



Southway Housing Trust
Green Spaces Strategy
2014 - 2017

Introduction

Recognising and promoting the importance of the environment in which Southway Housing Trust (Southway) tenants and residents live is at the heart of our investment in neighbourhoods. We believe that consideration of the green environment of South Manchester, in relation to the Southway homes that it surrounds, is integral in creating places where people want to live. We recognise that the quality of open spaces near to where people live can impact significantly on how places are perceived and valued locally.

Southway will deliver well designed and well managed green spaces that are safe for people to access and enjoy. These green spaces can be used for play, recreation, socialising and relaxing. They can also provide environments which enhance biodiversity and support climate adaptation. Positive use of open space brings people together, builds stronger communities and contributes to a healthier society.

There is increasing recognition that good quality landscapes provide important opportunities for people of all ages to enjoy their local environment.

Our local green spaces are effective 'green oases' for promoting healthy lifestyles, enhancing community cohesion and tackling inequality. They can provide volunteering and employment opportunities, encourage civic action and mitigate the effects of climate change.

This Strategy sets out Southway's commitment and vision towards green space in terms of their design, management and safe use. We will make the very best use of our green space and provide an 'urban park' across our area.

1. The benefits of access to green space for people

- Community Engagement

Access to, use of and engagement in green space in their neighbourhood can contribute to people's levels of satisfaction and sense of community. Several pieces of research identify that having a green space within a 5-10 minute walk from home increases the possibility that people, including children and older people will use it.

- Health

People's daily experience of their neighbourhood green space positively affects their physical and mental health. Studies have shown that the frequency of visits to a green space relates to its proximity to home and that the length of time spent there supports a reduction in stress levels. It has also been shown that older people live longer when they have walkable green streets and greenery-filled public spaces which they can walk to easily. Accessible and safe green spaces are important to peoples' sense of well being and mental health and are a positive influence on levels of physical activity.

- Perception of safety

People's perception of safety is influenced by various factors, one of which is the presence of a green neighbourhood. People who regularly use green spaces close to home, or even simply take an interest in the public green space around them perceive their neighbourhood as safer than those who do not.

- Ecological benefits

Well designed and correctly managed green space contributes to the green infrastructure of South Manchester and the ecosystems it can support. As well as supporting biodiversity and wildlife habitats, one hectare of green space can absorb one tonne of carbon dioxide, equivalent to 100 family cars.

2. Key themes of the Southway Green Space Strategy

Southway has the following themes which set out our priorities for the future management of our green spaces.

1. Commitment to Quality

Through this strategy we make a commitment to good quality green and open spaces at the highest level possible within Southway Housing Trust.

People value good quality green space. Better designed and managed spaces lead individuals and neighbourhoods to value and use their outdoor spaces more.

Investing in quality from the outset will help to save resources in the longer term. Well designed, managed and maintained green space reduces anti-social behaviour. Good design is about creating places that function now and can adapt in the future. Our green spaces will offer something for everyone, be robust and give people a sense of place.

A well designed place has the following qualities:

- Sustainability
- Character and distinctiveness.
- Definition and enclosure.
- Connectivity and accessibility.
- Adaptability and robustness.
- Inclusiveness.
- Biodiversity.

2. Involve Residents

We will encourage local residents of all ages to play an active role in deciding what the open spaces should be like, how they should be used and how they should be looked after.

Improvements will be led by residents' needs and aspirations and the Trust believes it is important that they are involved at each stage of the process. Successful resident involvement is key to delivering green space improvement projects. Engaging with our residents from the outset means projects are tailored to local needs and residents have a sense of ownership over their space in the long term.

Resident involvement will also play a major role in the forming of our Green Champion groups, monitoring of our grounds maintenance delivery service through our green inspectors and running of community events and activities.

3. Know the bigger picture

We will take a strategic approach when planning and improving open spaces.

With a better understanding of who owns what and who is responsible for maintaining specific spaces, it can be easier to prioritise investment and integrate changes into the wider neighbourhoods. This also enables great opportunities for partnership working with organisations that manage green spaces and parks, enabling connectivity of green infrastructure, monitoring of biodiversity and working towards Government targets and objectives.

Understanding ownership of space also supports our litigation process and inspections.

4. Maintain High Standards

This means having an agreed standard and palette to work from that links into each design of space, and regularly reviewing the performance of maintenance contracts so that they are fit for purpose to ensure all year round quality and sustainability.

The Trust will consider participation in national accreditation and award schemes such as the Green Flag Award which is the national standard for parks and green spaces in the UK. The award scheme began in 1996 as a means of recognising and rewarding parks and green spaces that are managed appropriately, meeting recognised standards and the needs of the community.

5. Make Places Feel Safe

We will improve the character and design of places to change user behaviour and improve personal safety.

Investing in the creation and care of high quality public spaces is highly effective in helping to reduce crime and deter anti social behaviour. Good quality open space brings people together, which increases informal social activity and surveillance and discourages nuisance behaviour, encouraging a sense of ownership, belonging and pride in the local environment.

Involving communities in the design of green spaces allows for stakeholder debate that explores potential risks and issues. An inclusive design that understands concerns from the perspective of different user groups will result in a greater sense of ownership and informal stewardship in the long term. All spaces should be clearly defined in terms of their use and ownership, as ambiguity results in inappropriate use. Key considerations for open space development improvements include;

- Seating
- Planting
- Access and movement
- Boundaries
- Lighting
- Materials
- Management and maintenance.

6. Promote healthy living

We will encourage people to be more active by providing and promoting attractive, well maintained open spaces.

Green space plays an important role in the drive to increase levels of physical activity. If people have easy access to an attractive network of local green spaces and pedestrian-friendly streets it becomes part of the everyday experience. It can be easy to undervalue the benefits of safe and well maintained green spaces that provide people with an *oasis* for recreation, relaxation, refreshment and relief.

The Trust will run a programme of events throughout the year that tenants can access free of charge that will encourage healthy living such as grow your own, health walks, and bike rides.

7. Prepare For Climate Change

Green infrastructure can deliver a multitude of environmental benefits that contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Green infrastructure can play an important role in ameliorating the effects of extreme weather conditions brought on by climate change.

Trees and vegetated space reduce conductive heat loss in the winter and offer shade in the summer, cooling the air and minimising the need for costly air conditioning while reducing air pollution caused by burned fossil fuels.

Biodiversity will be adversely affected as a result of changes in air temperature and water availability. Therefore native trees, shrubs and flowers will provide an important habitat space for wildlife.

3. Delivering the Strategy

The detailed actions necessary to deliver the vision, aims and objectives adopted in this strategy will be set out in a three year Action Plan. For each objective a set of actions is given with timescales and those responsible for delivery. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated yearly until the end of the strategy period.