



## **FULL COUNCIL REPORT**

Date Written	25/05/16
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Service Area	Planning and Countryside
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	15 <sup>th</sup> June 2016

*To: Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen*

## **MERTHYR TYDFIL OPEN SPACE STRATEGY**

### **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Council's approval to adopt the Merthyr Tydfil Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans.
- 1.2 The draft Merthyr Tydfil Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans were subject to 6 weeks of public consultation between 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016 and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2016 and a number of representations were received. A summary of each representor's comments are provided in Appendix 1 along with a response and recommended changes where necessary.
- 1.3 The proposed changes include minor amendments which provide clarity on relevant matters and limited boundary changes to Gellideg Play Space and Pant Hollow Natural/Semi Natural Greenspace.
- 1.4 If approved by Council, the Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans will be used to inform and help interpret the Council's local development plan policies, inform the site management of open spaces and act as a mechanism for directing funding to appropriate sites where improvements can be made.
- 1.5 They will be implemented through a variety of means, including both directly by the Council and through external organisations and their funding sources. Planning obligations secured through Section 106 Agreements and funding secured via the Community Infrastructure Levy will also contribute to the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plans.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S) that**

- 2.1 The Merthyr Tydfil Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans be approved.

## **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At a meeting of Full Council on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016, the Draft Merthyr Tydfil Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans were approved for six weeks of public consultation, which was subsequently undertaken between 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016 and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2016.
- 3.2 Methods of public consultation included a notice in the Merthyr Express, publicity via the Cwm Taf Community Engagement Hub website and the Council's website, and public engagement events held at Cyfarthfa Park and Parc Taf Bargoed. Electronic copies of the draft Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans were made available via the aforementioned websites and hard copies were made available for inspection at the Planning and Countryside office, local libraries and the public engagement events.
- 3.3 Six representors responded to the consultation and a summary of their comments is provided in Appendix 1 of this Report. All comments have been considered by the Policy and Implementation Section with the result that a small number of changes are now being proposed to the Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans. The Council's response to each comment is also provided in Appendix 1.

## **4.0 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE OPEN SPACE STRATEGY AND ASSOCIATED ACTION PLANS**

- 4.1 Councillors will note that the number of proposed changes is minimal (6 in total) and include minor amendments which provide clarity on relevant matters. In terms of open space provision, boundary changes are proposed to two open spaces: Gellideg Play Space and Pant Hollow Natural/Semi Natural Greenspace. The boundary change on the former open space reflects the recent granting of planning permission for development on part of the site, while the boundary change on the latter open space brings the site in line with the protected open space designation on the Proposals Map of the adopted Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan (2006-2021). The proposed boundary changes on both open spaces have a minimal effect on the overall quantity provision of open spaces within their respective wards.
- 4.2 It should be noted that although the boundary changes to the aforementioned open spaces have been made to the relevant ward maps within the Action Plans, they have not yet been made to the relevant ward maps within Appendix 5 of the Open Space Strategy. The changes will, however, be made before the final version is published.

## **5.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 Subject to Council's approval, the Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans will be published and used to inform and help interpret the Council's local development plan policies relating to the provision of open space in new development and the protection of existing open space. They will also be used to inform site-management of open spaces, and as a mechanism for directing funding to appropriate sites where improvements to the quantity, quality and accessibility of open spaces can be made.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 6.1 The financial implications relating to the implementation of the Open Space Strategy will depend on which recommendations are taken forward and which organisation or source of funding is used to deliver the improvements. The Strategy is clear in that implementation will occur through a variety of means, including external organisations and their funding sources, planning obligations secured through Section 106 Agreements and funding secured via the Community Infrastructure Levy. Any direct funding from Council departments will depend on departmental priorities and budget commitments.
- 6.2 It should also be noted that certain benefits can be realised through actions involving simple changes to management practices which have the potential to be cost neutral or even help realise cost savings. For example, certain areas of open space would benefit from reduced levels of grass cutting, saving the Council money while improving local biodiversity.
- 6.3 The Open Space Strategy does not commit the Council to meeting the aims and standards, or delivering all of the recommended actions, within a specified timescale; rather, it provides a framework for directing funding towards identified areas of need where the greatest benefits can be realised. In recognition of this, it is considered a medium to long term strategy where many recommended actions will only be undertaken when sources of funding become available.

## **7.0 SINGLE INTEGRATED PLAN AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT SUMMARY**

- 7.1 The Single Integrated Plan and Sustainability Impact Assessment has been completed and the Open Space Strategy and associated Action Plans have been found to have a number of positive impacts, including priority outcomes 3 and 4 of Merthyr Tydfil's Single Integrated Plan and priority area 4 of Merthyr Tydfil's Corporate Plan. No negative impacts have been identified.

## 8.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form has been updated for the purpose of this Report. It has been found that a full assessment is not required at this time. The form can be accessed on the Council's website/intranet via the 'Equality Impact Assessment' link.

**ELLIS COOPER**  
**CORPORATE DIRECTOR PLACE AND**  
**TRANSFORMATION**

**COUNCILLOR CHIRS BARRY**  
**PORTFOLIO MEMBER FOR**  
**REGENERATION, PLANNING AND**  
**COUNTRYSIDE**

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>		
<b>Title of Document(s)</b>	<b>Document(s) Date</b>	<b>Document Location</b>
Merthyr Tydfil Open Space Strategy	June 2016	Background Papers Link
Merthyr Tydfil Open Space Strategy – Action Plans	June 2016	Background Papers Link
<b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b>		<b>No</b>

***Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.***

## Appendix 1 – Summary of Comments Received on the Draft Open Space Strategy Consultation with Council Response in Each Case

**Representor:** Keep Wales Tidy

**Issue:** Clarification is sought for the boundary of Dowlais Community Park; there appeared to be confusion over where the boundary should be.

**Council Response:** The definition of the site boundary was made by incorporating only the accessible areas of the open space. Excluded were the community centre and the steep embankment falling away to the north, west and south.

**Recommended changes:** None

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Clarification required over why only Local Authority owned space is represented within the Strategy and certain types of spaces such as cemeteries have been excluded.

**Council Response:** The Strategy includes both Local Authority and non-Local Authority owned spaces which were selected using unmitigated access criteria (see P36 of the Strategy). The Strategy should reflect local conditions and attitudes to open spaces. Cemeteries locally do not function as open spaces in the local context in the manner that they might for some larger urban areas or inner city areas. Open spaces were selected with proximity to existing population centres and the degree of access afforded.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Clarification is sought for the reasons for using the 2006 standard for Accessible Greenspace and not the NRW current standard.

**Council Response:** At the time of preparing local standards for accessibility the NRW Standard was not available. The use of updated standards will be incorporated as part of the four year review of the Open Space Strategy.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** The Strategy is commended for its detailed, standard based approach which could be used as a model for other local authorities seeking to adopt a strategic approach to the provision of green space.

**Council Response:** Supportive comments from Natural Resources are welcomed

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Consider future revisions to include land owned by other public bodies or charitable organisations where the public could be expected to be granted access.

**Council Response:** Larger open spaces in the custody of other public bodies were considered at an early stage but were discounted at the time because they were insufficiently close to centres of population and as such were concluded to be inaccessible.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Need to indicate potential links between open spaces and linear/green corridors and potential green / safe / off road footpaths / cycle links.

**Council Response:** This was considered during the course of the Strategy but was discounted at that stage as it was outside the scope of the Strategy. It was however considered to be a secondary product that could be developed after the adoption of the Strategy.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Reference could be made to the Well Being of Future Generations Act.

**Council Response:** Reference to The Well Being of Future Generations Act can be found within the Policy Review document which is referred to within the Open Space Strategy and is available on request.

**Recommended changes:** None

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Care is needed with regard to building on open space and changes to the open space should be considered as a first option.

**Council Response:** The Council acknowledges concern over the development of open space, however this is regarded as a last resort and the need to improve existing space is considered to be the first priority. Where there is a surfeit of a particular type of open space there may be a case for disposing of one site in favour of compensating with another site which might meet the demand more appropriately for example in terms of geographic access.

**Recommended changes:** None

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Suggest an Executive Summary of the Strategy could be useful, capturing the salient messages from each section.

**Council Response:** The Council acknowledges the benefits of an Executive Summary and recommends that one be made available alongside the Open Space Strategy.

**Recommended changes:** Whilst no changes are recommended to the Strategy, an executive summary has been prepared which will be made available alongside the Strategy.

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** It would be worth looking at a strategic view for targeting less advantageous wards with a greater need for action over others for certain types of provision.

**Council Response:** The Action Plans have been designed to address shortfalls of certain types of open space in all wards by identifying priority sites. The statistical information within the Background Papers provides the evidence of need. It is quite clear which wards are in the greatest need although the issue is not just about accessibility and quantity but also quality. Prioritisation of sites aims to address this through working with communities on each priority site in accord with Green Flag guidelines. Sites within less advantaged wards can be given greater priority through targeted resources and the appropriateness of this approach should be considered further in collaboration with the Public Service Board as part of the priorities for the forthcoming Local Wellbeing Plan.

**Recommended changes:** None

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Concern that the references to mitigation and adaption to climate change referred to as functions of open space are not adequately covered within the main body of the document text.

**Council Response:** While the issues of a changing climate are recognised in the body of the text, this was not an overriding priority in the Strategy. It is however recognised that there are opportunities to expand on this in order to explain the benefits of open space within this context.

**Recommended changes:** Add the following sentences at the end of paragraph 1.7 of the Open Space Strategy to read: **In relation to the latter, trees and vegetation can reduce the impacts of climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. They can also ameliorate the warming effects of climate change through evapotranspiration and direct shading, and help cope with the increased frequency of sudden heavy rainfall by reducing runoff and increasing rainfall capture.**

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Consider placing the four major parks and gardens into the same standard as strategic parks and gardens, and clarify how/where this would be achieved and whether it is an achievable standard.

**Council Response:** It is not considered appropriate to apply the strategic parks and garden standard to the four major parks and gardens because they serve different open space needs. The former serve the needs of the County Borough's residents as well as wider adjacent areas and visitors from further afield, while the latter primarily serve the needs of the County Borough's residents in a similar way to local parks and gardens. It is therefore more appropriate to apply the smaller parks and gardens standard to the four major parks and gardens, which was indeed the case in calculating the current quantity provision of public parks and gardens at ward level. The Open Space Strategy should be amended to clarify the minimum quantity standard applied to major parks and gardens.

**Recommended changes:** Amend paragraph 2.57 of the Open Space Strategy to read: The minimum quantity standards have been set as follows:

- Strategic Public Parks or Gardens: **2.04Ha per 1000 population**



- Smaller **and Major** Public Parks or Gardens: **0.54Ha per 1000 population**
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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** The final sentence of paragraph 3.4 should read 'respectively not respectfully'.

**Council Response:** The error is acknowledged and a minor amendment to the text is required.

**Recommended changes:** Amend final sentence of paragraph 3.4 of the Open Space Strategy to read: In terms of access, 100% and 95% of the ward's population are served by these types of open space **respectfully respectively**.

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**Representor:** Natural Resources Wales

**Issue:** Old mineral workings should not be excluded.

**Council Response:** Old mineral workings have not been excluded from the Open Space Strategy, there are a number of examples of sites that were formerly worked for minerals or subsequently reclaimed. Sites were only excluded where they did not meet the access criteria.

**Recommended changes:** None

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**Representor:** Cadw

**Issue:** A number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments fall within open spaces and we would welcome their inclusion within the Open Spaces Strategy, and the provision of public access to them.

**Council Response:** All open spaces within the Strategy were included because they are afforded access; therefore all SAMs found within open spaces can be accessed. The issue of interpretation being expanded is one that can only be addressed through Open Space Quality which is being considered through the formation of Draft Management Frameworks for priority sites which includes interpretation as a component.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Cadw

**Issue:** It is recommended that MTCBC ensures that they are fully aware of designated assets within each open space.

**Council Response:** All data concerning open space is stored on a layer on the GIS. Mapped data concerning designated assets and SAMs is also available as a GIS layer to consult and interrogate each site. This data represents an up-to-date historic environment record, which includes regular updates from GGAT. The Draft Management Frameworks utilise this data when suggesting design changes to the manner in which a site is managed. It is therefore highly unlikely that we would not be aware of such assets.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Cadw

**Issue:** It is recommended that MTCBC consults Cadw regarding the management of individual SAMs to ensure public access is balanced with their conservation.

**Council Response:** Noted.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Cadw

**Issue:** With regard to historic parks and gardens, Cyfarthfa Castle and part of the registered site at Aberfan fall within the scope of the Open Space Strategy. Cadw would welcome further communication when considering any changes to elements of historic parks and gardens, such as trees and planting, historic structures and features, and layout.

**Council Response:** There are no current plans to make changes to historic parks and gardens under the Open Space Strategy although any future changes would be carried out in consultation with Cadw.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Friends of Saron

**Issue:** Request to include 'churchyards and cemeteries' as open spaces within the Open Space Strategy.

**Council Response:** The majority of cemeteries are still active and therefore would not fit with the perception of them being used for recreation. The older sites i.e. the smaller chapel graveyards such as Saron are unlikely ever to become under threat from development and it is more a case of encouraging and supporting an active programme of management for cultural and biodiversity reasons to ensure their future survival.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Merthyr Valleys Homes

**Issue:** Request to exclude eastern and western portions of the following site from the Strategy: ID168 Rear of Prince Charles Hospital.

**Council Response:** The proposed excluded portions form part of a strategic group of spaces linked together to form a linear open space. Amendment to exclude these portions would reduce the significance of the space and deplete the Gurnos ward further thereby affecting both quantity of open space and more importantly the quality with which the space could strategically connect across the northern part of the ward.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** Merthyr Valleys Homes

**Issue:** Request to amend boundaries to ID66 Gellideg Play Space.

**Council Response:** The amendment to this space is reasonable as planning permission has been recently granted for development on part of the space.

**Recommended changes:** Amend the Cyfarthfa Action Plan and Ward Map to reflect the amended boundary.

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**Representor:** Merthyr Valleys Homes

**Issue:** Request to amend boundaries to ID117 Pant Hollow.

**Council Response:** The amendment to this space can be made but only in accordance with the existing defined open space currently designated within the Local Development Plan.

**Recommended changes:** Amend the Dowlais Action Plan and Ward Map to reflect the amended boundary.

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**Representor:** Merthyr Valleys Homes

**Issue:** Request to remove ID270 Forsythia Close.

**Council Response:** The loss of this space will result in a loss of Natural Semi Natural Greenspace from the Gurnos ward which will worsen the already poor supply which currently falls below the standard set therefore removal cannot be justified.

**Recommended changes:** None.

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**Representor:** South and West Wales Wildlife Trust

**Issue:** Request for the creation of at least one Local Nature Reserve in each ward on the basis that one priority site from each ward is considered as an LNR.

**Council Response:** The Council will explore the possibility of creating Local Nature Reserves on the sites suggested; this will be subject to the outcome of the prioritised needs identified within each Action Plan. Each space will present appropriate opportunities where conditions allow for LNR creation on a case by case basis and will be considered for inclusion as an LNR.

**Recommended changes:** None.