



Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 20 January 2026

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Simon Forde, Climate & the Environment
Councillor Paul Peacock, Strategy, Performance & Finance

Director Lead: Matthew Finch, Director - Communities & Environment

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Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open Report / Key Decision
Report Title	Parks and Open Spaces Development Plan
Purpose of Report	To put forward a programme that will further improve parks and open spaces across Newark & Sherwood in line with resident aspirations and objectives set out within the Council's Community Plan. The proposals will enable parks and open spaces in the district to be future-proofed ahead of Local Government Reorganisation in 2028 and leave a positive legacy for the Council.
Recommendations	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) endorse the allocation of £100,000 in 2026/27 for parks and open spaces legacy fund for Towns and Parish Councils to bid into on a match-funded basis, to drive improvement in parks and open spaces across the district, and delegate authority for the implementation and administration of the fund to the Director - Communities & Environment;b) agree that £30,000 is committed within the budget for 2026/27, to enable investment in a number of Council-owned sites which have the potential for future development, including some for future Green Flag status;c) agree that three strategic sites are identified for potentially significant investment in new facilities, with consultation due to take place about those developments within 2026/27; andd) Once c) above is complete, bring a report back to Cabinet in 2026/27 about detailed development at those sites, together with a funding package, for delivery in 27/28 – the last operating year of NSDC ahead of Local Government Reorganisation.

Alternative Options Considered	Given the growing importance residents attach to parks and open spaces, doing nothing was not deemed a viable option. In the context of LGR, future decisions about investment in parks and open spaces in Newark and Sherwood will be taken by a new entity with a much broader geographical footprint and set of delivery responsibilities. Cabinet could choose to press on with developments at the three strategic sites in 2026/27, but given the potential costs it is deemed prudent to understand community support and explore sources of funding that may be available. There is no requirement to create a Town and Parish Council Park Legacy Fund, but this would fail to address the reality that many parks and open spaces across the district are not owned by NSDC and would be a missed opportunity to facilitate improvement in these valued facilities.
Reason for Recommendations	The recommendations align with the Community Plan objectives in relation to health and wellbeing, protecting and enhancing the environment and promoting community spirit. The proposals are also in line with resident feedback as evidenced through the latest resident survey and the increasing importance being placed on parks and open spaces.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Newark & Sherwood District Council has five award-winning Green Flag parks in its ownership – Sconce and Devon Park, the Castle Grounds and the Queen Elizabeth Memorial Gardens in Newark, Sherwood Heath at Ollerton and Vicar Water in Clipstone.
- 1.2 In addition, the Council has a total of 30 play parks that it owns and maintains across the district, including some at the award-winning parks above, some in our local communities and some on the housing revenue account land.
- 1.3 Over recent times, the Council has been undertaking some improvement works at these play parks to ensure that they are fit for purpose. This has included a programme of re-surfacing several, to ensure that they are fit for purpose and are safe to use, and the inclusion of accessible play equipment.
- 1.4 In 2023, the Council invested £350,000 across ten sites in Newark and Sherwood, installing modern, accessible play equipment and new fitness equipment and a Castle - themed playground in Sconce and Devon Park. Other parks to benefit from that investment round included Vicar Water, Clipstone; Mead Way, Balderton; Lincoln Road Recreation Ground Play Area, Newark; Thorpe Oaks Play Area, Coddington; Hillcote Drive, Clipstone; Old Tannery Drive, Lowdham; Cleveland Square, Newark and Turner Lane in Boughton.
- 1.5 Most recently, of course, the Council led the re-development of the Newark Town Council-owned Sherwood Avenue Park. This £500,000 development was made possible as a result of the Council's successful bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Section 106 monies and the sale of a town council asset, which had an overage attached to it. This summer the park re-gained the Green Flag status it had lost and continues to receive positive feedback from users and the wider community.

1.6 The recent investments in parks and open spaces should be seen in the context of many residents re-connecting with these spaces during the pandemic and the cost of living challenge which continues to affect many. Play parks and our wider park offerings have the ability to offer children and families engaging places to visit at no cost to them. Evidence for this growing importance in parks and open spaces was seen in the Council's latest resident survey with a notable increase in the survey undertaken after the pandemic compared to the one before.

2.0 Proposal/Details of Options Considered

2.1 Town and Parish Council Legacy Fund

2.1.1 Whilst the Council owns and operates a number of parks in its own right, many parks and open spaces within the District are owned and maintained by town and parish councils. Whilst such facilities are valued, they carry costs to run them and require investment in parts and equipment as facilities become older. Without investment, modern parks can also start to make older ones look tired.

2.1.2 As such, the Parks and Open Spaces Development Plan includes the creation of a fund specifically for town and parish councils with the aim of improving facilities across Newark and Sherwood.

2.1.3 During 2026/27, the Council will create a £100,000 fund for Town and Parish Councils to submit match-funded bids of up to £10,000 for investment in parks, play equipment and open spaces within their town or parish. For towns and parishes, this could see investment of up to £20,000 in their facilities and for NSDC a potential £200,000 investment in parks and open spaces across the district.

2.1.4 Subject to approval, a formal grant application process would need to be established as well as award criteria, which as well as the match-funding principle and maximum £10,000 award, will require delivery in 27/28 – the last year of NSDC before LGR. In the event the fund is oversubscribed, additional weighting may be given to communities which have a play area shortfall based on analysis contained within the latest Open Spaces Strategy. Administration of this fund would be overseen by the Director of Communities and Environment.

Parks and Open Spaces Development within our own sites (two phases)

2.2 Phase 1 – 26/27 (biodiversity improvements and strategic development)

2.2.1 There are a number of sites within the Council's ownership that present opportunities for new planting and features as well as future development into Green Flag parks. Below is a precis of those sites, the opportunities and costs required to deliver them. Some images of each site are also contained in **Appendix 1**. The proposals outlined are for the most part the views of officers only. Before any major works commence, we will be seeking the views of the local community on the proposals.

Clay Lane (improvements and development towards Green Flag - General Fund
High Level Schematic in Appendix 1)

2.2.2 Over the last 5 years the site which covers an area around 22,800m² has been transformed from a short-mown grass field to a landscape with meadow areas and large areas of tree planting and seating areas. Recently we have been working closely with local residents who have formed a Friends of Clay Lane Park Group. This group has raised some concerns with antisocial behaviour reported along the borders of the site and reports of alcohol use, drug taking and rough sleepers.

2.2.3 We are working with the Friends' Group to create a new vision for the site with improvements being made to reduce antisocial behaviour, including the cutting back of the bordering hedgerow, installation of a bund to prevent vehicle access and new litter bins at heavily littered locations.

2.2.4 The site is primarily used by dog walkers, so we propose new facilities by installing a dog agility course at the southern end of the site. This will consist of a number of fixed pieces of equipment including jump hoops, weaving posts and under and over bars. This is estimated to cost around £10,000

2.2.5 The site is prone to seasonal flooding which has on occasion covered the footpath, so we are also keen to look at the drainage on the site with the potential to create a new pond/wetland area or to divert water away from the footpath. Historic mapping indicates that there were a number of ponds in this area in the past and it is well documented that the addition of water to any site will provide a great boost to biodiversity both in terms of aquatic flora and fauna and terrestrial animals such as foxes, badgers and even deer visiting the site to drink. In Phase 1 we want to work with experts to conduct some investigation work into the drainage of the site and to gauge the response from the community to the proposed solutions.

2.2.6 We also want to explore the possibility of new options to create a new sensory planting area on adjacent land. This will prevent vehicles cutting across this space and with sensory planting focusing on smells and textures. With the above improvements and the cooperation of the local residents we think this site could become a future Green Flag Park.

Thorpe Oaks/Stirling Drive (planting at Stirling Drive and development towards Green Flag - High Level Schematic in Appendix 2 – General Fund)

2.2.7 Thorpe Oaks is a well-equipped and much-loved park in Coddington covering an area of around 22,500 m².

2.2.8 Having benefited from previous investment, the site has a well-equipped play area including some accessible equipment a casual football pitch with fixed goal posts and some teenage/ young adult provision in the form of a small climbing wall.

2.2.9 Historically the site was prone to unauthorised encampments, however the creation of bunds and ditches around the boundary of the site has prevented this and we have had no new encampments since they were installed. The bunds were hydroseeded with a mix of wildflower and grasses providing great habitat for pollinating insects.

- 2.2.10 This is a prime site for further improvement and with an area which has the scope to become community orchard has potential to become Green Flag Park if community involvement can be encouraged.
- 2.2.11 Just around the corner from Thorpe Oaks on the corner of Stirling Drive is a small open space which is suitable for a smaller orchard with some carefully selected shade tolerant fruit trees.
- 2.2.12 In 2026 we want to gauge the demand from the residents of the surrounding estate and see if there is scope for a Friends of Thorpe Oaks group to be led by the community. Feedback from such a group will be helpful to further develop the site.

Hawtonville Tree Equity Scheme

- 2.2.13 The following sites have been identified as potential additional locations for tree planting as part of the Tree Equity Scheme, a project being run by the Woodland Trust in partnership with Newark and Sherwood District Council. The international Tree Equity Score has identified the Hawtonville estate as one of our areas with the lowest levels of tree cover. Costs for both schemes will be met from existing budgets and the Trees for Climate scheme.

Cherry Holt – NSDC Housing

- 2.2.14 This is one of the larger green spaces on the Hawtonville estate (circa 10,000m²) and is enclosed by houses on all sides. It currently consists of a well-equipped play area with some accessible play equipment. New tree planting through the Tree Equity Project will create both habitat and shade on this site whilst retaining the prevailing open spaces as areas for ball games.

Fairfax Avenue - NSDC Housing

- 2.2.15 This small (~1,000m²) pocket park tucked into the corner of Fairfax Avenue has an anecdotal history of antisocial behaviour centred around a bench which was once on site. The bench was removed many years ago and in recent years it has been completely given over to nature, however there is potential to turn it into an appealing space for local residents. We are working with the Woodland Trust to plant 1 or 2 trees on this site which will be later complemented with some sensory planting focusing on smells and textures.
- 2.2.16 The budget to deliver this phase of the Parks and Open Spaces Development Plan is **£30,000**. Funding has been committed within the Environmental Services Business Unit, to deliver these works in 2026/27.

2.3 Phase 2a – 26/27 (consultation with residents and stakeholders over opportunities at three strategic sites)

- 2.3.1 In preparing this plan, site visits were undertaken across Newark and Sherwood. Whilst some sites lend themselves to improvements in biodiversity, some have space available which would warrant consideration of more substantial investment in play facilities.

Cedar Avenue, Newark (High-level schematic in Appendix 3)

2.3.2 Cedar Avenue is a substantial area of green space located off Lincoln Road in Newark. It is bordered by housing on three sides and to Lincoln Road on the east. The land is owned by the Gilstrap Charity which affects opportunities for future development. On the site there is a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) and a small youth shelter. However, the substantial extent of the site is given over to grassland which is maintained by NSDC.

2.3.3 The site sits over the road from the Yorke Drive estate which is due to undergo an extensive regeneration plan. It is also relatively close to the Beacon Hill Woodland Trust reserve. Over recent times, the Trust has tried to reduce use of part of the reserve which is essentially being used as an unstructured BMX track, which carries risks in terms of potential injuries being sustained in a location emergency services may struggle to access.

2.3.4 Alongside the MUGA, the availability of space and the local context, there may be a case for investing on the site in form a 'pump-track' for BMX, skateboard and scooter usage. Whilst NSDC would need to seek Gilstrap Trust consent for such an installation, we hope the Trust might agree to a contribution to such a development given possible links with its charitable objects. Some images of pump tracks are contained in Appendix 5.

Cherry Holt, Newark (High level schematic in Appendix 4 & 5)

2.3.5 This site sits within Hawtonville which faces high levels of deprivation when compared against the rest of the district. The table below shows this in some detail.

Indicator	Hawtonville	Newark and Sherwood
Household is deprived in one dimension	36.5%	33.3%
Residents in employment	52.1%	56%
Residents without qualifications	30.1%	19.1%
Residents in bad health	6.3%	4.5%

2.3.6 The site is an extensive piece of open space, surrounded on all sides by housing. There is a play park on the site at present and some tree planting is due to take place at the site as part of the Woodland Trust Tree Equity scheme in conjunction with NSDC and the Reach Charity.

2.3.7 In the *Hawtonville Neighbourhood Study 2018* Cherry Holt Greenspace was identified as potential Development Zone. With the potential to create a landscaped pocket park and options for playing pitch provision highlighted.

2.3.8 Across the entirety of the estate, there is currently only one Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), which is next to the Hawtonville Community Centre. It was constructed over 20 years ago and is in reasonable condition. Health outcomes within Hawtonville are comparatively poor when compared with the rest of the district as shown above. Whilst there is access to sporting and leisure provision within easy reach at both the YMCA and Active 4 Today facilities, those activities take place behind a pay barrier which is a challenge to meet for many given the economic outlook for the estate. By providing new opportunities for outdoor activities which are free at the point of use, we can help to improve the health outcomes of the area.

2.3.9 This site may provide a location for a new, modern fit for purpose MUGA, subject to decision and consultation with the community. Although expensive to fund, the Council has experience from Sherwood Avenue of successfully accessing third party funding and may be able to do the same at this location. The installation of a second MUGA is only our initial suggestion as officers are keen to provide a facility that the community wants rather than being seen to impose our own views.

Turner Lane, Boughton (High level schematic in Appendix 6)

2.3.10 The Ollerton and Boughton Neighbourhood study in 2019 showed health outcomes on the Retford Road estate to be some of the worst in the district. In 2021, the Council opened a new £3-million pool at the Dukeries Leisure Centre and the Turner Lane Park which is close by benefitted from the last round of play park investments in 2023.

2.3.11 There is scope to build on those developments with the creation of an additional 'pump track', similar to that suggested for Cedar Avenue, or alternative facilities such as outdoor gym equipment which could sit alongside the existing park and youth shelter. This may provide a positive outlet for young people in the estate to use a dedicated space with complimentary facilities surrounding it. The land is HRA-owned and, as with Cedar Avenue, a funding package could be put together to deliver the facility, subject to decision and consultation with the community and the local police. The *Asset Based Community Development Project Report (April 2024)* cited 53% of Boughton residents never used the leisure centre based on cost. By providing new opportunities for outdoor activities which are free at the point of use, we can help to improve the health outcomes.

2.3.12 The Neighbourhood Study is due to be revised in 2026 and we anticipate that the community consultation for these play area improvements would be run in a complementary fashion. This may result in the precise location of any new provision being amended as plans develop.

2.3.13 Total costs for delivery of all Phase 2 sites are currently estimated at **£552,500** (excluding inflation for undertaking the works in 27/28 and contingency) but opportunities exist to talk to landowners for contributions as well as exploring avenues of further funding as was the case with Sherwood Avenue Park.

2.3.14 As Members will be aware, two of the schemes, Cedar Avenue and Cherry Holt, are within the boundary for the Pride in Place programme of investment, which has £1.2-million earmarked for community grants aligned to the strategic objectives in the plan which include parks, open spaces and health and wellbeing. Bids are being capped at a maximum of £100,000 with projects bringing match-funding being a key criterion towards successful awards. As such, NSDC would seek grant funding for £200,000 towards the £400,000 forecasted cost of the pump track and MUGA. As such, the NSDC requirement could be £200,000, or 50% of the total cost.

2.3.15 Additionally, there is currently an uncommitted Section 106 grant available for Ollerton and Boughton which was originally intended to support the development of open space. £110,000 of this grant could be committed towards the pump track at Turner Lane, leaving £40,000 to be met by the Council.

2.3.16 Whilst the three sites would offer the greatest opportunity for significant investment, the Council is also looking at the potential development of a pond at Clay Lane and the potential for future use and investment in Southfield in Balderton. Costs would be far more modest with budgets for some of that feasibility work in 2026/27 available within existing budgets.

2.3.17 Before a decision on any of the above developments was undertaken, Cabinet would no doubt want to also assure themselves that the proposals had support from local communities as well as key stakeholders, as well as detail on successful funding bids. Hence, it is proposed that consultation takes place over the summer of 2026 and funding bids are submitted, to enable a report to be considered by members over the Autumn period and ahead of budget setting for 2027/28.

2.3.18 Were the proposals to be approved, however, they would potentially represent an investment in parks and open spaces in excess of £750,000 with more than half of that sum being met through grant, Section 106 and match-funding. On top of investments in parks in 2023 and Sherwood Avenue Park, NSDC would have delivered or facilitated an investment in excess of £1.5-million in parks over recent times.

2.4 Phase 2b – 27/28 (tender and install solutions at the sites)

2.4.1 Subject to consideration and approval by Cabinet, costs would be included within the capital programme for 27/28 to deliver at those sites ahead of LGR in April 2028.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations officers have considered the following implications; Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding, Sustainability, and Crime and Disorder and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

Implications Considered			
Yes – relevant and included / NA – not applicable			
Financial	Yes	Equality & Diversity	Yes
Human Resources	N/A	Human Rights	N/A
Legal	Yes	Data Protection	N/A
Digital & Cyber Security	N/A	Safeguarding	N/A
Sustainability	N/A	Crime & Disorder	Yes
LGR	N/A	Tenant Consultation	N/A

3.1 Equalities Implications

During the roll out of these schemes full consultation will take place with user groups where appropriate. Consideration will be given to suitability of any inclusive play equipment.

3.2 Financial Implications - FIN25-26/4763

Town and Parish Council Legacy Fund

3.2.1 As described in paragraph 2.1, the budget required of £100,000 for Towns and Parish Councils to bid into on a match-funded basis, will be added to the proposed revenue budget to Council in March 2026 and would be funded by the Council's reserves.

Parks and Open Spaces Development within our own sites (two phases)

3.2.2 There are two sites identified in phase 1 for development and improvements towards a green flag status: Clay Lane, Newark and Thorpe Oaks/Sterling Drive, Coddington.

3.2.3 As per paragraph 2.2.16, a budget of £30,000 has been added to the proposed 2026/27 revenue budget to fund phase 1. Consultation with the public will be carried out, followed by a more detailed report being brought back to SLT with the findings.

3.2.4 Cherry Holt and Fairfax Avenue are both HRA play areas, therefore any works carried out here will be at a cost to the HRA rather than the General Fund.

Phase 2

3.2.5 Phase 2 includes 2 parts, consultation during 2026/27, and works to be carried out in 2027/28. There are three sites identified:

Cedar Avenue Park, owned by Gilstap Trust
Turner Lane Park, owned by the HRA
Cherry Holt Park, owned by the HRA

3.2.6 There are a number of uncommitted S106 receipts (in excess of £440k) that could be used towards the works in phase 2, which would need to be discussed at the Developer Contributions meeting, but as per paragraph 2.3.15, £110,000 of the above has been identified which would be suitable to contribute to the works at Turner Lane.

3.2.7 Once all the consultations are complete, a report will be brought to Cabinet in 2026/27 about detailed development at those sites, together with a funding package, for delivery in 2027/28.

3.3 Legal Implications - LEG2526/8723

3.3.1 Any grant scheme administered by the Council shall apply the appropriate criteria to ensure openness, fairness, non-discrimination and value for money. Legal advice should be sought in developing the funding criteria. Any S106 monies to be used should accord with the relevant S106 conditions. Any consultation should be carried out in accordance with established principles. Appropriate delegations for the scheme need to be in place to ensure the Executive is not overburdened.

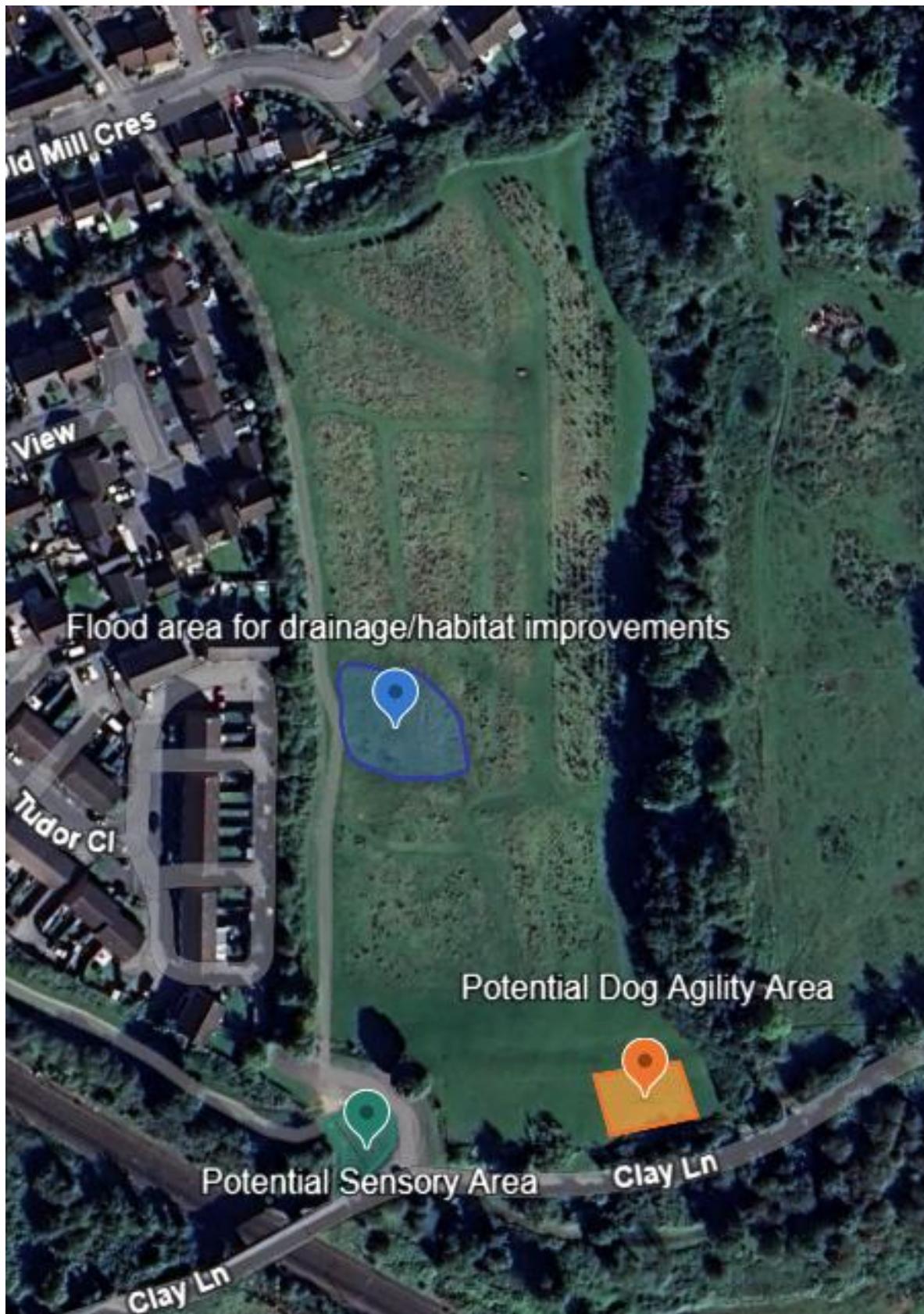
Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None

Appendix 1

Clay Lane Open Space



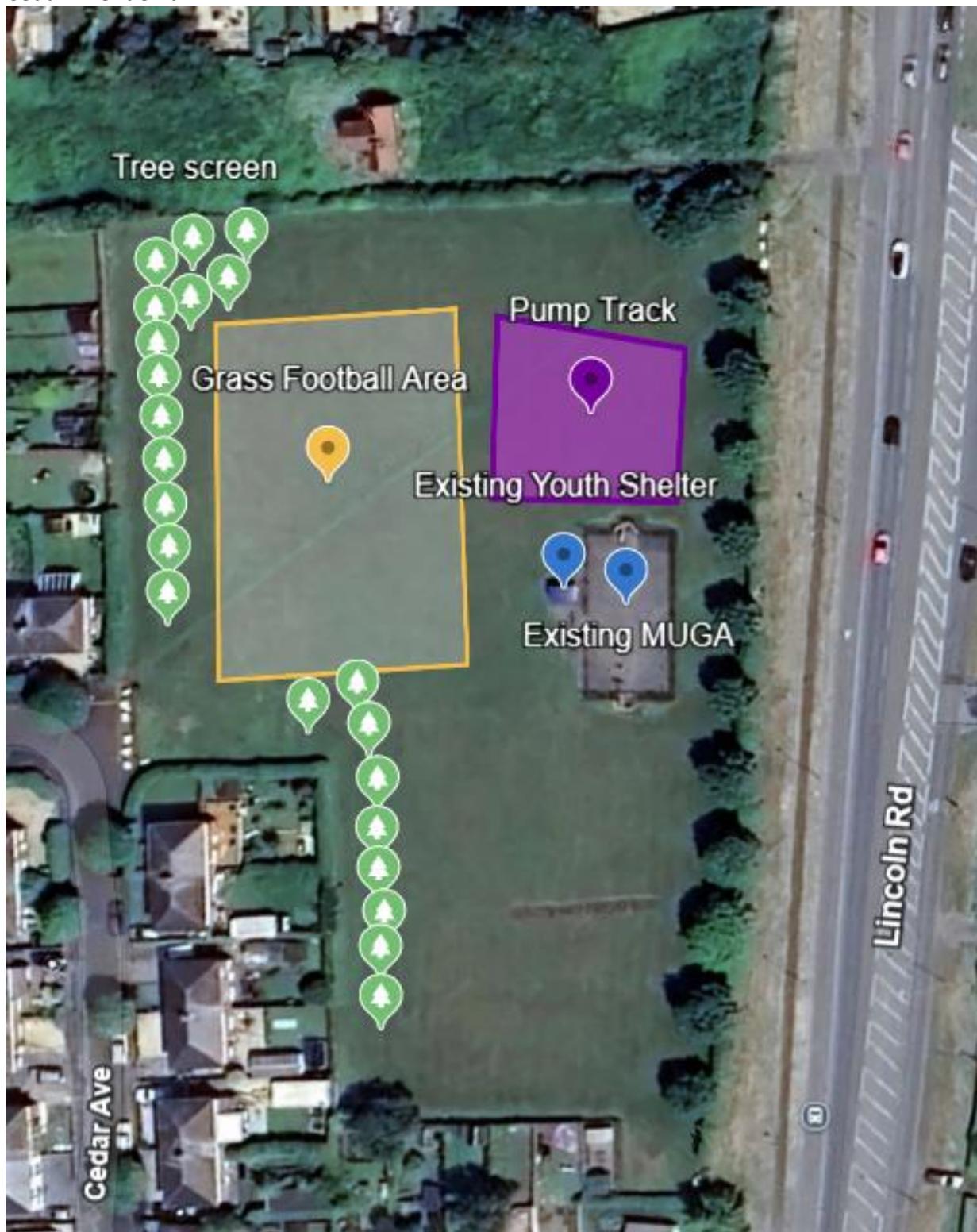
Appendix 2

Thorpe Oaks/Sterling Drive



Appendix 3

Cedar Avenue Park



Appendix 4

Cherry Holt



Appendix 5

Artist's impression of the type of MUGA and pump tracks which could be installed



MUGA's are multiuse games areas with space for sports like football, basket ball and Netball



Pump tracks are looped tracks where the riders use up and down body movements to generate momentum rather than pushing or pedaling. Tracks can also be used for skateboards and even wheelchairs.

Appendix 6

Turner Lane

