

Watford Greenspaces Strategy

2026-2036
Summary



WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL



Arkwood



Contents

Welcome	03	Healthy, connected communities	12
Our vision	04	Protecting nature and climate adaptation	13
Why greenspaces matter	06	Caring for what we have	14
Watford today	07	Working together	15
What you told us	08	Where we will focus	16
Our priorities	09	How we will deliver this	19
Greenspaces that welcome everyone	10	Looking ahead	20
Bringing our community together	11	How you can get involved	21



Welcome



From the Elected Mayor of Watford,
Peter Taylor:

Our parks and greenspaces are the jewel in Watford's crown - loved by residents, enjoyed by visitors, and vital to our shared wellbeing. This new Greenspaces Strategy is our ambitious 10-year plan to build on everything we've achieved and make sure our greenspaces thrive for future generations. It reflects the voices of residents, the insight of our partners, and the shared ambition to make Watford not just greener, but fairer, healthier and more connected.



Our vision for greenspaces

Welcoming places where people and nature can thrive, making Watford a vibrant, happy and healthy place.



Our vision for greenspaces

To deliver our vision we will:

- » **Lead** by making decisions based on evidence, in collaboration with our partners across Watford and beyond
- » **Listen** to our residents and businesses to understand the diverse needs of our communities
- » **Enable** community groups and volunteers to help look after our greenspaces
- » **Deliver** high-quality greenspaces while using our resources efficiently
- » **Communicate** with people about how important our greenspaces are for health, nature and tackling climate change
- » **Connect** our greenspaces with safe, accessible routes to create a greener, healthier town



Why greenspaces matter

People with good access to greenspace are 24% more likely to be physically active, and 30 minutes of moderate activity a day can help reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes.

Urban greenspaces are usually two to three degrees cooler than nearby streets.



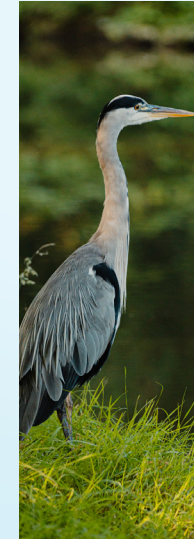
Health and Wellbeing

Parks help people move more, relax and feel better. Good access to greenspace is linked to higher physical activity and better health.



Local pride

Good parks make people proud of where they live. They add beauty, reflect local heritage and help make Watford a better place to live, work and visit.



Nature and Climate

Trees, rivers and greenspaces support wildlife, store carbon and help cool urban space in hot weather. They also soak up rainwater and help reduce flood risk.



Community

Parks are places where neighbours meet, children play and communities come together. They support everyday social contact, events and volunteering, and help people feel welcome and included.



Watford today

Watford is a growing town with a lot packed into a small area. Around 102,300 people live here, and the population is expected to reach 110,300 by 2035. More people are living in flats without private gardens, so public greenspaces play an even bigger part in daily life.

Watford has **387 hectares** of publicly accessible greenspace, covering 18% of the borough, including **17 Green Flag Award parks** (the most in Hertfordshire). As the town grows, these spaces will need to work even harder for people, nature and climate resilience.

Key stats

- » 102,300 residents
- » 110,300 residents by 2035
- » 21 square kilometres
- » 386.69 hectares of publicly accessible greenspace
- » 18.02% of the borough is publicly accessible greenspace
- » 17 Green Flag Award parks
- » 13,328 new homes planned by 2038



What you told us

We asked local people how they use Watford's parks and what would make them better. The message was clear: people value their greenspaces highly for fresh air, health and community life.

Cassiobury Park came through as the most loved park, with other favourites spread across the borough. **Walking** was the top reason for visiting parks. People also said they value **peace and quiet, natural beauty** and time with **family and friends**.

People told us that busy roads, safety concerns, poor lighting, unclear signs and some access issues can make parks harder to use. Smaller parks also received lower ratings than the main destination parks for cleanliness and maintenance.

We also heard that we need to keep listening to a wide range of voices, especially young people and some communities that were less well represented in the survey.

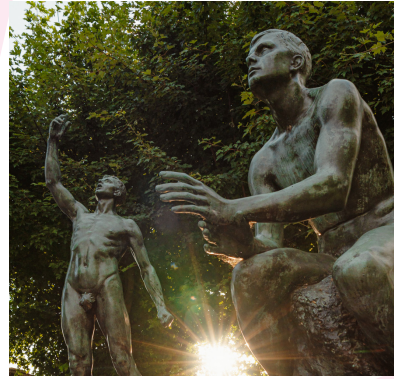
What residents love

- » Walking and fresh air
- » Beauty and wildlife
- » Family time
- » Community events

What could be better

- » Safer crossings and entrances
- » Better links between parks
- » Cleaner facilities
- » More accessible spaces





Our priorities

We have set six priorities to guide the next 10 years of work on Watford's greenspaces. They reflect what residents told us, what our evidence shows and where we can make the biggest difference:

- » Greenspaces that welcome everyone
- » Bringing our community together
- » Healthy, connected communities
- » Protecting nature and climate adaptation
- » Caring for what we have
- » Working together



Greenspaces that welcome everyone

Aim:

"Every resident has safe, convenient access to high-quality greenspace that meets their needs"

We will focus on

- » Inclusive design
- » Access and signage
- » Safe and welcoming entrances
- » Spaces for all ages and abilities



What we have achieved so far

- » Installed **accessible play equipment** at Garston Park and Oxhey Park. Oxhey Activity Park is fully wheelchair accessible
- » Built a strong working relationship with **Disability Watford** to improve how we design and manage public spaces
- » Improved the **ParksHerts website** so people can easily find their nearest park and what it offers

Objectives

- » Make sure everyone lives within a **15-minute walk** of a quality greenspace by 2030
- » Support **community ideas** that bring people together and share skills
- » Update **signs, entrances and information** so parks are easier to find and use
- » Use **digital tools and social media** to keep residents up to date with what's happening in their local park

Bringing our community together

Aim:

“Watford’s parks bring people together and make them feel proud”

We will support

- » Events and activities
- » Friends groups and volunteers
- » Cultural celebrations
- » Spaces to meet, relax and connect



What we have achieved so far

- » Active Friends and **volunteer groups** at Cassiobury Park, Oxhey Park, Harebreaks Wood and other sites.
- » Popular **cultural events**, especially at Cassiobury Park
- » The **Neighbourhood Grant Programme**, offering up to £50,000 for community-led projects, including park improvements.

Objectives

- » Deliver events and **activities all year round** across different parks.
- » Work more closely with schools to support **outdoor learning** and forest school sessions.
- » Help residents organise their own **events and activities**.
- » Reach people who do not currently use our parks, especially **young people** and **global majority communities**.

Healthy, connected communities



Aim:

“Create a connected greenspace network to help everyone stay active and healthy”

We will support

- » Safe walking and cycling routes
- » Better links between parks
- » Play and activity spaces for all ages
- » Supporting physical and mental wellbeing



What we have achieved so far

- » Created a **Healthy Hub** to support social prescribing and help people find parks for exercise and wellbeing
- » Supported the **Watford Cycle Hub**, offering bike repair, training and affordable bikes

Objectives

- » Work with **health partners** to test new ways of using parks to **improve wellbeing**
- » Build on the **Green Loop** and other key active routes so they are safer and easier to follow
- » Upgrade play, sport and activity facilities for people of **all ages and abilities**
- » Create **quiet natural areas** for rest and relaxation
- » Strengthen links between parks and **public health programmes**

Protecting nature and climate adaptation

Aim:

“Maintain a network of connected, resilient greenspaces that support wildlife and help to ease the effects of climate change”

We will focus on

- » Managing more space for nature
- » Planting and protecting trees
- » Reducing flood risk and overheating
- » Connecting habitats across the borough



What we have achieved so far

- » Planted over **170 trees in 2024 and 2025**, with more planned this year
- » Created **wildflower areas** and a new **wetland habitat** at Cassiobury Park
- » Installed **sustainable drainage** at Oxhey Activity Park
- » Introduced **electric vehicles** for parks maintenance

Objectives

- » Increase **tree canopy cover** to 25% by 2030
- » Use natural drainage systems to **reduce flooding and reuse rainwater**
- » Create more **wildlife habitats** in line with Hertfordshire's Nature Recovery Strategy
- » **Support Friends groups** to help care for parks sustainably
- » Protect **dark skies** in parks to support wildlife

Caring for what we have

Aim:

“Manage our resources efficiently and secure sustainable funding to maintain the high-quality of our greenspaces.”

We will focus on

- » Investing wisely in our parks
- » Keeping high standards
- » Improving facilities where most needed
- » Making best use of resources



What we have achieved so far

- » Achieved and maintained **17 Green Flag awarded parks**
- » Set up **mobile refreshments** concession
- » Hosted **events that bring in income** while benefiting residents
- » Brought in funding for the **Rediscovering the River Colne programme**

Objectives

- » Maintain Green Flag standards and **raise quality across all parks**
- » Strengthen **volunteer programmes** and improve staff training
- » **Generate income** through well-managed events and partnerships
- » **Work with communities** to balance events with environmental protection
- » **Plan for long-term** maintenance costs in every improvement project

Working together

Aim:

“Make better decisions by working together and tracking our progress”

We will focus on

- » Strong partnerships
- » Working with schools
- » Community leadership
- » Funding and innovation



What we have achieved so far

- » Established cross-council groups to **improve collaboration**
- » Worked with Hertfordshire County Council on **health walks and green infrastructure**
- » Created a **Natural Capital Account** to understand the value of our greenspaces

Objectives

- » Create more **joint projects** between council teams and partners
- » Align this strategy with wider plans across **Watford and Hertfordshire**
- » Improve how we **measure the quality, use and impact** of our parks
- » Regularly **review the value** of our greenspaces
- » Use **clear evidence** to secure funding from health, environmental and private sector sources
- » Make effective use of **Community Infrastructure Levy** and **Section 106 funding** to maintain and improve parks and playgrounds

Where we will focus



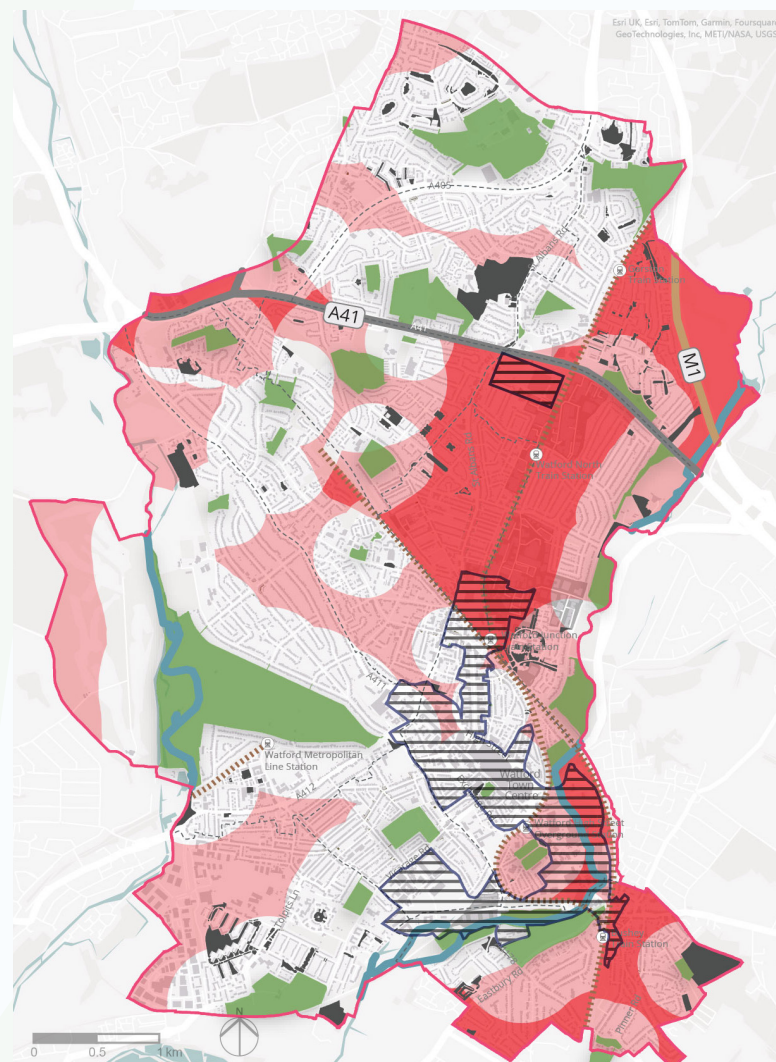
Places that need better access to greenspace

Watford has a strong network of parks and greenspaces, but access is not equal across the borough. Some neighbourhoods are well served by a range of spaces close to home, while others have fewer choices nearby or are cut off by major barriers such as busy roads, railway lines and river crossings.

Our first focus will be on the parts of Watford where people cannot easily reach parks in walking distance. Callowland, Tudor, parts of Meriden, and areas of Nascot and Oxhey are the main areas with fewer greenspace options close to home.

In some of these places, creating entirely new parks may be difficult, so the focus may need to be on better routes, safer crossings, stronger entrances, street trees and smaller local greening projects that improve day-to-day access.

Growth makes this even more important. Watford's population is set to grow, with 13,328 new homes planned by 2038. New development should help meet both future demand and existing shortfalls, especially in places already lacking good access to greenspace. That means using development to secure new or improved open space where it is most needed, upgrading some existing parks so they serve a wider catchment, and improving crossings and routes so nearby residents can reach parks more easily without needing a car.



LEGEND

- Borough boundary
- Ward boundaries
- Parks and gardens
- Amenity greenspaces
- Industrial areas

Areas outside greenspace catchment

- Priority 1: Area lacks access to all greenspace types
- Priority 2: Area lacks access to more than one type
- Priority development zone

Barriers

- River
- M1
- Railway
- A41

Opportunities for better access to greenspace



Where we will focus

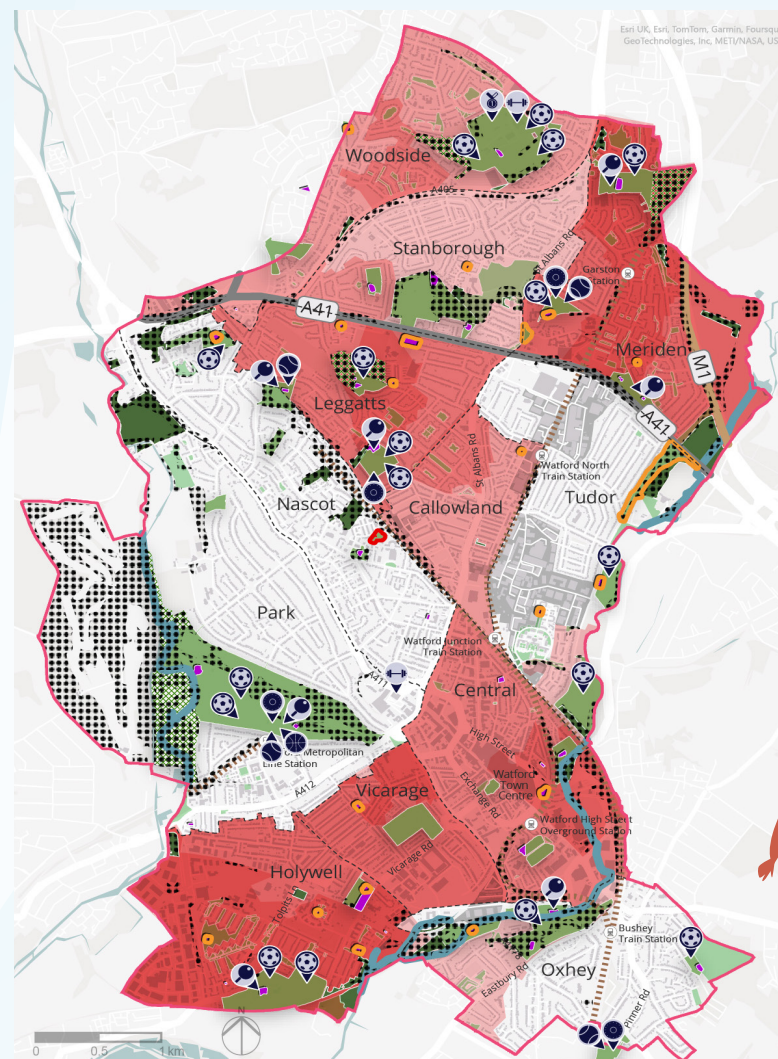
Places where we can make the biggest impact for people

Some parts of Watford face greater health challenges, lower access to activity spaces, or more barriers getting to parks. These are the places where targeted improvements could have the biggest effect on everyday life.

In a previous study from 2021, Watford ranked as the fourth most deprived district in Hertfordshire and West Essex, and its lowest health score was for access to greenspace at 79.6, more than 20 points below both the Hertfordshire and national averages. At the same time, 12,933 residents were recorded in the 2021 Census as living with disabilities. This suggests that better access, inclusive design and more opportunities for free activity could help to improve health and reduce inequality.



Greenspace opportunities for health and activity



LEGEND

Borough boundary

Ward boundaries

Parks and gardens - all

Amenity greenspaces

Semi-natural greenspaces

Adjoining natural and semi-natural greenspaces

Tree canopy

Playgrounds

Tennis court

Table tennis

Sports pitch

Leisure centre

Bowls green

Athletics stadium

Sports facilities

Intensity of health issues and deprivation levels

Park/play quality - fair

Park/play quality - poor



Where we will focus

Places where we can make the biggest impact for nature and climate

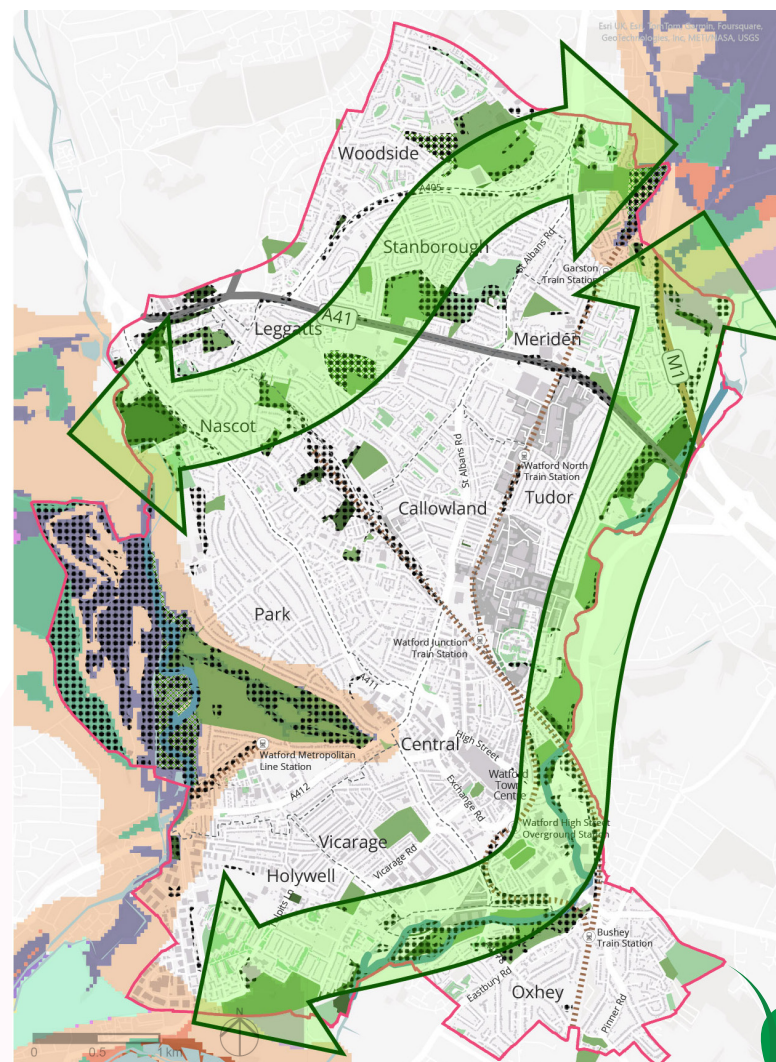
Watford's parks do more than provide places to walk and relax. They also help the borough respond to climate change by reducing flood risk, cooling urban areas, storing carbon and supporting wildlife. One of the biggest impacts we can make is managing more of our existing greenspace for nature.

Although Watford has a large amount of greenspace overall, it still needs more natural and semi-natural greenspace and better habitat connections. We have set ambitious targets for 2030: to manage 45% of greenspaces for nature and to reach 25% tree canopy cover.

In practice, that can mean changing how some spaces are maintained by reducing mowing, planting more trees, and creating habitats.

Assessment of our greenspaces has shown where management of natural features could be improved, especially where they could also strengthen habitat links and bring benefits to nearby communities.

Watford's greenspaces provide £19.8m in annual benefits, totalling over £600m across 60 years with continued proper maintenance.



LEGEND

Borough boundary

Ward boundaries

Parks and gardens - All

Amenity greenspaces

Semi-natural greenspaces

Adjoining natural and semi-natural greenspaces

Tree canopy

Industrial areas

National Priority Habitat Network

Ancient woodland

Lowland heathland

Lowland fern

Restorable habitat

Network Enhancement Zone 1

Network Enhancement Zone 2

Network Expansion Zone

Fragmentation Action Zone

Other habitat

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Potential habitat links



How we will deliver this

This is a 10-year strategy that will be delivered through practical, phased actions. Some improvements can begin straight away, building on existing programmes, partnerships and planned investment. Other actions will be developed and brought forward over time as funding, capacity and opportunities allow. Delivery will be shaped by what will make the greatest difference for our residents.

Some actions are quick wins, while others need more planning, partnership working or investment. The strategy groups them into short, medium and long-term steps so progress can build over time.

No single organisation can deliver this alone. Success will depend on council teams, local partners, community groups, volunteers and funders working together.

The strategy includes monitoring and review so we can track our progress, measure impact and respond to changes.

Below are some example actions from our action plan.



Short term - Early actions and quick wins 1 - 4 years

- Make sure our website, ParkHerts and Google maps information for every park is up to date, and includes access and facilities
- Create and share family activity trail maps in key parks
- Share knowledge and identify opportunities between parks and other council departments

Medium term - more complex improvements and partnership projects 5 - 8 years

- Test new ways of using parks to support health, including the Neighbourhood Health Model
- Create new wildlife corridors and improve habitat links across the borough
- Develop a working greenspaces and playgrounds database to monitor condition, function and benefits

Long term - bigger changes that need sustained planning and investment 9+ years

- Require two new publicly accessible parks with play areas as development comes forward
- Continue converting the park services fleet to electric, plan to reach 100%
- Study larger flood and water management features such as basins, ponds, raingardens and swales in parks

Looking ahead

By 2035, we want Watford's greenspaces to be easier to reach, better for wildlife and more welcoming for everyone. They should support healthier lives, stronger communities and a greener, more resilient town.

This strategy builds on strong foundations. It responds to what residents told us, uses evidence to guide decisions and turns six clear priorities into practical action over the next 10 years.

Success will mean more people using parks and open spaces, more nature thriving across the borough, and better everyday access to places for play, exercise, relaxation and community life. It will also mean parks that help Watford

respond to climate change and continue to add value for future generations.

By working together, we can make Watford an even better place to live, work and visit.



How you can get involved

Watford's parks belong to everyone. Residents, community groups, schools and volunteers can all play a part in shaping, using and caring for these spaces.

Friends groups and local organisations can help look after parks, organise activities, raise funds and represent their communities. Find out about friends groups here:

By getting involved, you can help make Watford's greenspaces more welcoming, better used and better cared for.

You can get involved by

- » Joining a Friends group or volunteering in your local park
- » Taking part in events and activities across the borough
- » Using ParksHerts and other online updates to find out what is happening near you
- » Sharing your ideas and feedback on your local greenspaces
- » Working with others to support community projects, learning and outdoor activities

For more info on parks and how to get involved visit:

www.watford.gov.uk/watford-parks-playgrounds





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