Parish Council

Parks and Open Spaces Policy

Document	Parks and Open Spaces Policy
Document owner	Operations Manager
Version	V2.0
Issue date	November 2026
Review date	October 2027, or within 12 months of adoption
Review	Annually, and sooner after a significant incident, material change or relevant legislative / guidance change
Applies to	Council-managed parks, recreation grounds and open spaces; officers, contractors, volunteers and authorised users.

Change log

Area	Changes from the November 2024 adopted policy
Core policy	Retained the original commitment to maintain and improve parks, the four aims and the six delivery commitments.
Scope and delivery	Clarified Council responsibilities, management planning, priorities, budgets and officer oversight.
Safety and access	Added proportionate inspection and defect response arrangements, contractor monitoring and consideration of access barriers.
Environment and community	Updated biodiversity commitments, wildlife checks and sustainable maintenance; clarified community participation and annual review.
Policy links	added explicit references to the Environment Policy (December 2020) and Tree Planting in Public Space Policy (March 2026), including planting criteria, aftercare, monitoring and approval arrangements.

1. Introduction

Central Swindon North Parish Council (CSNPC) acknowledges the importance of its parks and open spaces and the positive contribution they make to residents' quality of life. They provide places for recreation, sport, community activity and contact with nature. The Council recognises its responsibility to maintain and, where possible, improve their condition for the long-term enjoyment of all.

This policy sets the Council's overall approach. Detailed maintenance tasks, inspection arrangements and improvements will be set out in management plans, work programmes and service specifications appropriate to each site. It gives effect to the Council's Environment Policy (December 2020 version) and Tree Planting in Public Space Policy (adopted March 2026) in the management of parks and open spaces.

2. Scope

The policy applies to parks, recreation grounds, amenity areas and associated outdoor assets for which CSNPC has management responsibility. These include areas at Seven Fields, Southbrook Recreation Ground, Mannington Recreation Ground, St Mark's Park, Penhill Recreation Ground and Moredon Sporting Hub.

Officers must check ownership, boundaries, leases and service agreements before committing to work. This policy does not transfer responsibility from Swindon Borough Council, tenants, charities or other landowners. Separate arrangements for allotments, buildings, play facilities and sports bookings continue to apply.

3. Aims

- To develop, implement and maintain a sustainable Parks and Open Spaces Management Plan, supported by site plans and work programmes where needed.
- To review barriers to enjoyment and improve access for all, taking reasonable steps to meet different needs.
- To embed environmentally responsible techniques and processes throughout service delivery.
- To promote the importance and value of parks and open spaces and their contribution to the community's quality of life.

4. How the Council will deliver these aims

4.1 Consult when preparing and reviewing management plans

The Council will consult Members, residents, contractors, professional bodies and relevant national award schemes when drafting and reviewing its management plan. Consultation should reflect how sites are used and include people whose access needs or views may otherwise be missed.

Plans will identify management responsibilities, site uses, significant assets and habitats, maintenance needs and improvement priorities. Proposals must consider safety, accessibility, environmental value and both capital and ongoing costs. Delivery will be prioritised through the Council's approved budgets and work programmes.

4.2 Apply relevant industry standards and guidance

The Council will use relevant standards and competent advice to inform maintenance, inspections and improvements. Inspection frequencies must reflect the type, use, condition and risks of each asset, with additional checks after severe weather or incidents where appropriate. Trees, play equipment and other specialist facilities require suitable competent assessment.

Officers will record significant defects, assign actions and follow up completion. Urgent hazards must be made safe promptly, including temporary closure where necessary. Contractors must follow agreed specifications and safe methods; officers will monitor performance and resolve missed work or defects.

4.3 Meet environmental duties and protect wildlife

The Council will comply with relevant environmental legislation and regulations. It will consider how its functions can conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree appropriate objectives and take action to deliver them. This consideration must be revisited at least every five years, with progress reviewed through normal management planning.

Management plans should identify practical opportunities such as varied mowing, suitable tree and shrub planting, pollinator areas and habitat retention, balanced with access, visibility, sport and recreation. The Council will have regard to applicable local nature recovery strategies and other relevant conservation strategies when considering biodiversity action.

Before potentially damaging works, officers and contractors must check for nesting birds, protected species and habitats, tree protection and any required consents. In line with commitments 3–5, 8 and 9 of the Environment Policy, maintenance and purchasing decisions must consider resource use and lifecycle impacts, waste prevention, reuse and recycling, responsible disposal, energy and emissions, water conservation and the environmental practices of suppliers. Relevant requirements must be reflected in service specifications.

4.4 Work alongside other Council policies

This policy must be read alongside the following Council policies, using their latest adopted versions:

Environment Policy (December 2020 version): provides the Council-wide commitments to reduce adverse environmental impacts and protect natural resources. Section 4.3 above applies those commitments to parks maintenance and improvements. Community-led environmental projects and sustainable access proposals should also reflect commitments 6 and 7 of that policy.

Tree Planting in Public Space Policy (adopted March 2026): provides the detailed framework for new and replacement tree planting, species selection, site suitability and long-term tree management. Planting proposals must follow its urban design and practical site principles in section 7, including mature size, growing conditions, infrastructure, visibility, accessibility and species diversity.

Under sections 7.9–7.11 of the Tree Planting in Public Space Policy, proposals must identify establishment watering, protection, inspections, long-term maintenance and replacement arrangements where appropriate. Officers must keep proportionate planting records and monitor establishment and outcomes. Community planting requests must be assessed against the same requirements.

The annual tree planting programme must follow section 8 of that policy: consideration by the Leisure & Recreation Committee and approval by Full Council. This Parks and Open Spaces Policy does not replace that approval route or the detailed planting requirements. Relevant health and safety, volunteer, safeguarding and play area arrangements must also be followed.

Officers will consider accessibility when maintaining sites and planning changes, including entrances, paths, gates, seating and signs. Reasonable adjustments and safe alternative access should be considered where barriers or temporary closures affect users. Legitimate mobility aids must not be treated as unauthorised recreational motor vehicles.

4.5 Keep policy and practice up to date

The Operations Manager will keep relevant legal and guidance changes under review and recommend amendments where necessary. Relevant duties include health and safety, occupiers' liability, equality, environmental protection and biodiversity. Planning, rights-of-way, tree protection and watercourse permissions must be checked where relevant to proposed work.

Any signs or restrictions must reflect the rules and lawful powers that actually apply to the site. This policy does not create offences or enforcement powers. Officers will work with Swindon Borough Council, police and other partners where concerns fall within their responsibilities.

4.6 Engage with community groups

The Council will work with community groups, residents and volunteers where appropriate to support improvements, participation and care of local spaces. Council-authorised volunteering must follow the Volunteer Policy, with agreed tasks, supervision and safety arrangements.

Organised events, commercial activities, installations and physical alterations requiring Council permission must be agreed in advance. Officers will consider the activity, safety, access, environmental impact, insurance and reinstatement responsibilities. Council permission does not replace any statutory consent or licence required.

5. Responsibilities reporting and review

The Council approves policy, budgets and major improvements through its governance arrangements. The Operations Manager coordinates delivery, maintains clear site responsibilities and reports significant risks, maintenance performance and investment priorities to the appropriate committee. This applies whether work is undertaken by staff, contractors or both.

Reports of damage, hazards or access problems should be made through the Parish Office. Officers must log and prioritise reports, arrange action or refer them to the responsible body. Call 999 where there is immediate danger requiring emergency assistance.

The policy and progress against its aims will be reviewed annually, drawing on inspections, service monitoring, environmental actions and community feedback. Material changes require approval through the Council's governance arrangements. Reviews must check consistency with the Environment Policy and Tree Planting in Public Space Policy, including any subsequent adopted amendments.