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# Portswood Rec Management Plan 2024 - 2029

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Produced by the City Services Division  
and key Portswood Rec Stakeholders

Updated January 2024

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# Section 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This management plan sets out the general principles that should be applied over the five year term and includes an action plan for specific developments and improvements.

The management plan is a 'live' document in that the development of the park is guided by the plan but not limited by it. Staff working in the park and the various key stakeholders including the Friends of Portswood Rec (FOPR) have assisted in writing the document and have copies to refer to during the year.

This plan must be read in conjunction with the "*Green Flag Management Principles*" which provides the overarching principles and corporate approach to green flag management in Southampton. This plan only includes site specific information and has been written to follow the categories judged for the Green Flag Award.

The Green Flag Award measures the performance of all aspects of park management against set criteria. It represents the best industry practice for public green open space management, while allowing and encouraging the individuality of parks to shine through.

## 1.2 Vision Statement

**"For Portswood Rec to offer an inviting, attractive and interesting District Park. With the local community at its heart, working with the City Services team to continually improve recreation, biodiversity, events and involvement to ensure the park continues to be clean, safe and accessible for all."**

### 1.3 Aims

Portswood Rec serves a wide range of functions for the local community and draws people in from further afield to use its facilities. It is a vital green space for many in the community that live in shared or bedsit accommodation and do not have access to a garden. It is also extensively used as a play/sports resource for the adjacent school and is popular throughout the community as a safe space for exercise and relaxation, as well as improving access to the natural environment.

The overall character of the park should be recognised and enhanced whilst maintaining and improving the individual components that make it unique. The aims of the plan are:

- To retain and enhance the distinctive quality of the park, and ensure it is regularly maintained to a high standard.
- Provide a park that meets and continues to meet user need, both locally and strategically through the objectives of the City Council
- Promote the park to ensure the benefits it offers are maximised
- Ensure the park is accessible to all elements of the community.
- To actively encourage local people to get involved with the Friends group to support the management and maintenance of Portswood Rec.

### 1.4 Objectives

A number of objectives have been identified for Portswood Rec and these will continue to be applicable. Specific actions to address these objectives are identified in the Action Plan in section 6.

- Increase community involvement in the management and maintenance of the park by continuing to work closely with FOPR and other key stakeholders;
- Maintain and improve the unique character of Portswood Rec;
- Enhance and interpret the varied biodiversity;
- Increase customer satisfaction in Portswood Rec;
- Provide and promote key events in the park, raising environmental awareness and increasing community involvement;
- Keep Portswood Rec clean and litter free.

## Section 2 – Park Guide

### 2.1 Description and Arial View of Portswood Rec

Portswood Rec is a district park within the Portswood area of Southampton. It is the main green open space serving a large urban area that includes numerous houses of multiple occupancy and student flats, as well as family housing. In addition to resident’s needs, it also provides an environmental, sporting and play resource for the neighbouring primary school. The park is secluded, located behind residential homes in Upper Shaftesbury Avenue, Kitchener Road, Welbeck Avenue and Upper Grosvenor Road, yet within a few hundred metres of the popular Southampton University.

Portswood Rec has three entrances, two (Kitchener Road and Upper Grosvenor Road) have level access from the street and the other (Brickfield Road) can be accessed via steps, a ramp or the interconnecting path between the other entrances.

There are noticeboards at each entrance, giving details of relevant contact numbers, and information about the park. These are reviewed regularly and updated by council staff and members of FOPR.



## 2.2 The Play Area



The play area was fully enclosed for safety and partially refurbished by the council in 2012 with further updates and additions made in 2016 after a successful grant application by FOPR to Sita Trust. The design of the play area was widely consulted on with the local community and equipment installed to provide greater play value and access for all users.

## 2.3 Recreation Area



There is a large central grassed area split roughly in two by a path running from the Upper Grosvenor Road entrance to the play area, providing safe alternative access for young children away from the busy path that links this entrance to Kitchener Road which is often used by cyclists. There is a full-sized football goal with an area of astro turf in front that allows maximum usage of the space throughout the year, even during prolonged wet spells. A fenced area contains two tennis courts which were resurfaced by SCC, supported by additional funding from FOPR in 2018. The courts are currently free to play and are widely used by people of all ages from across the city. A fenced area around the perimeter of the

park offers ideal space for dogs to be exercised safely. Around the edge of this space brambles and trees provide feeding and nesting opportunities for wildlife.

## 2.4 Community Garden



The community garden which is maintained by SCC and FOPR, features a central bed known locally as “The Pollinator Patch” because it has been planted to attract a variety of bees, butterflies and moths. This area is also home to picnic tables and a hardstanding area currently set aside for barbecues and delivery of materials such as mulch for the beds. The Friends group working in conjunction with other stakeholders such as SCC Ranger Team and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) are in the process of developing the area around the central garden to make it more attractive and provide greater habitats for wildlife.

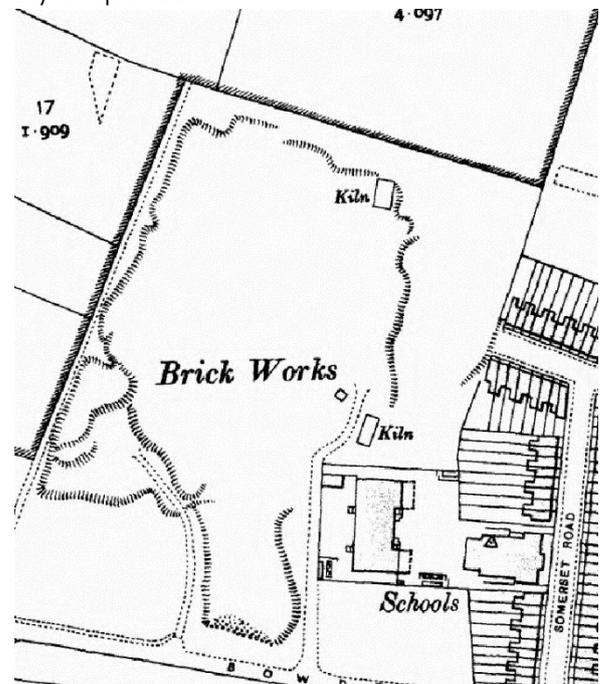
## Section 3 – Heritage and Nature Conservation

It is important that the unique characteristics of Portswood Rec are maintained, and that the local history is preserved where possible. Moreover, natural conservation is increasingly important within this previous amenity dominated open space and FOPR are working together with SCC to improve biodiversity at the park to increase the number and variety of species.

### 3.1 Brief History

The area now known as Portswood Rec, originally part of the Highfield Estate, has a long and varied history, of which only a few details are currently known.

In the early 1900's, the site was home to a brickworks that produced the bricks which were used to build all the houses in the surrounding streets. A second kiln was built in 1910 when the brickworks was expanding to cope with demand. Whilst excavating for clay in 1914, a Palaeolithic axe dating from 700,000-100,000 BC was found on the site.



The suggestion to turn the site into a recreation ground with tennis courts and a bowling green was first raised in a Council meeting in 1920. However it wasn't until 8<sup>th</sup> January 1931 that the Council compulsory purchased the site for the sum of two thousand, eight hundred and eighty pounds, fifteen shillings and eleven pence. In 1935, under pressure from residents, the Council drew up plans to develop the site into a recreation ground with a playground, two tennis courts, one hard and one grassed and a hockey pitch to cater for all the new families moving into the area. The tennis courts and playground were installed, but residents do not recall the hockey pitch coming to fruition. Instead, the large central grassed area was left free of markings, so all sports could be played.



Portswood Rec in 1947

Complaints about damage and “uncontrolled behaviour” at the Rec led to the erection of an iron fence so the park could be locked at sunset, with the proposal that a man in uniform should be based on site at all times. The fence remained, and the park was locked at night until at least the late 1970’s.

During the Second World War, a barrage balloon was tethered at the Rec to prevent low level flying by enemy aircraft, and in c.1939 an Air Raid Patrol Warden’s hut was built at the park. This building was converted to toilets in 1954 but removed in the late 1970’s when the roof became unsafe and maintenance became an issue as there was no longer a groundsman on site.

In the 1980’s, the grassed tennis court was converted to a hard court.



### Timeline 2010 onwards

- 2011** The Friends of Portswood Rec was established.
- 2012** Field In Trust granted protecting it in perpetuity as a green space. A plaque marking this is installed in the path near the Upper Grosvenor Road entrance.
- 2013** Accessible ramp built at the Brickfield Road entrance
- 2016** Play area renovated (£35,000 funding from Sita Trust secured by FOPR) match funded by SCC.
- 2018** Tennis courts resurfaced
- 2019** Entrance improvements completed at Upper Grosvenor Road and Kitchener Road entrances.
- 2021** Portswood Rec received its first Green Flag Award
- 2022** Wildflower banks completed at Brickfield Road entrance

### 3.2 Nature Conservation

Portswood Rec is managed by SCC to ensure biodiversity does not decrease, and there is a strong desire from FOPR that it should be enhanced. FOPR gardening volunteers have been renovating the beds within the Community Garden, planting them up with shrubs and plants to increase biodiversity and attract wildlife. The gardens are managed for wildlife with particular emphasis on encouraging pollinators, which has led to a considerable increase in the number of butterflies, birds and insects seen at the Rec, creating a peaceful haven for all the community to enjoy. The plan is to extend the planting to provide greater food and potential nesting sites for wildlife. This will include introducing a greater variety of shrubs and plants, including native wildflowers, installing bat boxes and bug hotels and creating log piles.

FOPR plan to undertake regular Citizen Science surveys to monitor the progress and effectiveness of their plan to increase biodiversity and use this to inform their next steps and any action that is required.

*Bug hotel constructed by a member of FOPR gardening volunteers in 2021*



Monthly Nature Notes are produced by FOPR, packed with information on a different topic each time. These notes are shared by email to around 100 people each month directly by the Friends group, as well as being promoted on social media with links to the website where the notes are posted each month. Other local groups share the Nature Notes links on their social media pages to further raise awareness and understanding of the importance of nature.

Biodiversity value is also taken into consideration when assessing trees and wherever suitable, deadwood, broken branches and dead trees are left in situ to provide habitats. Where crown reductions are required, wherever possible we undertake final cuts using coronet cuts. This gives an impression of a broken branch end rather than a truncated stump and provides extra habitats for insects. We also wire pieces of hollow trunks back into trees to provide bird and bat roosts.

## Section 4 – Community Involvement

### 4.1 Target Audience

There are many different types of user groups that enjoy Portswood Rec. Previous consultation highlighted the wide range of uses including dog walking, wildlife watching, football, tennis, relaxation, and of course children and adults' play. People of all ages visit the park on a regular basis. It is particularly popular with children attending the adjacent nursery and primary school, as well as students and staff from the nearby Southampton University. The tennis courts are particularly popular, and people travel across the city to use them.

### 4.2 Friends of Portswood Rec (FOPR)

FOPR is a small not-for-profit community group, with a committed base of members. They organise regular gardening sessions and litter picks throughout the year, and encourage both members, and non-members to attend and join in. They have also organised community events, often working with other local groups to deliver them.

Their aims are:

- maintain and improve the physical and natural environment of the park in liaison with Southampton City Council;
- promote wider use of Portswood Rec across the whole community;
- protect and promote the natural beauty and wildlife of the Park;
- help make the Park a clean, safe and healthy place to be;
- secure funds to improve amenities;
- ensure community-based involvement in the future of the Park.

FOPR liaise with the community and work closely with Southampton City Council to prioritise improvements at the Rec. In 2012, they were instrumental in getting the park protected as a Field In Trust and securing the design and funding for the ramp to improve access at the Brickfield Road entrance in 2013.

FOPR also obtained some funding from Southern Water in 2018 which enabled them to contribute to the resurfacing of the tennis courts undertaken by SCC.

FOPR are currently fundraising for much needed replacement equipment within the play area. The current financial situation within the Council means that this equipment will need to be funded by community grants. We await results of an application to Veolia worked up by FOPR and SCC officers.

The FOPR Gardeners continue to work tirelessly in all weathers in the Community Garden. In 2023 there was an exhibition in Portswood Library and the garden also featured in both the Butterfly Conservation Trust magazine, and in Highfield Residents Newsletter.

## Section 5 – Marketing and Communication

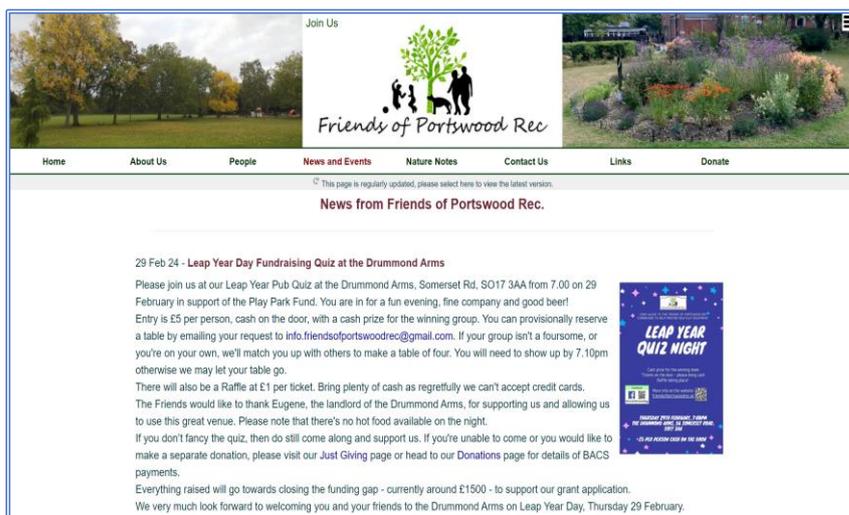
### 5.1 On the web and on “the move”

People’s main source of information is now on the web and on ‘the go’. This provides us with great opportunities to get messages to users in a timely fashion. Portswood Rec has a dedicated page on the Southampton City Council website.

Additionally, FOPR markets the park and their activities through social media, with both a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofPortswoodRec/>

and an X account <https://twitter.com/recfriends?lang=en>

They also have a website [www.fopr.btck.co.uk](http://www.fopr.btck.co.uk)



The tennis courts are advertised on local tennis league sites and Active Places website with information and details of the park shared on NHS Services pages.

### 5.2 Events

Events in Portswood Rec are used to promote the park more widely, they are advertised in local press and in posters displayed in local shops and the library. Leaflets are also distributed through the nearby school and delivered to local homes. Events are also promoted in newsletters that are emailed to over 100 people, many of whom live outside the local vicinity.

Social media is used to promote what’s going on in the park. All events are publicised through the Discover Southampton web site which is set up through a partnership with the Council and local businesses.

[Events in Southampton | What's On | Visit Southampton](#)

Portswood Pirate Community Event  
Held at the Rec in June 2023



October 2023

Volunteers and SCC Rangers built a bug hotel. As an interesting aside, the bricks used for the bug hotel were originally made at the Rec around 1927-1928 when it was home to a brickworks.

### 5.3 User Feedback

The Friends of Portswood Rec are in constant touch with park users and regularly update Council officers with user feedback.

Feedback also comes in the form of online reviews. Current Google review rating is 4.4:

Review summary 🔍 Write a review

5 ★★★★★  
4 ★★★★  
3 ★★★  
2 ★★  
1 ★

**4.4**  
★★★★★  
111 reviews

**j** "Play park with tennis court.dog walk area away from kids play area"  
★★★★★

**S** "It is a nice place to spend time with family.."  
★★★★★

**D** "Such a big space and no were to run your dog caus it's mostly no dogs aloud."  
★★★★

## Section 6 – Actions and Recommendations

### 16.1 Action Plan

This dynamic working document is reviewed and updated annually. Some proposed actions are aspirational and will depend upon sourcing adequate funding. Although the plan has been ordered according to Green Flag criteria, several of the actions fall under more than one heading. The actions below are over and above the core maintenance tasks undertaken by the Central District Team

Action	Lead officer	Key partners and consultees	Estimated resource required and source of funding	Target Completion date	Progress / Comments
<i>A welcoming place</i>					
Further improvements to the Upper Grosvenor Road entrance Funding needed to improve the appearance of the former car park area and create a more welcoming entrance	Cliff Brown/ Kelvin Wyatt	FOPR Chair,	£?K	2025	Realign hedge – new planting complete, waiting for establishment before second phase.  Fencing (see above)  Potential decorative Portswood Rec sign/structure – No current funding.  Flagpole and planting complete.
Install a DDA compliant bench seat with a back in the community garden area.	Nick Yeats Cliff Brown	FOPR	£1.5k	2024	None of the existing seating in this area has a back, making it unsuitable for people with some disabilities, but it is one of the most peaceful places in the park and many people like to sit in this area to enjoy the garden and wildlife.
Install chess table on old groundsman hut base	Cliff Brown	FOPR	£1k	2024	

Action	Lead officer	Key partners and consultees	Estimated resource required and source of funding	Target Completion date	Progress / Comments
<i>Healthy, safe and secure</i>					
Install secure bike rack	Cliff Brown	Simon Buston/ FOPR	£1K	2024	Promote and encourage sustainable travel by providing secure storage for bikes whilst people visit the park.
<i>Clean and well maintained</i>					
Continue to investigate drainage issue	Kelvin Wyatt	FOPR	£?	ASAP	Increasing problem of poor drainage leaves much of the park inaccessible for prolonged periods each year. Resolving the issue will enable greater use of the Rec for more of the year.
Keep noticeboards up to date with information about Portswood Rec	FOPR	SCC Rangers	Officer time Volunteer hours	Ongoing	Keeping noticeboards up to date with information will add to the overall park experience and raise awareness of park users to activities and relevant guidance
New signs for all 3 park entrances	Cliff Brown	FOPR	£1K	2025	There is currently no entrance sign at Brickfield Road. Installing one would increase awareness that the steps and ramp form part of the park.
Resurface play area	Cliff Brown	FOPR	£10K	When funding available	Play area surfacing starting to deteriorate giving a rundown impression.
Deep clean of tennis courts surface	Kelvin Wyatt	Dennis Murphy Central Clean Team	£2k	2024	

Action	Lead officer	Key partners and consultees	Estimated resource required and source of funding	Target Completion date	Progress / Comments
<i>Environmental Management</i>					
To further reduce the use of chemical treatments within the park	Kelvin Wyatt	Area team	Officer time	Ongoing	Except around the Play Area (required due to poor surfacing), all chemical treatments have ceased since 2022. Together with increased use of mulch to suppress weeds on shrub beds.
Implement electric compact sweepers	Fleet Transport	Simon Buston	£1,000,000	2021	Complete
<i>Heritage and Conservation</i>					
To fully restore the garden area, and increase the variety of habitat available for wildlife	SCC Rangers FOPR	Kelvin Wyatt	Officer/FOPR time	2025	Encourage wildlife through creative planting and design, such as a wildflower meadow, bat boxes, bug hotel etc. to encourage wildlife.
Research the history of the park and publish information online, through social media, FOPR website and on-site interpretation boards	FOPR	FOPR/local history groups	FOPR to seek grant funding	2024	FOPR are keen to obtain funding to research and share information on the origins of the park. It is hoped that if the information warrants it, an exhibition could be held at the local library together with presentations at the local school to encourage community awareness and engagement.

Action	Lead officer	Key partners and consultees	Estimated resource required and source of funding	Target Completion date	Progress / Comments
Creation of wildflower meadows at Brickfield Road entrance	FOPR / Kelvin Wyatt	Both	£1000.	2022	Complete
<i>Community involvement</i>					
Carry out Citizen Science surveys to promote greater involvement and awareness from the local community helping to improve biodiversity.	FOPR	Area Team FOPR	Officer time	On Going	Bug hotels complete.  Bat Boxes ASAP
Continue to support FOPR events	Ranger Team	FOPR/ Parks Team	Officer time	On-going	To encourage more use of the park by local residents and strengthen community involvement.
Fundraising and grant application for new play equipment	FOPR Dawn Bannatyne	Nick Yeats Simon Buston	£75k	2025	Awaiting decision from funding bid to Veolia.
<i>Marketing and communication</i>					
Ensure the council website is kept up to date with Portswood Rec information and event updates	Cliff Brown Chair FOPR	Simon Buston, Nick Yeats, Cliff Brown	Officer time	Ongoing	Includes making use of what's on pages. FOPR to communicate regularly with SCC officers to enable relevant information to be published on council website

Action	Lead officer	Key partners and consultees	Estimated resource required and source of funding	Target Completion date	Progress / Comments
FOPR to keep noticeboards, website and social media pages relevant and current to update followers on park activities and news	Chair of FOPR	FOPR	£0 Volunteer hours	Ongoing	Ongoing
<i>Management</i>					
Continue to meet and discuss FOPR aspirations and develop agreed actions to progress	Kelvin Wyatt/ Cliff Brown/ Ranger Team	FOPR	Officer time	Ongoing	It is important for all parties to continue to work for continuous improvement of the park.