

Open Spaces Policy

Introduction:

Crewkerne is blessed with fine countryside, much of it accessible, but people of all ages & backgrounds need open spaces close to where they live. Open space is land in some form of public ownership that is regularly available for recreational or sporting use by the community, and also includes a cemetery and churchyard. Open spaces are valued community assets improving public health, well-being and quality of life, and bringing regeneration benefits to an area.

As well as providing space for recreation and exercise, parks & open spaces perform a considerable range of other vital functions for the community such as the following: -

- a. Habitat for wildlife and movement corridors for animals, important to local nature conservation.
- b. Flood protection providing areas for rainfall to drain away.
- c. Space for trees, too large for many gardens, which in turn provide shade, climate regulation and shelter.
- d. Air and water purification.
- e. Aesthetic & landscape enhancement and protection of green vistas.
- f. Sense of well-being, improving desirability of an area and increase in property value.
- g. A venue for social interaction, public art and community events.
- h. An outdoor classroom allowing children to explore and learn about the natural world.
- i. Land for community food growing and enjoying horticultural achievements.
- j. Protection of areas and structures of heritage value.
- k. Carbon sequestration in tackling the causes of climate change.

Environmental change and the need for increased biodiversity will have an effect on the way open spaces are managed.

Open Spaces owned and managed by Crewkerne Town Council:

- Happy Valley Recreation Ground
- Barn Street Recreation Ground
- Bincombe Beeches Nature Reserve
- Severalls War Memorial Garden
- Henhayes Recreation Ground
- Southmead Play Area
- Severalls Bowling Green
- Severalls Tennis Courts
- Townsend Cemetery
- St Bartholomew's Church Grounds

Objectives:

Open spaces provide opportunities for all areas of our community and include play opportunities, places to walk and sit quietly, and protection for wildlife and social areas.

There is an agreed procedure for the upkeep of Open Spaces and these are maintained for the optimum use of all residents. This procedure is determined by Council Staff, in particular the Operations Manager, and is communicated to, and known, by all Grounds Staff. This will include details on where grass is to be cut, wild areas, areas of rewilding, frequency of maintenance, tree planting/pruning/removal, equipment inspections and records.

Sports pitches will be maintained to a reasonable standard and where a team requires additional work undertaken this can be done either at an additional cost to the Sports Club or with the written agreement of Crewkerne Town Council to undertake it themselves.

Upkeep of these Open Spaces remains under the control of Crewkerne Town Council and no additional work is to be undertaken in any Open Space without the written permission of Crewkerne Town Council. Any unauthorised work will be considered to be criminal damage and action taken accordingly.

Tree Policy

For Crewkerne Town Council owned trees, we will endeavour to:

- Maintain our trees in a safe condition.
- Prune our trees when they are causing an actual nuisance, i.e. damage to buildings.

Tree Works the Council are not able to do:

- Prune privately owned trees.
- Prune trees back because they are overhanging.
- Systematically prune trees to control their size or height.
- Prune or remove trees in order to improve light.
- Prune or remove trees to improve a view.
- Prune or remove trees because of falling leaves, sap, seeds or debris.
- Prune or remove trees to improve television or satellite reception.

Common tree related enquiries:

If the tree does not belong to CTC and the resident is concerned about:

- Electricity cables (trees interfering with) and supply: National Grid (formerly Western Power) 0800 096 3080
- Telephone wires – BT Faults – 0800 800151
- Trees threatening or obstructing the Highway (including pavements) – Somerset Council Highways – 0300 123 2224
- Trees obstructing streetlights – Somerset Council Streetlight Department – 0345 601 0939
- Trees obstructing right of way – Somerset Council Highways – 0300 123 2224
- High evergreen hedges – refer to land owner or Somerset Council Tree Officer
- Nesting birds and roosting bats – contact the police – 101
- If the resident is unsure about which arborist to employ, helpful consumer advice and directories are available at www.trees.org.uk

Doing the work yourselves:

In common law, a property owner can cut back overhanging branches to the boundary of their property. Crewkerne Town Council will usually have no objection to property owners carrying out this type of tree works or engaging a contractor at their own expense, **providing:**

- Access is not gained via Council land or trees, without written permission of the Town Clerk. 01460 74001.
- The tree is not situated within a Conservation Area or subject to a Tree Preservation Order. Refer to the Town Clerk. 01460 74001.
- That any work to the tree is not detrimental to its health or stability and is carried out in accordance with British Standard 2998:2010 – Tree Works.
- That the cut branches are disposed of in a responsible manner and that no unauthorised damage to Council property occurs.
- Works to any tree situated in a Conservation Area, whether Council or privately owned, should have the correct permissions obtained from the Local Planning Authority (LPA) before commencement.

No timber is to be removed by the public from Council open spaces without the express written permission of the Town Clerk.

Grass Cutting

Grass cutting policy will be dependent on the area. Pitches will be maintained to a suitable standard. Should a club need maintenance to a higher standard then this should be made known to the Town Council for consideration. Permission must be in writing and at the club's cost. Other areas may be maintained in a different way to encourage biodiversity, increase wildlife habitat or to save costs. In these areas throughout the spring and summer, the grasses are allowed to grow to create a meadow effect and mown pathways are cut in between. Wildflowers will also be actively sown in areas determined by the Town Clerk in conjunction with the Operations Manager.

In the autumn the flat, open areas will be cut back before the winter. The time of this cut will be determined by the Town Council and timescales may vary depending on weather and staff capacity. Pathways may continue to be cut in the autumn/winter depending on the weather but the grass will be allowed to grow longer outside of these areas.

The Churchyard and Cemetery will have their own requirements which may be a mixture of continued grass cutting throughout the season and wilder areas.

Dog Walking

Crewkerne Town Council allows well behaved dogs in all its open spaces except Barn Street Recreation Ground which has a dog ban.

Invasive Species

The public are not allowed to plant any plants, flowers or trees on Council Open Spaces without prior written agreement. Any non-native or invasive species will be removed, without warning, and disposed of or rehomed as necessary.

Financial implications:

There are financial implications to Crewkerne Town Council for maintaining Open Spaces and changes may be made to agreed procedures to allow for budget management or special events. This decision can be made by the Town Clerk in conjunction with the Chair of Amenities Committee.

Biodiversity Considerations:

The Natural England and Rural Communities Act of 2006 placed a duty on authorities in England (including Town Councils) to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy and decision-making processes. This was subsequently strengthened under the Environment Act of 2021 which asked public authorities to consider what they can do to enhance biodiversity in England. The first consideration of this duty must be completed by 1st January 2024.

This means a public authority must:

- Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration.
- Act to deliver policies and achieve objectives.

What the Town Council will do:

- Consider the impact on biodiversity in the decisions made by the Town Council, especially when commenting on planning applications.
- It will reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides used on Town Council owned land.
- It will regularly review how it manages the Open Spaces identified above, and consider where possible:
 - Leaving standing and fallen dead wood as a habitat for invertebrates.
 - Leaving leaf litter and dead vegetation wherever possible as a habitat for invertebrates.
 - Removing invasive and non-invasive species that are detrimental to native flora or fauna as required.
 - The Town Council will consider reducing the number of cuts in appropriate areas to allow the grasses to grow and be swathed in September.
 - Ensure that there is a margin of uncut grass around the hedges to allow longer grasses to grow.
 - Allow fallen tree branches to remain, if safe, to allow invertebrates to inhabit.
 - To preserve the Lucombe Oak tree and encourage biodiversity the area under the tree will be left wilded and to protect the tree's root system.
- The Crewkerne Neighbourhood Plan is being drafted and the Town Council supports the discussion of biodiversity and added to the plan as necessary.
- Hedge cutting takes place twice a year. All hedges are cut outside of the bird nesting season.
- The Town Council will look to install bird boxes in Town Council owned trees.
- The Town Council will look to promote biodiversity via the Town Council website.



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