

Designing Open Spaces for Recreation



Guidance Notes for the Design of Open Space
Local Plan Policy L11
Referencing L10, L9

(April 2006)
Concept drawings © 2005, Simon Lee Dicker, Fire and Ice Creative

LOCAL PLAN 1996-2011



This document provides an innovative and sustainable approach to the design of stimulating open spaces and play spaces, sympathetic to the promotion of bio-diversity and the needs of a multi-user culture.



Concept drawings © 2005, Simon Lee Dicker, Fire and Ice Creative

The Council has worked with the Green Heart Partnership model of creative-led, cross-disciplinary teams for design and delivery of quality of open spaces.

The Green Heart model allows for a more inclusive approach to partners' and stakeholders' needs and requirements, resulting in innovative design, deliverable within realistic timescales and budgets.

A well designed, well used space offers many benefits, including above all, sustainability, added value and value for money.

"Sustainable communities are places that people like living in, and want to stay in, neighbourhoods with real character and sense of place. These successful places should have well designed green spaces that people will want to use and respect. CABE Space has been contributing to a growing body of evidence that demonstrates how green spaces can offer lasting economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits. It links high quality green spaces with increased house prices and demonstrates their role in tackling issues such as anti-social behaviour."

© 2005 Start with the Park, CABE Space



DELIVERING THREE RIVERS LOCAL PLAN

Policy L10 states:

Where amenity space is provided in accordance, the Council will seek to ensure the proper maintenance of the space. Where the Council is requested to adopt open space of any kind, acceptance will be conditional on the agreement of a commuted sum for maintenance.

Policy L11 further explains the specifics of how the design of those open spaces must be incorporated in the planning applications.

L11 Design of Open Space

The Council expects proposals involving new or existing open space to be designed to a high standard. Large areas of open grass with neither planting nor dedicated areas for specific uses (e.g. children's play areas) should not form part of new developments. The Council will expect the design of open space to have regard to the following factors:

- The relationship between the open spaces and their physical surroundings, including buildings and other areas of open land (for example, through the choice of planting and layout of paths);
- The level and kinds of users likely to be required of the open space, given the nature of the nearby uses and occupants;
- The need to maintain a variety and balance of different forms of open space, such as visual amenity, areas for more active use including informal play space, and natural areas for wildlife;
- The need to maintain and enhance any existing nature conservation interest and, where appropriate, the benefits of creating new habitats. The proposed arrangements and responsibilities for management and maintenance, which may have implications for design, must be resolved before consent will be granted.





DEFINING THE ENVIRONMENT

Creating stimulating spaces of all sizes for a multi-user culture

Overall variety in general areas and where possible within individual spaces is important. Whatever the design form chosen, it should reflect the character of the area and the needs of the residents, employees or casual visitors likely to make use of the space. Local Plan, L10.39

Objectives

- To execute joined-up design through a combination of landscape environment, art and play structures by developing multi-disciplinary partnerships at earliest concept stages.
- To provide an innovative and sustainable play environment that encourages cross-generational (and species) interaction, by:
 - Encouraging family activity, rather than segregated child activity;
 - Incorporating habitats for species other than humans through the use of considered planting, so that children and other users will have contact with nature, helping to make connections between issues beyond human activity.
- To consider the whole park as a stimulating and playful environment. This will avoid creating single purpose-built, segregated areas and encourage consistent design across the park, by:
 - Shifting focus from a single user profile to a multi-user profile throughout the design;
 - Considering all elements of park design from pathways to planting to be related to play structures and equipment;
 - Broadening notions of play to include visual and sensorial experiences alongside physical activity.
- To combine landscaping, planting, sculptural and architectural interventions alongside traditional play equipment, by:
 - Integrating play structures into park design and designing stock play equipment into the environment;
 - Integrating all street furniture, signage and lighting into the play and planted environment.





DESIGN OF OPEN SPACE GUIDANCE NOTES

These principles can be achieved within open spaces of all scales. The following points and visuals demonstrate how this can be achieved in a variety of open spaces, throughout different scales and environments – from large parks to small housing development provision.



Within large open spaces there will be a central hub of activity comprising an intense area of play with a specific focus on children. From a distance these areas are designed to have the same effect as mountains, drawing you in through complex visual relationships that make you want to explore.



These spaces are composed of islands created through landscaping and linked together through the use of planting, pathways, sculptural / architectural objects, and play equipment. The scale is always in relation to the whole open space.



In larger open spaces, allow for the overall form to be added to over time. This should eradicate the need to demolish and rebuild, as new advancements or trends can be incorporated into existing design. This should also help to preserve the site's bio-diversity.



Pocket parks and the smaller clusters within the larger parks will use the same combination of landscaping, planting, sculptural & architectural interventions and play equipment, but on a smaller scale. The focus of these smaller interventions will be to create a strong visual language that defines an area's character and provides a green and playful space.





ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Open Spaces can vary widely in character, size and use. Local Plan L10.37

Open space provision, amenity spaces and public art can be combined to achieve greater results for developers, residents / users and the Council. These concept drawings and examples of good practice show how innovative solutions that address the needs for a safer and more prosperous community can deliver good design that strengthens the bio-diversity of the site. This model demonstrates how an inclusive and creative approach to the design of landscaping and use of catalogue play equipment can be integrated to create a better quality environment that is attractive to all ages.

seasonal artwork cut from long grass

green shelter/play house

swings

climbing columns

raised path

small climbing wall

slides

large flat roundabout

water channel

large multi-textured floor play area

sand play area

living wall under raised path

audio play

water feature activated by solar power

rope bridge

small stream, bridge and wetland planting

large bridge with steps

raised platform behind arch

planting integrated into play environment

steps leading to back of large climbing wall

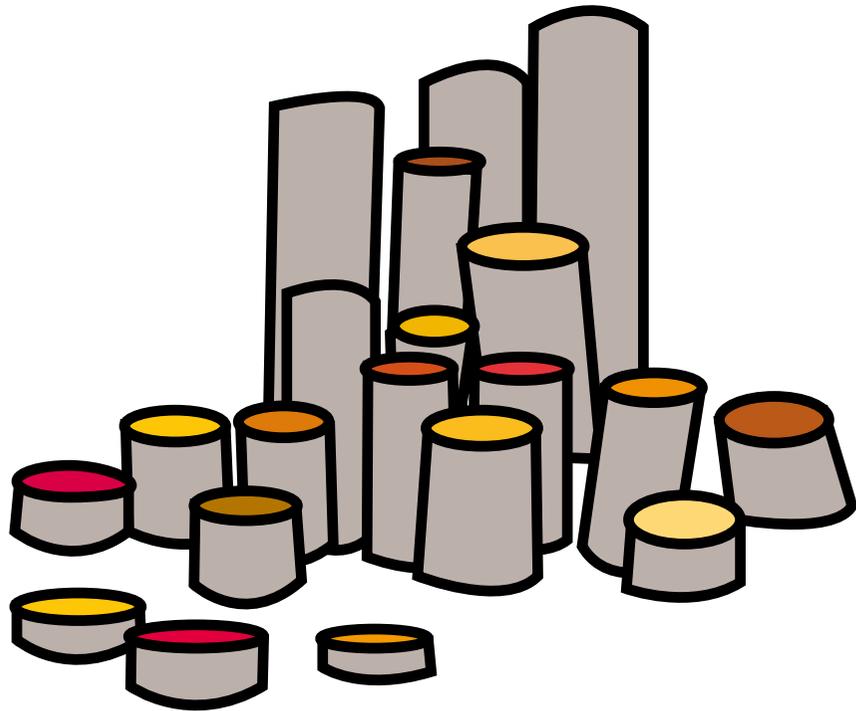


STEPPING STONES

Modular play structure combined with landscaping / planting and traditional play equipment

The stepping stones are clusters of raised columns that form the basis of the play structure. Used in combination with landscaping, planting and specially-manufactured play equipment, they will create horizontal and vertical structural forms that can be used in numerous ways. The main hub of activity can consist of hundreds of these columns, placed to create a visually exciting landscape that caters for different ages and abilities, and is surrounded by planting that will stimulate the senses and encourage other wildlife.

The stepping stones will also be placed throughout the park in small clusters. They will become sculptures that can be used to play on, look at, or sit on to watch the world go by.



Materials

The stepping stones will be made out of different materials according to environmental sustainability, durability and safety, with special consideration given to the walking surfaces and sound-making materials. Smart materials, such as thermo-chromatic and photo-chromatic paint that is affected by temperature, light and the use of water, can be used as playful elements.



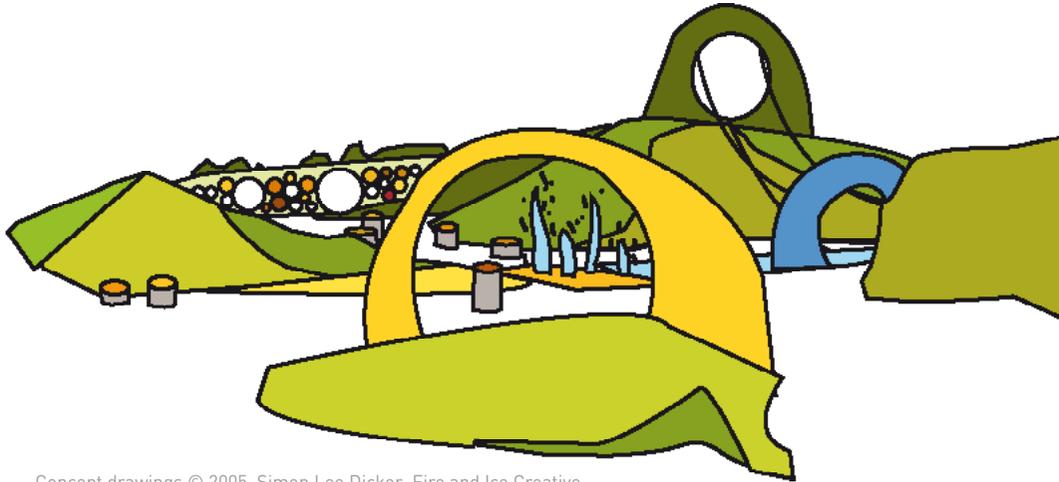


ARCHES

Modular play structure combined with landscaping / planting and traditional play equipment

The arches are the other predominant sculptural feature and are multi-functional objects that encourage play, create framed vistas and encourage wildlife. They must also be used with the landscaping, planting and specially manufactured play equipment to create vertical, structural forms that can be used in numerous ways.

Like the stepping stones, the tunnels will play a major part in the design of the central hub, creating spatial divisions that link together and encourage movement around the space. As well as being integral to the main play area, the tunnels will be placed around the park, creating framed vistas and play opportunities.



Concept drawings © 2005, Simon Lee Dicker, Fire and Ice Creative

Materials

The tunnels will be made out of different materials, according to placement and to what they are adjacent.

One material of particular interest is vertically-grown sedum that creates an organic surface that encourages butterflies and other mini-beasts, and changes with the seasons.





GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

The Model

Establishing a cross-departmental team with council officers prior to any design or planning process to:

- Address characteristics of the area
- Address key users and needs of the site
- Assess the site's relationship to neighbouring amenities
- Relate the site objectives to key Three Rivers Strategic Plan objectives
- Identify the appropriate creative/design roles for the project
- Identify the opportunities and timing for community engagement
- Address ongoing maintenance

Throughout Hertfordshire, this model has proven a successful tool for also leveraging in additional funds from regional and national funding bodies such as Government Office, National Lottery and EEDA.

Sample Team

This team will be able to review the progress with the developers throughout the planning and implementation process.

Officer Roles may include

Development Control Planner
Planning Policy Officer
Landscape Officer
Leisure Projects Manager
Play Development Officer
Arts Development Officer
Leisure Services Manager
Landscape Architect

Others

Outside Creative Professional (e.g. artist, designer, landscape architect, equipment designer)
Green Heart Partnership.

The Green Heart Partnership is a partnership initiative between Arts Council England, East and the eleven local authorities of Hertfordshire that aims to achieve growth and capacity between the arts and environment sectors. GHP recognises the role local government plays within growth and regeneration from the strategic future planning perspective through to delivery. Working with local government partners to understand their complex process, and at times politically sensitive position, GHP helps to develop a collaborative, creative-led, cross-disciplinary team process to achieve sustainable solutions. GHP facilitates creative collaborations exploring the physical and social aspects of open space in our society, driving forward an innovative approach to arts-led regeneration.





FURTHER READING

Three Rivers District Council

- Three Rivers Local Plan 2006-2011: Policies L9-11
- SPG: Amenity and Children's Play Space in New Residential Development
- Green Space Strategy

Please contact:
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www.threerivers.gov.uk

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- **Start with the Park**
CABE Space publication 2005

Green Heart Partnership

www.greenheartpartnership.org
www.gunpowderpark.org

www.greenheartpartnership.org/newsletter
(please refer to archive for case studies)

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Credits

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