks. CPRE are asking the government to introduce compulsory standards for access to nature to be introduced into planning law and planning policy and for an access indicator for green access to be added onto the index for multiple deprivation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2022/feb/02/englands-poor-urban-areas-have-fewest-protected-green-spaces-analysis-finds>

## Environment Act 2021

From 2023, biodiversity net gain requires every housing and infrastructural development to increase natural space by 10% under the Environment Act 2021.<sup>3</sup>

This is supported by Natural England, who emphasise the importance of protecting existing areas, creating more national nature reserves and balancing the needs of both nature recovery and, following the pandemic, the demand of the population to access green spaces for mental and physical wellbeing, together with balancing the need for dog control.<sup>4</sup>

The government's 25 year Environment Plan (under the Environment Act 2021) includes the creation of the Nature Recovery Network (NRN)<sup>5</sup>. The NRN management group includes the following government bodies:

- Natural England
- DEFRA
- Environment Agency

Sector bodies on the management group include: wildlife trusts, The Woodland Trust, Local Government Organisation, RSPB, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Parks England.

The Environment Act 2021 will include the establishment of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). These are a mandatory system of spatial strategies which will allow a co-ordinated focus towards nature development. It is anticipated that there will be approximately 50 LNRS based around a county pattern.

The objectives of the network of strategies include:

- Restoration of 75% of protected sites to a condition that allows nature to thrive
- Creation or restoration of 500,000 hectares of wildlife rich habitats outside of protected sites
- Provision of better connected habitats to recover threatened animal and plant species

These objectives will be achieved by using mapping and data via the LNRS to target action and investment in nature. Policy and mandatory requirements will be integrated with the following funding streams which will incentivise environmental management:

- Countryside Stewardship scheme
- Nature for Climate Fund
- Green Recovery Challenge Fund

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/25/natural-england-chair-tony-juniper-backs-biodiversity-net-gain-plan-boost-wild-areas?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/25/natural-england-chair-tony-juniper-backs-biodiversity-net-gain-plan-boost-wild-areas?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

<sup>5</sup> [Nature Recovery Network - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/nature-recovery-network)

## Public Health England - Improving Access to Public Space

The above policy<sup>6</sup> focusses on the relationship between green space and health and wellbeing outcomes. It argues that the natural capital of greenspace can:

- Improve health and wellbeing
- Manage health and social care costs
- Reduce health inequalities
- Improve social cohesion
- Contribute towards mitigating climate change

Current issues of physical inactivity and social isolation contribute directly to several health conditions including dementia, obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and mental ill-health. The consequences of these conditions in financial terms to the NHS and local authorities' social care budgets are considerable.

## Local Government Association - Parks Fit for the Future

The Local Government Association (LGA) with the National Lottery Heritage Fund undertook research demonstrating the financial impact of Covid 19 on Council Parks Services<sup>7</sup>. The LGA argued that parks were a lifeline for local communities particularly as they had stayed open during the national lockdowns. However, the increased usage, loss of volunteers during the pandemic and closure of facilities influenced the condition of the parks even before the financial impact of Covid-19 on budgets was considered. The findings from the study included the following conclusions:

- Loss of income for parks due to closure of income generating facilities and lost volunteer hours
- Maintenance and work schedule backlog due to lockdown
- Pressure on budget from additional operational costs (PPE, signage and other Covid related regimes) and onward impact on capital projects
- Negative impact on the reputation of parks following the various lockdown restrictions affecting parks facilities and volunteers
- The importance of parks to the nation's future in covid recovery and climate change

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/904439/improving\\_access\\_to\\_greenspace\\_2020\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/financial-impact-covid-19-parks-2020-21-case-study-key-findings>

## Communities and Local Government Select Committee

Responsibility for parks policy falls under the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), formerly Department for Communities and Local Government. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee carried out a report on public parks in 2017. This report, whilst not supportive of Parks becoming a statutory requirement, did note the importance of Parks in their contribution to wider local authority objectives. The report confirmed that there are an estimated 27,000 parks and green spaces across the UK and parks usage is higher amongst those living in urban areas, such as Portsmouth. The report also noted the rights of children to play and engage in recreational activity enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## Heritage Fund State of Public Parks

This document argues that there is a widening gap between increased usage of parks and reduction in resources to manage them.<sup>8</sup> The report argues that new ways of funding need to be found to enable the future of parks and this may involve the following:

- Promoting active partnerships
- Supporting community groups' involvement
- Developing new models of management and funding

Without new ways of funding parks, the impact to the service risks a decline in quality, skills and morale to parks friends groups, volunteers and staff. Conversely this also risks increasing fees / charges, complaints and closure of facilities.

External methods of funding might include ticketed events and fairs and sponsorship from businesses.

## Nesta: Rethinking Parks

Rethinking Parks project ran from July 2012 to October 2020. Funded by Nesta, The National Lottery Heritage Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund, the project considered different ways to fund the UK's parks for long term sustainability and use. Several briefing papers were produced, including:

- Rethinking income and income funding models
- Rethinking community involvement and participation
- Covid, inequality and greenspace

The first two themes were explored in consideration of the reduction in Council parks' budgets and the requirement to support parks from alternative sources. The third theme explored how disadvantaged groups gained a larger health benefit and have reduced socio-economic related inequalities in health, when living within access of green space.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/state-uk-public-parks-2016>

## Regional Policy Context

### Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) Green Infrastructure Strategy 2017-2034

This strategy recognises that the delivery of green infrastructure has a direct relationship to sustainable economic growth and development of the region. By developing quality of life, green infrastructure promotes the area and attracts investment. By attracting high value industries, it impacts land values, supporting local businesses, increasing disposable income and therefore further economic growth. The strategy aims to deliver upon four objectives:

- Sustainable economic growth
- Protecting the natural environment
- Benefitting local communities
- Good quality homes and workspaces

The strategy also considers potential funding streams for developing green infrastructure.

### Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy 2017

The purpose of this strategy is to implement mitigations to counteract additional housebuilding in the Solent region. Many thousands of coastal birds winter on the Solent before returning to their summer habitats. New housebuilding will generate more visits and recreational pressure to the area through increased population which could disturb these birds.

The strategy is key to the protection of the area which includes 10% of the population of Brent Geese.

The Solent Special Protection Areas in the strategy include Chichester and Langstone Harbour, Portsmouth Harbour and Solent and Southampton Water.

A key disturbance to these birds identified by the strategy is dogs off-lead which causes 47% of flights to escape disturbance. Part of the strategy includes:

- the promotion of numerous greenspaces in an area to balance visits away from coastal areas
- initiatives for responsible dog walking
- improved signage / interpretation boards for wildlife

## Wilder 2030: Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust Strategy

The vision for this strategy incorporates three key elements:

- Harnessing nature to address climate crisis
- Restoration of biodiversity and wildlife
- Promoting a healthy environment for local people

These three objectives are delivered through two programmes, Team Wilder and Wilder Land & Sea. Team Wilder includes the empowerment of community groups to 'go wild' in their local area and includes an education and learning programme, together with volunteering and awards.

Wilder Land and Sea includes rewilding projects and an exhortation to work with public bodies to improve the green and blue spaces for people and wildlife.

## Hampshire Gardens Trust (HGT)

HGT have been undertaking surveys of urban parks in the county of Hampshire since 1996. A key objective for the research group is to maintain and enhance the register of historic parks and gardens. A survey of 18 of Portsmouth's parks and gardens was undertaken in 2021/22.<sup>9</sup> Some of the conclusions of the research were that many of the parks in the city were significant due to their connection to the military history of Portsea Island. Other parks were important due to their connection to the nineteenth century enthusiasm for creating public parks. The parks were also noted as crucial spaces within densely residential areas for both human and wildlife flourishing.

The summary report also notes the extra dimension that the seafront gives to several the city's parks and acknowledges the work that the Council are doing to develop sustainable horticulture and improved green spaces for wildlife. Significantly, the researchers did not pick up any notable problems and were impressed by the level of care and maintenance at all 18 sites visited.

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<sup>9</sup> [Publications & E-Publications | Hampshire Garden Trust Research \(hgt.org.uk\)](https://www.hgt.org.uk/publications-and-e-publications)