

Advice Note for Practical Design and Management of Greenspace

(Public Open Spaces and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces)

For developers and land managers



Dorset
Council



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1. Introduction

Dorset Council understand the worth of its greenspaces and recognise how design influences the way that people use them and how they can be efficiently maintained. Designed well, our Public Open Space (POS) can function as an important part of peoples' everyday lives contributing to their health and happiness, in addition to playing a key part of our natural habitat network. This note briefly sets out considerations for design and the kind of open space the council expects developers to provide in association with new housing. It could also be used to help inform and improve the management of existing sites.

It is important that developers use this advice note to supplement Local Plan requirements rather than as a substitute. Please note: this document details good practice not policy, unless specified. Therefore, the guidance does not prejudice further advice that may be received from other specialisms such as Landscape Design or Ecology during development planning.

In large schemes, during the site planning stages there is usually ample scope for optimising POS location in relation to pedestrian routes, existing site features and other parkland (existing or planned).

Developers should discuss the range of facilities, type of treatment and maintenance responsibilities with Dorset Council at an early stage. In larger developments applicants will be expected to provide land and undertake suitable structural landscaping. The freehold of such areas of landscaping may be agreed to be conveyed to the council together with an appropriate capital sum for future maintenance. This should be included during the early discussions.

Dorset Council will seek a financial contribution based upon the total area of any land put forward for adoption. A developer will need to enter into a legal agreement for the council to take over the maintenance of the POS on completion of the development scheme. This figure is subject to periodic review and developers are therefore advised to contact the council's Coast and Greenspace service to determine the current rate.

The location, size and quality of facilities are important. Developers should consult the Dorset Council Natural Environment Team (NET) about the provision of infrastructure in areas to be

adopted by the council. They in turn will liaise with the Countryside and Grounds Maintenance services.

The design of the POS is largely determined by:

- (a) its function,
- and
- (b) the characteristics of the site.

It is useful when starting to consider design to contemplate the following:

- Why is the space being created, what is its primary purpose?

Example answer: there is an identified local need for children to have a play space.

The user requirements of a space are critical if the area is to be fully utilised- and hence cared for - by the local community. At local scale of provision, the emphasis is usually placed on a low-key approach, flexible enough to accommodate changing demands.

- What are the secondary purposes for the site?

Example answer: dog walking

- Where is the site located and how might this have any influence?

Example answer: it is in a historical village where existing infrastructure and landscape is very traditional. Modern materials may look out of place.

Take advantage of existing features that are worthy of retention, such as trees, areas of mature shrub vegetation, hedges and walls.

- When does the site need to be open or is it open already?
- Who are the target audience/ site users?

Example answer: children, teenagers.

- What existing constraints are there?

This may be ecological constraints, environmental, physical or even emotional (existing memorial, new memorial required etc.)

Parts of the site may be determined by topography, existing vegetation, waterbodies, only be suitable for certain activities, and so on. By first relating these features to the user requirements, initial site zoning can be undertaken.

- Who is going to be managing the site and what resources do they have available to do so?

Example answer: a management company who have 10 staff, but no off-road vehicles except for a tractor.

- How is the site going to be delivered?

Example answer: it will need to be delivered in the next 12 months and there is £50,000 budget for construction with a further £100,000 per year to maintain it over the next 25 years.

Once you have the answers to all these questions a picture may naturally start to form around what the site may look like and needs to contain.

As information is gathered it is important to retain it for the **management plan** to ensure it has all the essential information needed for future maintenance and decision making. NET's **Advice Note for Greenspace Management Plans** provides further guidance.

Infrastructure and design need to be sympathetic to the natural environment and surrounding landscape. Nowadays there is a variety of materials to choose from, each have their own benefits, but we need to be cautious that we do not over design, engineer, or create a space that is visually intrusive.

2. Access

When thinking about access it is not just the entry points to a site that need to be thought about. Gates, paths, vegetation and so on, can all influence how and if people are able to use a site. Any barriers to use should be removed or reduced as far as practically possible. Under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1998, the needs of disabled people should be

taken into account in the design and provision. For example, avoid the use of steps and steep gradients if possible, introduce changes of level gradually, try and provide some indication of changes. An Equalities Impact Assessment can help inform the design process.

When thinking about the following keep in mind the types of use the site will have; if it is grazed it will need to be secure for livestock; Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) are likely to need to be safely fenced and gated for dogs; but fences and gates can be restrictive, so consider if they are needed and the specification.

2.1 Roads and parking

Roads providing access and roads creating barriers play an important part of site design. Where there is an opportunity to comment on the design of highway infrastructure in relation to greenspace it can be helpful. In turn, highway infrastructure may influence design of a space. Consider the following:

- Pedestrian access points should be sited to aid safe crossing of roads. For example, close to a formal crossing point and where there is good visibility in both directions. Set the access points back into the site to allow for room to open any gate without stepping back into a road.
- Vehicular access for maintenance or emergency access should be sited to allow for larger vehicles to turn into and out of the site without causing congestion or compromising road safety.
- Roads can be a barrier for site users. For sites adjacent to a road additional fencing may improve user safety and provide a sense of security.
- Two or more greenspaces separated by a road can still function as one larger site for recreation by connecting them with appropriate crossing points.
- Site carparks or main access should be served by a road that can absorb the expected increase of traffic.

Where insufficient provision has been made for parking within a residential area pressure can be put on any incidental space, including grass verges, resulting loss of amenity. Unless the

grass has been reinforced by a geotextile or cellular mat, it will soon become rutted and/or bare. The problem needs to be anticipated at the site layout stage and, as far as possible, designed out.

2.2 Gates

Include a specification in your plans for any infrastructure at access points, consider longevity of materials and security. Galvanised steel increases longevity and many gate products on the market are DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant. And to British Standard construction.

Bridleway gates should be a two-way system. It is likely they may also be serving cyclists and other users. If gates are required on a bridleway, it is useful that they can be opened effectively without having to dismount and should be self-closing /latching.

Consider the placement of horses whilst the gate is in use. If a horse needs to step back, there should be room for it to do so with no hazards such as a ditch or road.

Vehicle gates or gaps – need to be situated appropriately and at the quantity required to be able to access all the site for maintenance and emergency access.



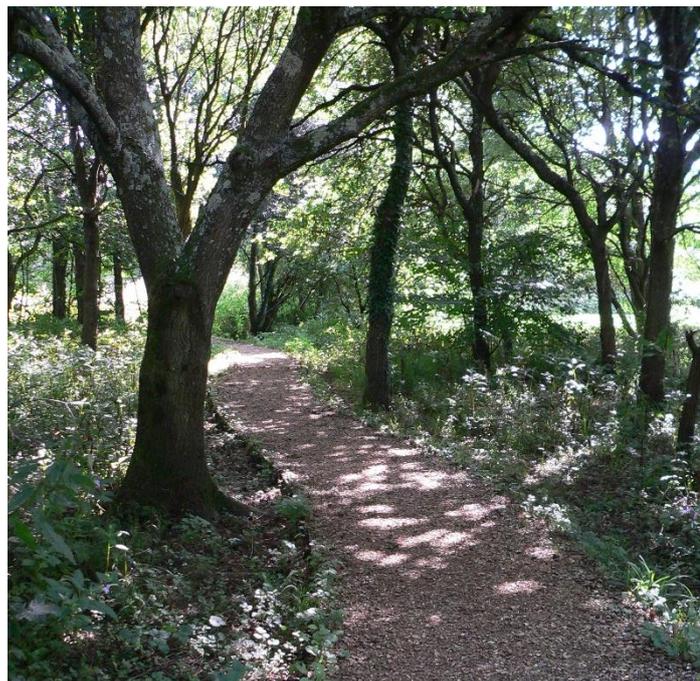
Consider:

- Width and height of any required turns into or out of the gate. Emergency and maintenance vehicles require a clearance of ideally 4m wide, by 4m in height. 3.7m minimum.
- Emergency response may require an identified entry and exit point. This is especially important in events such as wildfire, where having to turn a vehicle round during an incident could increase risk.
- Width and pass height for corridor areas (ride on mowers need at least a 2m gap)
- Gradient and ground conditions especially in grassed areas to avoid vehicles getting stuck. Especially considering how much of the maintenance is carried out during wetter months.

2.3 Paths

When considering surfacing or pathways that will be in a POS, thought should be given to their dimensions, surface material and accompanying infrastructure. It is important that a construction detail is submitted during planning, addressing the following parameters:

- Width - Routes across POS should be of a suitable width as appropriate for the predicted “footfall” and user demographic. We suggest a width of 1.8m for a footpath and 3m for a bridleway or shared route.
- Surface – A pathway’s surface should be appropriate for its status and recessive in colour to blend into the landscape character. It should also be suitably robust for the various pressures it will receive from all members of the community. Path surfaces should accommodate various needs, ages and abilities – for example, people unsteady on their feet or using pushchairs, wheelchair/trampers etc.
- Amount of path should not be excessive to avoid restriction of other opportunities, informal play, community gathering, hay cropping etc. Firstly, establish the points of access and carparking areas for the site, the main path network can then be developed by linking the sites zones
- Paths should flow naturally following land contours around the site avoiding steep embankments and difficult turns.
- Linking with other sites, other routes, Public Rights of Way (PRoWs), footways, create looped – circular walks



2.4 Boardwalks and Bridges

Specification for boardwalks should consider galvanised steel frames with impregnated nonslip decking on top. Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) and recycled plastic materials may be

suitable, but there can be environmental concerns which need to be fully considered especially near water.

They should be designed to be wide enough to act as a shared route (3m in width) or with regular passing points.

Consider whether a boardwalk is the best option? Could a causeway be created instead, or is there an alternative dry route?

Where Dorset Council is adopting a site there is a need to build to Dorset Council specification for level of intended use.

2.5 Rights of Way

The status of routes will need to be agreed (footpath, cycleways, permissive route etc.) to help establish future maintenance responsibilities and adequate provision for the future maintenance of formal PRowS.

If the overall development sits in a location with numerous PRowS, care should be taken to ensure that entry and exit points to the development areas effectively tie into this wider network, providing good opportunity to facilitate walking for both leisure and practical journeys.

- Consider that routes may require diversion applications and temporary closures during works
- Dedication of routes as PRowS or new cycleways need to be considered with Dorset Council consultation.

2.6 Steps and slopes

Steps and slopes to and from POS need to be constructed from suitable materials and need to be specified considering accessibility and safety, especially if they go onto a road or footpath next to a road.

- There should be a 1.2m landing zone between the bottom of any steps and the road edge. Barriers may also need to be considered.
- Slopes should be no more than 1:12 gradient.
- They need to be of a suitable width for pedestrians and for maintenance (no less than 2m).

2.7 Signage

Waymarking should be well-thought-out to ensure that it complements the local character of the overall area. Clear signage is required for access routes. Ensure interpretation includes existing surrounding spaces and encourage appropriate use, for example dog walking on less sensitive greenspaces, (SANGs not SSSI)

Consider local signage design. There may be styles that you can replicate or an organisation you can collaborate with to improve your signage.

Example: Dorset Dogs have a paw print system that can be used on signs to indicate dogs on lead or off lead areas. [Love Dogs... Love Nature \(dorsetdogs.org.uk\)](https://www.dorsetdogs.org.uk)



Any site bylaws, county wide standards should be included on signs for example; dogs in play areas, Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs), ground nesting bird season etc.

3. Site Security

Greenspaces need to be secure and opportunities for antisocial behavior reduced where possible. This can be achieved through a considered design, for example:

- Ensuring vehicles are unable to drive off road and gain access across open grassland
 - Using bollards or bunding
 - Installing height barriers and gates
 - Planting hedging or trees to create barriers
- Reduction of scrub to open areas up to passing view and natural lighting
- Fencing



When considering which option to use, future maintenance will have a direct influence. When considering materials, wooden infrastructure can be most aesthetically pleasing, especially in a natural or historical environment. However, wood can rot quickly especially in damp soils and may require more frequent replacement. Galvanised steel (normally powder coated in black) can offer a great alternative where natural barriers are unable to be used.

4. Fencing

A detailed fence specification helps identify maintenance and replacement needs. As aforementioned, whilst wood may be more natural and aesthetically pleasing replacement costs have been extremely high in recent years due to quality of timber and effectiveness of treatments:

Dorset Council Countryside service have used a galvanized metal fencing system on their SANGs and POS successfully which is easy to maintain and long lasting, especially compared to wooden posts/rails. Hedges can be left to grow into the fence line as there is nothing to rot (as long as this is remembered during hedge cutting!).

5. Retaining Walls

Walls should be engineered for suitability and longevity. Back fill should be of suitable material, and both specified during design. Wooden fascia or similar can be included to soften appearance. However, fascias will still require replacing at some point due to rotting like other timber which can be expensive.

Any resulting drop needs to be considered for safety; fencing may be required.

6. Habitats

An informal design is preferable, utilising natural features to soften boundaries and visual impact of surrounding buildings.

NET produces a series of advice notes and guidance sheets on specific habitats and species: [Species and habitat advice notes and guidance sheets - Dorset Council](#).

Modern pressures on our greenspace to function for recreation, health, climate change, ecological, historical, landscape and conservation, in addition to a multitude of other things can make it difficult to decipher what natural habitats to aim for.

This is where primary purpose of a site becomes increasingly important. For example, if your site is to function as POS for recreation you may require an open area of grassland with a short sward height as a kick about space or picnic area. Whatever the primary function, plan for this first in your design.

Surveys can help inform the design process. For example, a tree survey should identify their species, size, approximate age and condition. This can help determine what is to be retained.

Greenspaces and the maintenance of them is intrinsically linked to nature and natural processes. Consider:

- Natural regeneration which can allow for more robust specimens suited to the local environment. Reducing costs and carbon footprint.
- Planting for instant effect, screening and creating corridors of habitat.

New planting, whether native or selected non-native species, can contribute to the diversity of wildlife. However, it should be ensured that the species chosen will not, adversely affect established habitats. This is particularly important where a greenspace lies adjacent to nature conservation sites.

- Existing species requirements and population size.
- Increasing age structure and biodiversity.

It is essential to plan for the protection of existing features and space your design exploits where construction surrounds it. Consider matters such as tree roots, soil compaction and so on, from the outset. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will assist with this.

7. Wetland Features

We recognise the invaluable role wetland features play. These are locally valued to provide a variety of roles, invaluable amenity and biodiversity value. Wetland features need to be carefully designed.

Consider how changes to ground conditions and culverting of watercourses may create water management issues.

Design considerations should include:

- Future management of the features needs careful consideration. Especially access for desilting and capacity retention work. Details of which should be included in a management plan for the site.

- Any surrounding areas which may need to be incorporated into mowing regimes need to be able to be accessed by ride on mowers in damp conditions.
- There should be clear accessible areas where exit is achievable to anyone entering a pond or wetland feature by accident.
- Inflow/outflow pipes, culverts and inspection chambers if they are required need to be suitably sited and accessible for maintenance, but not visually intrusive or create a hazard to site users.
- Vehicular access needs to be systematically thought through. Where ground conditions may be wet or heavy vehicles required for maintenance access, routes may need to be reinforced or have planned temporary measures identified in advance within a management plan.
- Gates or gaps with drop down bollards need to be suitably located and wide enough to fit equipment through.

Poor land drainage can limit the value of the amenity. Soil conditions should also be assessed, and the greenspace designed to accommodate fluctuations in water levels. Proposed infrastructure may need to be specified to withstand wetter conditions.

Further guidance on **Sustainable Drainage Systems** (SuDs) can be found here:

[Sustainable Drainage Systems Advice Note \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/resources/sustainable-drainage-systems-advice-note)



8. Play

The inclusion of play facilities within POS design is welcomed. Play space needs to be designed as an integral part of its surroundings through a holistic approach. NET highly recommend looking at the Play England advice on planning design for play: [Design for Play – Play England](#). Natural play opportunities can be just as important as a Locally Equipped Area of Play (LEAP).

The council's play spaces must be readily accessible by foot, and as such, should be designed as an integral part of the housing layout. The location of such areas should relate to the distribution of other open space, both existing and planned, and to any specific council policies and proposals set out in the Local Plan where applicable.

Within the POS site management plan please include the following for play (for purposes of maintenance, repair, and replacement):

- Details on the basis for the chosen equipment and how it meets local need.

- Relevant information on how the designed play area meets the Equality Act 2010.
- Drainage design plans and required maintenance of such features detailing expected frequency.
- Longevity/ lifespan of provided equipment and surfacing.
- The equipment manufacturer.
- Details for responsibilities for the provision, maintenance, and inspection of the equipment (to be included in the work plan), providing contact details and details of what the site signage should contain for health and safety including emergency contact details.



Dorset Council Grounds Maintenance team have no preference for suppliers. We advise a preference of higher quality equipment over amount of equipment provided. Other considerations related to design:

- Play sites situated under or close to trees are prone to moss and leaf litter making the equipment slippery and may require jet washing twice a year or more.
- Parents like resting places – and can damage wooden overhangs they use as benches.
- Ornate wooden carvings can be prone to being stolen.
- Metal bolts used in wood can become loose due to wood shrinkage.

Key design points for easy maintenance:

- Tiger mulch type surfacing can be easier to patch repair than other play surfacing.
- There are known issues around ground compaction where grass matting is used as safety surfacing.
- A gap and/or strip of concrete under the fence aids strimming and negates the need for chemical spraying. Approx. 4 inches/10-15 cm.
- Metal ground sockets and sleeves can be used on wooden equipment to reduce rot and damage from strimming.
- Painted wood requires more maintenance long term as it needs re-painting.
- Plastic fades in the sun so should be used out of direct sunlight to retain colour.
- Metal slides should not be south facing due to heat retention and consequential burns.
- Extra planting and shrubbery can be hard to maintain and require additional expertise/ resources.
- Trees, especially fruiting species are welcome, can provide shade and foraging opportunities.

- Small hills and bumps for children to play on should be able to be driven over with a ride on mower.

The play areas are required to be signed off by a suitably qualified play inspector after installation and prior to Dorset Council's final sign off. We suggest seeking play inspector comments at design stage, especially around health and safety.

Dorset Council expect any future managing organisation to organise independent yearly inspections and have any identified defects rectified promptly.

9. Additional Information

During development planning early discussions on future ownership are important so that opportunities can be identified early in the process (as early as pre-app). Especially as design has a direct influence on contribution costs (which we can advise on) and viability.

From the outset it is important to ascertain the costs of both implementation and maintenance so that the appropriate provision can be made. Where it is expected that Dorset Council or a Parish Council should adopt greenspace, it is important that they should be consulted so that they may be given the opportunity to comment on the maintenance implications of the design in relation to their resources and other requirements.

NET and Countryside Opens Spaces (COS) team will assess opportunities for Dorset Council ownership based on location, surrounding green/blue infrastructure network, financial contribution, resource availability etc.

For infrastructure being conveyed to Dorset Council, clerk of works may be required to ensure quality of build. Particularly for retaining walls, SuDs, extensive path networks. This should be highlighted during design stages.

For site management plans NET have created an **Advice Note for Greenspace Management Plans** detailing the information future site managers require to effectively manage these spaces. This is available on request and included in the NET Guidance sheets section of our webpages: [Species and habitat advice notes and guidance sheets - Dorset Council](#).

