

## **Parks & Open Spaces, the Coast & Countryside**

### **Why is this a Public Health issue?**

Being outside, being active, being involved and being closer to nature is good for all of us. It is good for our physical and mental health, and for fostering pride and closer links with local community.

- Parks and open spaces have been recognised for walking, cycling, informal recreation, social interaction, education, promoting healthy living and well-being.
- Parks and open spaces contribute to all aspects of health and wellbeing including increasing levels of physical activity.
- Simply being outside in green space promotes mental wellbeing, relieves stress, overcomes isolation, improves social cohesion and alleviates physical problems.
- Open spaces have a role to play in maximising the quality of life and improving health.
- The design and management of parks and open spaces can play a key role in addressing community safety, levels of physical activity, physical and mental wellbeing and self-esteem.
- Safe play is an essential part of the physical, emotional and psychological development of children, where they can meet play and socialise.
- Parks and open spaces are vital components in the fabric of urban life.
- Access to the countryside on public rights of way (footpaths and bridleways), on access land (in the upland's and on registered common land), on the coast, in country parks and accessible woodlands, provide invaluable opportunities to escape from the physical and mental stresses of modern urban life.

### **What can the County Council do about it?**

- Meet the needs of Northumberland's diverse communities through the careful planning of new development to ensure the provision of appropriate green infrastructure<sup>1</sup>.
- Improve people's enjoyment and experience of parks and green spaces
- Effectively managing the usage and infrastructure of parks and green spaces
- Work with the community to improve green spaces so that they better serve their needs.
- Create a comprehensive policy framework for the protection, enhancement, accessibility and use of urban parks, country parks, local nature reserves and other green spaces; make sure that green spaces enhance the quality and diversity of the environment, the life of local communities and promote civic pride and social inclusion;
- Ensure that the green space network meets the needs of local people, now and in the future; provide a framework for resource allocation that maximises

funding to support improvements from internal revenue budgets and external funding opportunities;

- Create a framework for, and support the work of voluntary and community groups to participate in green space provision and management
- Ensure that the county's network of public rights of way (footpaths and bridleways), including national and regional trails, is easy to use.
- Ensure that public access to open access land is protected.
- Work in partnership with others to ensure that opportunities for recreation in parks, open spaces and the countryside are well promoted.

### **How will it make a difference?**

- There will be an increased public use and enjoyment of green spaces in the urban areas leading to improvements in health and wellbeing
- Greater opportunities to enjoy the countryside at country parks, Local Nature Reserves and on the rights of way network
- Enhanced opportunities for community engagement and involvement in the management and enhancement of green spaces and public rights of way.
- It will lead to the creation of a well-planned and managed network of green spaces across the county
- Encourages greater partnership working with Parish Councils, community groups, and third sector organisations.

<sup>1</sup>**Green Infrastructure:** A network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities