



*Figure 1 Bellevue Park*

## **Open Space Strategy**

This document is available in Welsh

### **Background and Context**

#### **What do we mean by Open Space?**

An open space is defined as any outdoor space that is considered to have public value. All of these spaces provide health, wellbeing and recreational value to the people living nearby in addition to providing an ecological value to a variety of species. The open spaces that are considered within the scope of this report can be found below.

#### Country Parks / Parks / Gardens

Large areas of open space, the majority of which will be publically accessible, close to public transport links and provide a range of facilities and features offering recreational, ecological, landscape, cultural or green infrastructure benefits. These open spaces may also include areas for water recreation. For example, Acton Park.

#### Informal / Natural Green space

Informal and natural green space provides the opportunity to promote meaningful and safe recreation. This open space typology covers a wide range of uses, including woodland areas, wetland areas, heath-land Meadows. For example, Fenn's Moss.

#### Outdoor sports fields/pitches

Outdoor sports space includes all formally laid out sport and playing pitches for a number of different sporting activities (including rugby, football, netball, hockey, tennis and basketball). This does not include indoor sports provision or facilities. For example, the Wauns in Bradley.

### General amenity green space

Most commonly (but not exclusively) in residential areas including informal recreation spaces, green space in and around housing, or village greens.

### Play areas

This covers provision for children and teenagers, and includes play areas, skateboard parks, MUGA's, and other more informal areas. Generally these appear within other types of green space (e.g. country parks).

### Allotments

This covers Council-owned allotments where a plot of land rented by an individual for growing fruit, vegetables or flowers.

### Cemeteries and Crematoria

Publically accessible cemeteries, and crematorium grounds (those managed by WCBC).

### Public Rights of Way

Public rights of way are rights across land exercisable by the public, and which allow them to pass along them at any time they choose.

### Grass verges

A grass verge is a strip of grass or plants, and sometimes also trees, located at the edge of the highway (road).

## **Statutory and Legislative Context**

The open spaces throughout Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC) are governed by several pieces of legislation. The Open Spaces Strategy will demonstrate how we will meet all of these in the Our Objectives section.

One of the most important areas of statues and legislation is WCBC's obligation to improve the natural environment. This comes under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The former of these Acts is focused on improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and the latter is focused on securing healthy, resilient and productive ecosystems. However, both of these Acts require public authorities to maintain and enhance a biodiverse environment whilst promoting the resilience of ecosystems. Additionally, Section 6 in Part 1 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 requires local authorities to embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into early thinking and business planning. Our commitment to meeting these objectives informed the decision to declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency in September 2019.

Access to open spaces is recognised to be internationally important in the development of children. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) created a specific right for all children to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. This prompted the Welsh Government to issue statutory guidance to local authorities called Wales: a Play Friendly Country. This requires local authorities to assess for and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area. Many of these play areas are located within our open spaces which offer further well-being, play and educational opportunities to children. Thus, this statute falls within the remit of this strategy.

There is also a recognition that people have a right to access and use the wider environment outside of our urban areas. The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) is the primary legislation that protects animals, plants and habitats in the UK and outlines specific nature conservation areas such as SSSI sites. However, the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) also outlines Public Rights of Way (PROW). This gives members of the public the right to use identified pathways, bridleways and byways open to all traffic (BOATs). This was furthered by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) which created restricted byways and introduced a new right of access for open-air recreation in open country and on common land. Despite many PROWs falling on private land, it falls to WCBC to maintain PROWs under the Highways Act (1980) and to set up a Local Access Forums (LAFs) under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). Thus, the Open Space strategy will consider these as a part of our open spaces as they are enjoyed by our customers and we have the ability to carry out works on these spaces.

Our growing spaces, considered to be open spaces in the scope of this strategy, are also governed by their own legislation which is applied in addition to those identified above. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act (1908) required local authorities to provide sufficient allotments to the people in the borough. These spaces were then further protected by the Allotments Act (1925). This Act mandated that allotments obtained by the Council cannot be sold or converted to other uses without ministerial consent. This ensured that these spaces are maintained as open spaces.

### **What people of Wrexham have told us**

#### Carbon survey 2022

- 86% of people feel that we should do all we can to 'green' the urban environment in the city centre
- 57% of people feel that we should try to reduce the amount we cut the grass in parks and along the edges of our roads
- 80% of people said that they would like to see more trees, fruiting bushes, hedgerows and wildflower meadows where they live

#### PSB wellbeing assessment

Here are citizens' views on how Wrexham County Borough's environmental well-being can be improved:

**Retain, protect, promote, and improve access to green space.** Less building on green space, particularly in the town centre. Use brownfield sites where possible before considering green space. Good access to green space for well-being, developing skills and promoting community cohesion. Promote local green spaces and walking routes to reduce car travel and make more accessible for all. Encourage more biodiversity.

## **Our Vision**

Wrexham County Borough is a place with a diverse range of open spaces which are accessible and managed appropriately (according to their intended use) to ensure that they are clean, safe, fit-for-purpose and providing maximum opportunities for positive environmental impacts.

## **Our Objectives**

- To encourage a diverse range of sustainable open spaces of high quality which help fulfil the health and wellbeing needs of those living and working within Wrexham.
- To ensure that people, and communities have access to multiple areas of open space in a range of diverse locations, and for a variety of uses across the County Borough.
- To protect, manage and enhance our open spaces for the benefit of biodiversity and to address the climate and biodiversity crisis; as well as to enhance social and economic benefits.
- To ensure that our open spaces and any associated infrastructure is safe, appropriately managed and is suitable for all intended users.
- To work with local people, communities and partners to identify opportunities to improve our open spaces, and to improve access and connectivity of open spaces.
- Sustainably manage, protect and enhance the County Borough's open spaces to maximise ecological, social and economic benefits.

## **Benefits of appropriately managed Open Space in Wrexham**

### **Environmental**

- Reduce pollution and noise
- Sequester carbon emissions
- Temperature reduction
- Improve air quality
- Mitigate flooding and improve water quality
- Protect and enhance wildlife habitats and biodiversity
- Enhance local landscape character and attractiveness.

### **Social**

- Provide opportunities for children's play
- Provide opportunities for sport and physical activity

- Improve physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Improve community cohesion through use of shared and communal spaces
- Address social inequality by providing accessible opportunities
- Provide opportunities for learning, development, celebration etc. through various programmes and events.

### **Economic**

- Improve the appearance and attractiveness of an area
- Create direct employment, volunteering and learning opportunities
- Increase property values
- Encourage investment
- Protect homes and businesses through flood risk mitigation
- Encourage tourism

### **How does this fit with other WCBC policies and strategies?**

This Strategy (when adopted) will represent the over-arching Strategy, within which other WCBC policies and protocols exist. Some of these include:

- Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- WCBC Play pledge
- WCBC Tree and woodland strategy
- Allotment strategy
- Play area strategy
- Country park management plans
- City-centre place-making
- Football facilities management plans