



NORTH AYRSHIRE
COUNCIL

Open Space Strategy 2016 - 2026

Streetscene, Commercial Services

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‘North Ayrshire will be recognised by the high quality and accessibility of its excellent publicly accessible open spaces, promoting economic prosperity, healthy lifestyles and biodiversity through the provision of greater opportunity for outdoor recreation for residents and visitors.’

2 Introduction

2.1 A strategic approach to Open Space

North Ayrshire Council has created a clear strategic framework for the development and management of open space.

North Ayrshire has a network of connected open spaces that combine to create a green network and infrastructure that provides significant economic, social and environmental benefits.

The Council has both direct and indirect responsibility for a variety of open spaces including woodland, playing fields, playparks and burial grounds. Through the local planning process the Council seeks to maintain, enhance and promote access to open space and recreational opportunities.

The North Ayrshire Council Open Space Strategy 2016 – 2026 will deliver through partnership working, open spaces that are inclusive, accessible and ‘fit for purpose’ enhancing the quality of life for residents in North Ayrshire and visitors to North Ayrshire.

Meeting the requirements of the Scottish Government’s Scottish Planning Policy, it sets out the Council’s approach to managing open space, assessing both current and future needs for open space and identifying specific actions to improve provision. Over the next 10 years it will assist in directing resources, knowledge sharing, budget planning and enable greater co-ordination of open space among key stakeholders.

The Strategy will be reviewed and updated every 5 years and is complemented by an Open Space Asset Management Plan (reviewed annually). See action 1.7.

2.2 North Ayrshire Open Space

North Ayrshire Council has approximately 2,410 hectares of open space within its ownership consisting of:

- Eglinton Country Park
- Neighbourhood and Local Parks
- Cemeteries and Burial Grounds
- Woodlands
- Core Paths
- Allotments
- Sports Facilities including Playing Fields
- Equipped Play Area and Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAS)
- Water Courses and Open Water features
- Promenades and Coastal Paths
- Beaches
- Residential Greenspace

2.3 Benefits of Open Space

North Ayrshire’s open spaces provide a wide range of benefits for communities, the environment and the local economy. They make an important contribution to the character

and biodiversity of the area and to the quality of life and place by providing the setting for a wide range of social interactions and pursuits that support personal and community wellbeing. They also allow individuals to interact with the natural environment and provide habitats for wildlife.

Open spaces can also be important in defining the character and identity of towns and villages. Connecting them in a green network can provide enhanced benefits for people, the environment and biodiversity. They also provide valuable 'ecosystem services' such as climate change regulation, filtering of pollution, flood prevention and carbon sequestration.

Well planned and managed open space will provide a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefit to communities such as:

- Outdoor recreation and health improvement
- Contributing to sustainable lifestyles
- A sense of pride in your town/village
- Regulating the urban environment
- Bringing nature into town

2.4 Purpose of the Open Space Strategy

The Open Space Strategy will provide clear direction in the co-ordinated management of North Ayrshire's open space to ensure it meets the needs of residents and visitors alike.

2.5 Strategic Context/Strategic Objectives

The Open Space Strategy will contribute to the Council's following Key Priorities:

- Protecting and enhancing the environment for future generations
- Supporting our people to stay safe, healthy and active
- Working together to develop stronger communities
- Growing our economy, increasing employment and regenerating towns

2.6 Streetscene

Open Space maintenance is carried out by the Council's modern integrated Streetscene service.

Streetscene is an experienced, well equipped team with approximately 125 FTEs managing an overall annual revenue budget of £7.6m, with £2m allocated for grounds maintenance. Streetscene is responsible for the planning and co-ordination of all maintenance and adopts a locality approach to this with teams allocated by area but sharing good practice across the whole Council boundary.

In order to ensure the existing Open Space is proportionate, fit for purpose and meets the public's needs, Streetscene will undertake audits of existing areas - see actions 1.1 and 1.2. The gateways to North Ayrshire are critically important to ensure residents, visitors and potential investors have a good first impression of the area which will aid economic regeneration, see action points 1.4 and 1.5.

The quality of grounds maintenance on open space is monitored through the Local Authority Management System (LAMS), see action 2.2 and 9.1. The audits will be carried

out three times per year and will be analysed and benchmarked to ensure a quality service is provided.

Customer satisfaction levels will also be benchmarked to help maintain service standards, see action 5.1.

Streetscene shares and learns best practice initiatives through its membership of the Association of Public Sector Excellence. (APSE), see action 7.1. APSE has a number of working groups and advisory groups that Streetscene participate in.

The Council's modern integrated approach to the provision of Streetscene services has proved to be effective and has received a number of awards in recognition of its successes over recent years. The service will continue to be developed to facilitate ongoing service excellence within available financial resources.

3 Open Space Strategy Overview

3.1 Structure of the Strategy

The Open Space Strategy has been developed using six Key Strategic Objectives and four key themes.

The 6 key strategic objectives are:

- Open Space will be promoted as a resource for tourism and recreation, economic development & biodiversity
- Help reduce local inequalities by ensuring that all communities have access to high quality, well equipped clean and safe open space.
- Promote better health by providing diverse opportunities in open spaces, the natural environment and countryside for physical exercise, sport and recreation
- Protect and enhance all areas of nature conservation value, in particular historic features, sensitive habitats and special landscapes.
- Improve the perception, quality and range of recreational and tourism facilities in the area's open spaces.
- Respond to climate change through the delivery of a connected and integrated network, incorporating water management, woodland area and biodiversity benefits.

The four main themes are:

- Parks, Open Space & Equipped Playparks
- Woodlands
- Cemeteries
- Sports Pitches

All of the themes are interdependent to ensure the Strategy is delivered in full and to maximum effect.

From these themes an action plan has been developed to supplement the Strategic Objectives.

The success of the Strategy and its associated action plan will be heavily reliant on the continued contributions of Streetscene and its Key Partners to ensure successful implementation.

4 Open Space Strategy by Theme

4.1 Parks, Open Space and Equipped Playparks

Overview

The largest element of North Ayrshire Open Space falls within this category. The objective of the strategy is to increase the quality of parks, open space and equipped play parks to play an active contribution in meeting the Council's Key Priorities.

Parks

North Ayrshire has a number of high quality, popular parks such as:

- Eglinton Country Park, Kilwinning
- McGavin Park, Kilwinning
- Irvine Beach Park
- Douglas Park, Largs
- Barrmill Park, Beith
- Elm Park, Ardrossan
- Stevenston Beach
- The Glen, West Kilbride

A number of these parks have organisations and groups within them offering community activities and also assisting with maintenance and keeping the parks clean and tidy - see action 2.3.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the locality partnership approach will help drive more community involvement in the running of parks which in turn will shape the priorities of the local community, see actions 2.3 and 5.2.

Open Space

Quality is a key component of open space. Open spaces need to be 'fit for purpose' and serve local communities by providing a level of service and functional provision to meet informal leisure and recreational needs. Quality is important in terms of offering the following:

- Linked networks of open space, providing routes to work, schools and other community facilities.
- Well designed, attractive and managed spaces of all types and size.
- Providing a range of habitats for biodiversity, that can act as wildlife corridors.
- Places that provide opportunities to participate in formal sports, informal recreation (including walking, cycling, growing food) promoting health and wellbeing.
- Places which are inclusive and serve local needs

- Inclusive play and open space

The Council has a Local Biodiversity Action Plan in place for the period 2015-2018. To help the Council achieve its Biodiversity outcomes, a review of the location and frequency of grass cutting should be undertaken, see actions 1.6, and 6.1. Consideration should also be given to increase the use of natural 'wild flowers', see actions 4.1 and 6.2.

Funding opportunities should be robustly explored to help with the provision of high quality open space, see actions 3.1, 4.2 and 4.3. Similarly opportunities for additional resources as part of Community Payback schemes should also be utilised, see action 7.6.

High quality open space will encourage tourists and potential investors to visit the area. Such opportunities should be marketed in conjunction with Economy & Communities, see action 1.3.

Beaches

North Ayrshire prides itself on its beaches as a key attraction for tourists to the area and provides fantastic play, sport and leisure opportunities for residents.

There are main beaches at:

- Ardrossan
- Blackwaterfoot, Isle of Arran
- Brodick Bay, Isle of Arran
- Fairlie
- Irvine Gables
- Kames Bay, Cumbrae
- Largs Main beach
- Largs Pencil
- Newton Beach Millport, Cumbrae
- Saltcoats
- Seamill
- Stevenston
- Whiting Bay, Isle of Arran

Newton Beach Millport was successful in the 2015 Keep Scotland Beautiful Scottish Seaside Awards for excellence in beaches and was awarded a Blue Flag, see action 7.5.

The water quality at the beach at the Pencil Monument, Largs has also been recognised by the Marine Conservation Society.

Having such high quality, clean, beaches wouldn't be possible without the help of North Ayrshire's dedicated community volunteers who help with beach cleans and litter picks, see action 7.4.

Allotments

The Council has an Allotments Policy and it aims to empower local people to take forward developments themselves rather than the Council directly providing allotment sites.

Advice is offered on:

- Setting up a constituted allotment association
- Sources of funding
- Locations of suitable plots
- How to develop and manage land

The Council has helped develop the “3 Towns Growers” and is currently working with the Douglas Park allotment group. See action 7.7.

Equipped Playparks

The vision for equipped playparks is:

‘To improve the quality of life for all children and young people in North Ayrshire through high quality playpark provision.’

Childrens’ play is recognised as being essential to healthy, happy lives and is fundamental to learning and development. More play, more fun, more often.

There are currently 104 playparks provided, inspected and maintained by the Council. There has been significant investment in playpark equipment in recent years which has resulted in high quality playpark provision. However, there are a minority of playparks which are rarely used, have a small number of pieces of equipment and suffer from location, in some cases by being closely located to larger, more popular, high quality playparks.

It is therefore planned to reduce the number of playparks to ensure all provided playparks are high quality and in appropriate locations. This will ensure investment is targeted at enhancing the remaining playparks. This will ensure high quality playpark provision is in place to meet the needs of our children and young people.

The proposals to enhance and reduce are based on:

- Location
- Usage
- Current state of equipment
- Equipment prone to miss-use/anti-social behaviour
- Equipment approaching end of life
- Low value play facilities
- Potential for enhancement

Play park rationalisation plan

The approach to play park rationalisation throughout North Ayrshire is based upon having larger, high quality play parks in highly accessible prominent locations, supported by smaller high quality local play parks across the wider North Ayrshire. This will ensure play

park facilities are there for all to use and will also provide excellent facilities for tourists and visitors to North Ayrshire, see actions 2.1, 7.2 & 7.3.

Legislation/Policy

The Equality Act 2010

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

Planning Policy

United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (Article 31)

South Beach, Ardrossan

Mackerston, Largs



Brodick, Isle of Arran



Woodlands

Overview

Woodlands are an essential part of the area's character. Forests and woodlands make a unique contribution to the environment and economy of North Ayrshire currently occupying around 16% of the land area. They provide a key resource for biodiversity and deliver a wide range of environmental benefits that help to support the local communities, see actions 6.3 and 8.2.

Woodlands also help create memorable and interesting landscapes, providing high levels of visual amenity and habitat value.

Having high quality tree & woodland stock provides value beyond visual amenity such as:

- Providing education and community benefits by connecting people with nature
- Reduce the impact of built development
- Provide environmental benefits such as carbon sequestration, improved air quality, screening from wind, filtering noise and attracting wildlife.
- Reduce surface water run-off and the effects of soil erosion
- Contribute to physical and mental wellbeing
- Provide a sustainable resource
- Offers commercial opportunities, see action 8.3

Legislation/Policy

North Ayrshire Council Tree & Woodland Policy, see action 8.1
Town and Country (Scotland) Planning Act 1997

Planning policy
Tree Preservation Orders
Trees in Conservation Areas (Scotland) Regulations 2010
Roads (Scotland) Act 1984
Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960
Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004
High Hedges (Scotland) Act 2013

A number of Actions will be developed and implemented to ensure the continued provision of high quality woodland across North Ayrshire Council's open space assets. See actions 6.3 and 8.2.

Eglinton Park, Kilwinning



Cemeteries

Overview

North Ayrshire Council has a statutory obligation under the Burial Grounds (Scotland) Act 1855 to provide ground for the burial of the dead. This duty is being replaced by the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 which is in force but yet to be fully introduced. See action 9.4.

There are 44 burial grounds in North Ayrshire. Of these, 26 can no longer be used for new lairs and 18 remain operational and open for new lairs.

Whilst the 26 burial grounds can no longer provide new lairs they can still be used if families have bought lairs/plots that have capacity within them. The 26 also still continue to be operated and maintained to a high standard.

The service manages approximately 750 burials per year of which, on average, half require new lairs.

The 18 cemeteries in regular use are:

Locality	Cemetery/Churchyard
Isle of Arran	Brodick New Cemetery
	Kilmory Cemetery & Churchyard
	Lochranza Churchyard
	Lamlash Cemetery
	Sannox Cemetery
	Shiskine New Cemetery
Isle of Cumbrae	Millport New Cemetery
Largs & North Coast	Largs Brisbane Glen
	West Kilbride Cemetery
Garnock Valley	Beith New Cemetery
	Dalry Cemetery
	Kilbirnie New Cemetery
Irvine	Knadgerhill Cemetery
	Dreghorn New Cemetery
	Shewalton Cemetery
Kilwinning	Kilwinning Cemetery
Three Towns	Ardrossan Cemetery
	High Road, Stevenston

North Ayrshire Council recognises that the capacity of the existing cemeteries is finite and has plans in place to address this. A large number of cemeteries operated by the Council will reach capacity over the next 10 years, see action 9.2.

The Council has made significant investments in cemeteries to extend them, repair walls & paths and upgrade kerbing, see action 9.3.

The Cabinet agreed in March 2013 on the development of a cemetery provision programme on a locality basis to allow a more cost effective approach to the duty to provide sufficient burial space within the area. It was agreed that at least one cemetery would be available for new lairs within each locality.

In determining new sites for cemeteries, it is necessary to undertake intrusive ground investigation works to ensure that the site has adequate natural drainage, is not subject to mine workings, is free from contamination, has an adequate depth of soil to enable multiple interments and has a topographical consistency. Any site must be located in an area of tranquillity, have good public transport and road links and be adequately served by utilities for the associated buildings. In addition to the capital requirements associated with the development of new cemeteries, revenue budgets are required for their operation and maintenance.

Legislation

Burial Grounds (Scotland) Act 1855

Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Act 1925 amended in 1933

Cremation Act 1952

Cremation (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2003

Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016

A number of Actions will be developed and implemented to ensure the continued provision of high quality cemeteries across North Ayrshire. See actions 9.1, 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4.

Kilbirnie New

Beith Cemetery



Knadgerhill Cemetery, Irvine



Sports Pitches

Overview

Physical activity and sport brings people and communities together and greatly contributes to removing social and cultural barriers. Physical activity in its broadest sense is a critical public health issue as a lack of physical activity is associated with significant risks to many aspects of health.

North Ayrshire has a variety of outdoor sports facilities including:

- Football pitches
- Rugby pitches
- Cricket pitches
- Synthetic grass pitches
- Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA)
- Bowling greens
- Tennis Courts
- Athletics tracks
- Golf Courses

The attractive and unique environment of North Ayrshire makes it well placed to promote active lifestyles. Over the past decade, North Ayrshire Council has significantly improved its open space - sport and leisure facilities. Some of the achievements are:

New Facilities

- Arran Outdoor Centre
- Six new play areas
- Full size synthetic pitch at Almswall Park
- Sports Hubs at KA Campus Arran, KA Campus Dalry, KA Campus Greenwood and KA Campus St Matthews.

There is also a full time active schools co-ordinator in each school cluster and an active schools awards scheme implanted in all schools.

Partnership working and Community led initiatives have resulted in the development and enhancement of the Kilwinning Community Sports Club and the provision of new synthetic tennis courts in West Kilbride.

North Ayrshire Council, KA Leisure and partners are working on a revision to the Physical Activity and Sports Strategy, see action 10.1.

The Open Space Strategy will play a key role in supporting the Physical Activity and Sports Strategy. This will in part be facilitated by the continued provision of high quality and accessible open space suitable for recreation and physical activity. See action 10.2.

Douglas Park Bowling Club, Largs



5 Action Plan

Action	Owner	Timescale
Strategic Objective 1: Open Space will be promoted as a resource for tourism and recreation, economic development & biodiversity		
1.1 Audit the existing Open Space and identify any deficiencies/gaps in provision relating to location, type, need and use.	Streetscene/ Economy & Communities	2017-2018
1.2 Address any deficiencies/gaps identified, see above action.	Streetscene/ Economy & Communities	2018-2019
1.3 Liaise with Economy and Communities on initiatives to promote and showcase North Ayrshire's Open Space.	Streetscene/ Economy & Communities	On-going
1.4 Ensure the gateways to North Ayrshire are welcoming, creating a positive first impression of the area.	Streetscene	2017-2018
1.5 Review the gateways to North Ayrshire and develop plans to improve this, where appropriate to do so.	Streetscene	2017-2018
1.6 Continue to contribute to the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan.	Streetscene/ Sustainability	On-going
1.7 Continue to refresh and develop an appropriate Open Space Asset Management Plan with action plan.	Streetscene	Annually
Strategic Objective 2: Help reduce local inequalities by ensuring that all communities have access to high quality, well equipped clean and safe open space.		
2.1 Improve playpark provision with an emphasis on quality rather than quantity.	Streetscene	On-going
2.2 Audit the quality of grounds maintenance on Open Space through the Local Audit Management System (LAMS). Recommend three audits per year.	Streetscene Operations/ Strategy	On-going
2.3 Work with community groups, using a Locality approach on the community ownership of open space, including small urban spaces and parks.	Streetscene/ Economy & Communities and locality Partnerships	On-going
Strategic Objective 3: Promote better health by providing diverse opportunities in open spaces, the natural environment and countryside for physical exercise, sport and recreation		
3.1 Work with Central Green Scotland Network to obtain funding for bespoke projects such as improved pathways to encourage walking, running, cycling.	Streetscene/ Access Officer/ CGSN	On-going
Strategic Objective 4: Protect and enhance all areas of nature conservation value, in particular historic features,		

sensitive habitats and special landscapes.		
4.1 Consider opportunities for 'wild flower meadows' to enhance Open Space areas.	Streetscene Strategy/ Sustainability	On-going
4.2 Work with Central Green Scotland Network to obtain funding for bespoke projects.	Streetscene/ Access Officer/ CGSN	On-going
4.3 Work with the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative (IFLI) on funding opportunities.	Streetscene/ Economy & Communities/ Ranger Service	On-going
Strategic Objective 5: Improve the perception, quality and range of recreational and tourism facilities in the area's open spaces.		
5.1 Undertake a biennial customer satisfaction survey on Open Space.	Streetscene	2017, 2019
5.2 Liaise with the Locality groups and Key Stakeholders on the development of Open Space initiatives to ensure the Council delivers what the public needs.	Streetscene	On-going
Strategic Objective 6: Respond to climate change through the delivery of a connected and integrated network, incorporating water management, woodland area and biodiversity benefits.		
6.1 Review the location and frequency of grass cutting taking account of the benefits of biodiversity from a reduction in cutting.	Streetscene Strategy/ Officers	2017
6.2 Consider opportunities for 'wild flower meadows' to enhance Open Space areas.	Streetscene Strategy/ Sustainability	On-going
6.3 Consider options for developing woodland in low amenity value open space to reduce maintenance costs and contribute to Biomass needs.	Arbor Officer/ Sustainability	On-going
Parks, Open Space & Equipped Playparks		
7.1 Continue to contribute to the APSE Advisory Groups on the sharing of best practice.	Streetscene	On-going
7.2 Improve playpark provision with an emphasis on quality rather than quantity.	Streetscene	On-going
7.3 Rationalise play-parks and ensure those remaining provide high quality provision and monitor this through	Streetscene	2017

customer satisfaction surveys and audits.		
7.4 Continue to support local volunteers who litter pick open space areas and beaches with materials, equipment and advice.	Streetscene/ Local volunteers	On-going
7.5 Maintain beach cleanliness and ensure beaches retain their award winning status.	Streetscene/ Local volunteers	On-going
7.6 Consider opportunities to use the Community Payback team to support environmental clean-up initiatives.	Streetscene	On-going
7.7 Continue to support the development of allotments across North Ayrshire in line with the "Allotments Policy"	Streetscene/ Economy & Communities/ Locality Partnerships	On-going
Woodlands		
8.1 Review the Council's Tree & Woodland Policy every 3 years to ensure it remains fit for purpose.	Arbor Officer	2019
8.2 Consider options for developing woodland in low amenity value open space to reduce maintenance costs and contribute to Biomass needs.	Arbor Officer/ Sustainability	On-going
8.3 Consider commercial opportunities for the re-use/sale of wood from trees felled.	Arbor Officer	2017
Cemeteries		
9.1 Audit the quality of grounds maintenance in Cemeteries through the Local Audit Management System (LAMS). Recommend three audits per year.	Streetscene Operations/ Strategy	On-going
9.2 Continue to regularly review existing burial capacity and demand to ensure there is adequate ground for burials in accordance with the Burials (Scotland) Act 1855.	Bereavement Officer/ Property/ Estates	On-going
9.3 Consider opportunities for improving the wall, paths and infrastructure in Cemetery grounds.	Bereavement Officer/ Property	On-going
9.4 Review and respond to the new legislative framework being introduced by the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016	Bereavement Officer	As enacted
Sports Pitches		
10.1 Review the Physical Activity and Sports Strategy	Economy & Communities/ KA Leisure	2017
10.2 Support the Physical Activity and Sports Strategy through the continued provision of high quality and accessible open space suitable for recreation and physical activity.	Economy & Communities/ KA Leisure/ Streetscene	On-going