

## Sea Mills Recreation Ground



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# Preface

## Understanding the context of our place...

The City of Bristol is one of the most historic cities in England. Founded in about 1000AD the city has always been a place of change, economic growth and innovation.

Until the First World War the fabric of the city was essentially a medieval structure centred on the cross roads of High Street, Corn Street, Broad Street and Wine Street. Even the outer structure of the city, now the inner suburbs such as St Pauls and Kingsdown, was based on medieval routes or field patterns.

Despite centuries of urban growth and densification this structure remained unchanged while building forms adapted to new uses and new architectural styles.

During the twentieth century Bristol has seen its most dramatic changes with the depopulation of the central core, bombing during the Second World War and the dominance of private motor car use. Although this period has continued the process of urban renewal and the replacement of built form, it is the Post War highway infrastructure projects that have eroded the physical fabric of the city on a scale unlike any other period.

Within this broad context, Bristol's character is defined by a variety of individual neighbourhoods with a distinctive character informed by their topography, landscape, views, layout, land use, social development, architectural style and materials.

An Our Place document is intended to help explain how a specific area has arrived at its current state from its origins, and highlight the key features that define the area as it exists today.

This understanding provides the basis from which appropriate changes to the area can be achieved, which will enable it to grow and succeed whilst still respecting its historic legacy and unique sense of place. Ultimately it will help to deliver local plan policies particularly around issues concerning local character and distinctiveness.

The Our Place process encourages greater participation by communities in defining the character of their neighbourhood and planning for the future of their place.

Our Place character mapping is an important stage in defining the identity of a place that informs the Spirit of Place process that follows a co-creative place evaluation approach as defined by the National Trust (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/our-conservation-principles>).

### Understanding Our Spirit of Place...

Spirit of Place brings together key stakeholders to unpick and identify what makes a place distinctive and unique. This understanding is built from the emotional reactions people have to the physical elements such as scenery and buildings, cultural aspects, heritage, and a sites aesthetic qualities.

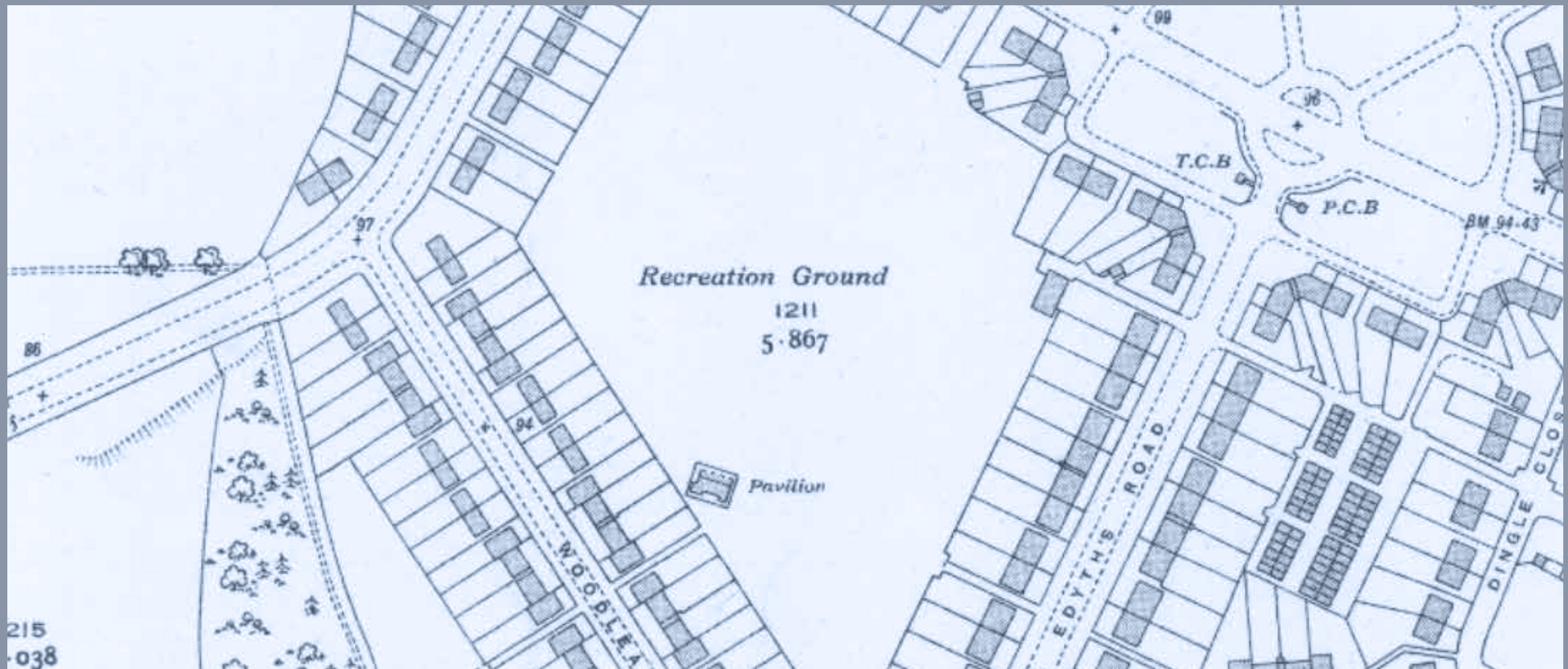
Bristol City Council have adopted this approach as a way of understanding what their parks and green spaces mean to the people that use them. Through a series of workshops run at each site BCC will work with park users and managers to create a set of guiding principals that will act as a touchstone for future management of that place.

The finished Spirit of Place documents will be publicly accessible and will be published alongside the Bristol Future Parks Expression of Interest pilot. This aims to identify new sustainable income opportunities and community activities whilst also respecting the natural and cultural heritage within our parks and green spaces. The themes and principals identified in the Spirit of Place document will form part of the decision-making process.



# Introduction

# 1



# Purpose, scope and status

## Policy Context

A local area is largely defined by its physical character and distinctiveness. Understanding and defining this local character significantly contributes to conserving an area's identity. For this reason local character and distinctiveness is a material consideration of any planning proposal.

The over-arching planning policy is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied at a local level. Of specific relevance is Section 12: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

The Core Strategy (June 2011) is the overall approach for planning in Bristol, guiding development and setting out key elements of the planning framework up to 2026 and beyond. Our Place documents form part of a suite of guidance documents referred to in Policy BCS21 of the Core Strategy and the Local Character and Distinctiveness policy in the Development Management Policy document.

## Purpose and scope

This document provides an understanding of why Sea Mills Recreation Ground is special and articulates which elements contribute to or detract from its identity.

To achieve this understanding, the document identifies the physical characteristics of the park defined by the local:

- Topography
- Views and vantage points (into, out of and within each area)
- Landmarks (positive landmarks and other notable features)
- Significant green infrastructure
- Routes
- Spaces and boundaries

Combining an Our Place process that considers physical character and significance to a Spirit of Place process that draws in wider communal aspects, enables a rich understanding of the identity of an area.

This understanding is intended to form the basis of care for places like Sea Mills Rec and ensure that all users of the park can contribute to its positive future.

## Our Spirit of Place Sea Mills Rec

In May 2021, the community met with officers at the Rec to undertake an Our Place character mapping exercise and begin the Spirit of Place process.

Participants were invited to complete an online survey to help define what was special and distinctive about the place and whether there were any negative aspects to the site.

Two online Spirit of Place workshops followed the Our Place mapping event. These community and officer collaborative sessions used a Flinga online white board tool to draw out themes about the place, based on the survey responses and discussions. Screenshots from the Sea Mills Spirit of Place Flinga board are shown in the appendix on page 22.

The Our Place character mapping and identified place themes have been combined in this document to form a co-created vision for Sea Mills Recreation Ground that should inform the future use and management of the site.

For further information about the Our Place project visit <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/239165/Our+Place+report-revised.pdf/bcbfffe3-58a4-2297-26be-98a8ba32d8a3>

## The Our Spirit of Place Process

### Our Place

Community mapping exercise to co-define the character and significance of a place, based on the Our Place toolkit

### Spirit of Place

Agreeing together the underlying themes that define a place and set of principles to guide its future management based on National Trust guidance

### Our Spirit of Place

Document that unites the Our Place (statement of character and significance) and Spirit of Place (place themes and principles) agreed by all stakeholders



# Language of the document

## Character/context

The main visual characteristics of an area resulting from the influence of geology, topography, urban layout, plot form, land use, and predominant building ages, types, form and materials.

## Topography

The physical form of an area defined by natural features of relief and geographic elements such as rivers.

## Views

Within the scope of this document views are discussed in terms of locations from which a view to a specific landmark, or series of features (natural or built) is possible.

## Landmarks

Are defined as features that make a positive contribution to a view (long distant or local). The description of each character area refers to positive landmarks as well as 'other features within the area'. This latter type are not necessarily visible in a specific view but are of historic interest or make a positive contribution to the local character.







**Fig 1**  
**Our Place Sea Mills Rec study area**



Park area boundary

# Location

## Location

Sea Mills is a 20th century residential suburb in the north west of Bristol, west of Stoke Bishop and east of Shirehampton.

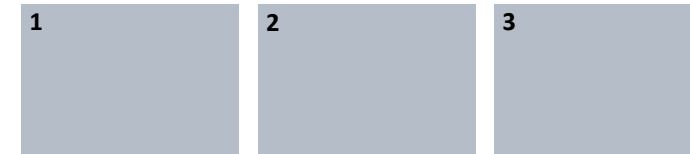
Sea Mills Recreation Ground lies in the south west quarter of Sea Mills. It is bordered by the rear gardens of the residential properties on Shirehampton Road, St Edyth's Road, Woodleaze and Sylvan Way.





**Fig 2**  
**Historic development**

- 1 1903 Ordnance Survey (OS) plan
- 2 1936 OS
- 3 1946 RAF aerial photograph



## Sea Mills Rec historic development



### 1903

- By the early 20th century the area now occupied by Sea Mills was agricultural land in the ownership of the Kings Weston estate.
- Routes crisscrossed this landscape, most notably Shirehampton Road (1) that connected Shirehampton and Kings Weston to Stoke Bishop, Clifton and Bristol.



### 1936

- Sea Mills was created as a municipal housing estate following the introduction of the Housing Act in 1919. The estate was laid out following the Garden Suburb principles that promoted low density neighbourhoods (12 dwellings to the acre) set in leafy surroundings.
- The concept was to create a healthy living environment for the community that included generous private gardens and public green spaces. Spaces for physical exercise was an important aspect of garden suburbs and led to the creation of recreation grounds on many estates often including sports pavilions (2).



### 1946

- During the Second World War, Sea Mills Rec was partly given over to allotments use as part of the Dig for Victory campaign (3).
- By this time, the route across the southern corner of the Rec linking St Edyth's Road with Woodleaze had been formalised with a line of trees (4).
- Note the public air raid shelter was at Sea Mills Square (5) rather than the Rec and earthworks relating to the army camp on Shirehampton Park (6).

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## Identity of place

# 2





# The Rec

## Summary description

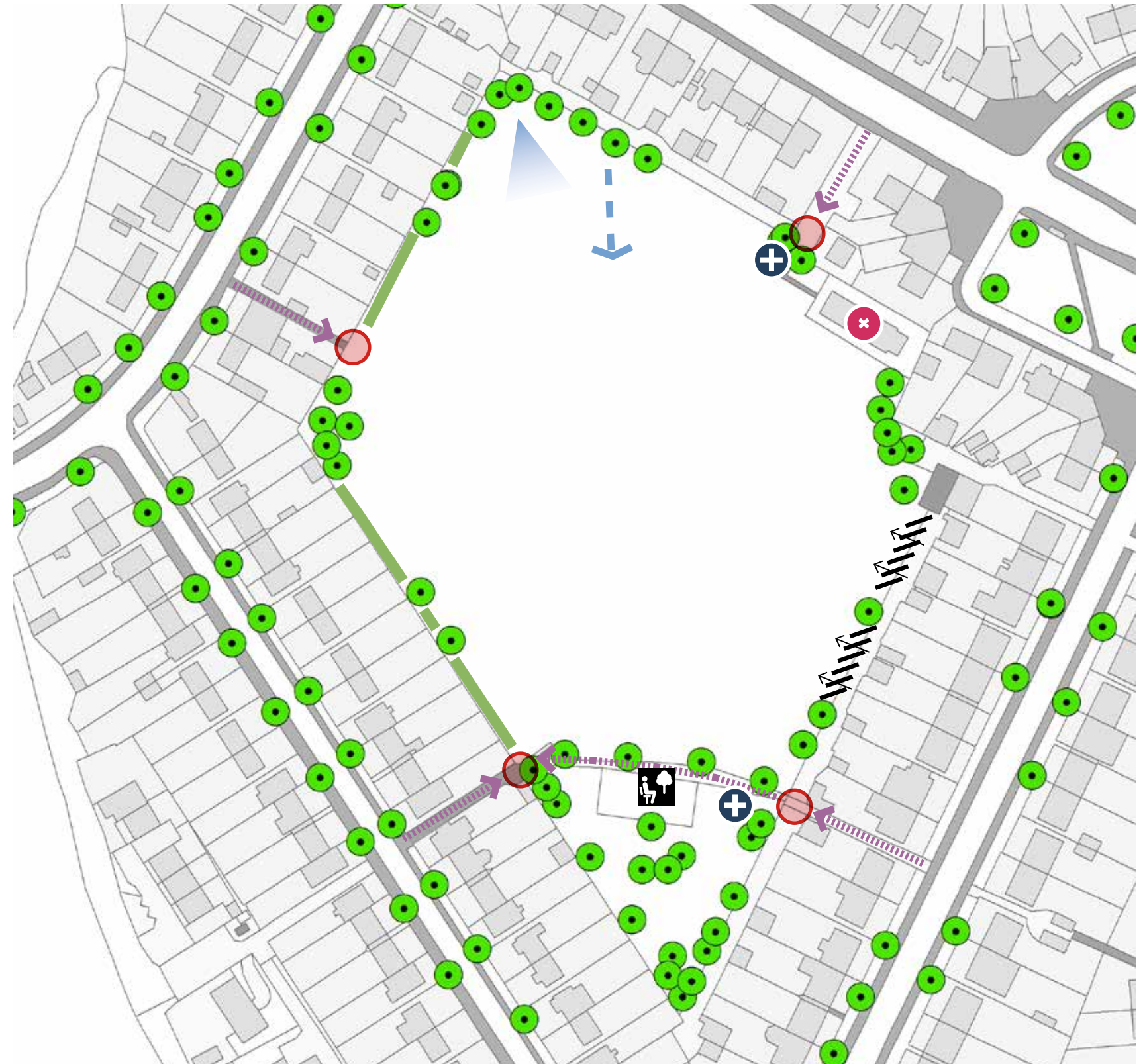
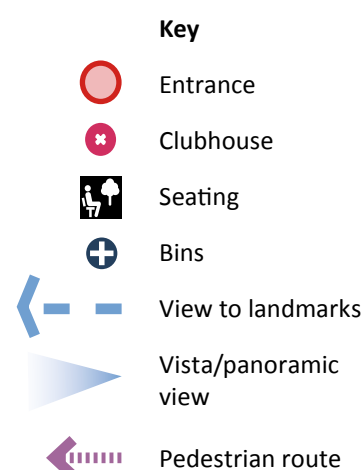
A large open space designed for recreational uses. Since its early history these uses have been predominantly football related and the area contains two football pitches and club house.

The space has four access points approached by lanes from the surrounding residential streets; Shirehampton Road, St Edyth's Road, Sylvan Way and Woodleaze. A semi-formal route between St Edyth's Road and Woodleaze cuts across the southern corner of the space and is surfaced with loose bonded tarmac and marked with a line of four trees.

South of this route is a recently planted area of fruit trees.

Rear gardens of residential properties surround the space. The boundary tends to be wire fencing, although this is largely covered by hedges, bushes and trees particularly along the west and north edges. The eastern boundary is more exposed with the driveway access to rear garages being visible beyond the fence line.

The Rec gently slopes upwards towards the northern corner of the area allowing good views of the local landmarks such as St Edyth's church and the wider Stoke Bishop landscape beyond.





### Positive Context

Views to local landmarks and wider landscape  
Open green space enclosed by tree lined boundary  
Wildlife orchard area in southern corner  
Local sports facilities for young people  
Generally good access from surrounding residential streets









# Strengths and challenges

Following the Our Place mapping activity the participants were asked to identify the various character strengths in the local area.

In addition to these positive elements a number of particular challenges to the maintenance of the area’s character were also identified.

These strengths and challenges have been correlated in the adjoining table.

Strength	Description	Challenges and opportunities
<b>Open, safe green space away from roads</b>	The Rec is designed as enclosed open area for sports	Comments were made about the frequency of grass cutting and several comments about dog mess
<b>Great place for young people’s football activities</b>	Shire Colts, the local under 18s football team are an active club using the facilities on the Rec, but the open, well drained and level space enables informal football and games	As above The club house including its boundary requires further investment to realise the community potential of this asset
<b>Natural areas including blackberry rich boundaries and wildlife orchard</b>	The boundaries, particularly the south and west boundaries are well established wild areas that offer opportunities for blackberry picking in late summer and provide wider wildlife benefits	The east boundary is more sparse, although it allows views of the Rec from the rear of the St Edyth’s Road properties. There is an opportunity to increase the biodiversity of this edge and include nectar rich species to promote bees and butterflies as well as add seasonal colour to the space
<b>Good views from top of the Rec</b>	The views as described above are a significant contributor to the identity of the Rec	This top corner would be a good area to introduce seating and/or picnic tables
<b>Mature trees</b>	The trees around the Rec help to provide a sense of enclosure to the space, but are well spaced to allow views out	Greater species variation should be encouraged where new trees are planted and care should be taken when selecting locations and size of tree to ensure views into and out of the space are maintained. Fruit trees or species such as copper beech can contribute to the seasonal colour
<b>Good access</b>	The four entrances provide level easy access for users	Not all the entrances are fully accessible and the gateways have a municipal appearance with scaffold type bars. There is also a lack of signage to the Rec. In some ways this is a benefit, making it a secret space, but new signage and improved access points would enhance the welcoming nature of the space

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# Significance

# 3





# Understanding Significance

## Heritage Values and Significance

The conservation principle of ‘Significance’, the sum of the cultural and natural heritage values of a historic place, underpins modern conservation policy and practice. It provides a framework for understanding and comparing different values that have established in a given place through time.

Recent publications by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund set out the current thinking on what is significant and how it is to be described. These documents promote four key categories of heritage value:

- The site as a source of evidence or knowledge (*evidential*)
- The site as a link to the past, the people who shaped it and a means of learning about it (*historic*)
- The site as a source of sensory or intellectual stimulation, designed or incidental (*aesthetic*)
- The site as an embodiment of social or spiritual values (*communal*)

To these heritage values a fifth has been added to cover the contribution that the site makes to the natural environment.

Within the five value categories the different levels of importance inevitably require judgements about their relative significance.

This study takes a broad approach to ranking the assets significance based on the heritage values, any formal designation status and survey information available at the time of assessment. The following significance ratings are used:

A+	Exceptional	(international)
A	Exceptional	(national - UK)
B	Considerable	(regional - West of England)
C	Some	(local - Bristol)
D	Little or no importance	
INT	Intrusive or damaging	

This approach supports future decision-making about the prioritisation and approach to management of historic assets. However, it is recognised that direct comparison across different heritage values can be problematic. For example part of the site may only be of limited historic interest but exceptional communal value to the local community.

# Historic Values

English Heritage’s ‘Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance’ (2008) states that:

- *historic* value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present
- *historic* value tends to be *illustrative* or *associative*

**Recognised as an early example of a municipal residential estate laid out as a garden suburb, Sea Mills is an important heritage asset. It consequently falls within the remit of the Local Plan Policy DM31 that aims to protect and enhance heritage assets.**

**Value rating C**

## Historic Associative Values

**There is some associative value in relation to the original land owning Napier Miles family of Kings Weston House who sold the land to the Corporation as part of the Bristol Housing Scheme of 1919.**

**Sea Mills as a whole also has associative value in connection to Dr Christopher Addison, the architect of the 1919 Housing Act, who attended the tree planting ceremony at Sea Mills in 1919 that launched the housing scheme.**

**Value rating C**

# Aesthetic Values

English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' (2008) states that:

- *design* value relates to the aesthetic qualities generated by the conscious design of a building, structure or landscape as a whole
- *aesthetic* value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place
- some aesthetic values are not substantially the product of formal design, but develop more or less *fortuitously* over time, as the result of a succession of responses within a cultural framework

**Views out of the open space are also important contributors to the significance of the recreation ground and wider conservation area.**

**Consequently the good views from the northern corner of the Rec have considerable aesthetic value. There is also some evidence to suggest that the planting of trees along the southern boundary has taken consideration of these viewpoints and have some design value.**

**Value rating C**

## Design Value

**The Rec retains much of its municipal design, although the original pavilion has been lost.**

**Value rating C**

# Evidential Values

English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' (2008) states that:

- evidential value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity
- physical remains of past human activity are the primary source of evidence and evolution of places, and of the people and cultures that made them
- age can be a strong indicator of relative evidential value
- evidential value derives from the physical remains or genetic lines that have been inherited from the past
- the ability to understand and interpret the evidence tends to be diminished in proportion to the extent of its removal and replacement

**The recent Sea Mills 100 project celebrating the community history of the neighbourhood has added a huge amount of local evidential value to all aspects of the suburb.**

**Value rating B**

# Communal and Natural Values

English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' (2008) states that:

- *communal* value derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory
- *commemorative* and *symbolic* values reflect the meanings of a place for those who draw part of their identity from it, or have emotional links to it
- *social* value is associated with places that people perceive as a source of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence

## Communal Value

**As a public space the Rec has considerable communal value particularly given the decrease in publicly accessible recreation spaces in the area.**

## Natural Value

**Parts of the Rec have some wildlife value particularly around the boundaries and within the southern orchard area.**

# Summary of significance

## Heritage significance

The Recreation Ground lies within the Sea Mills Conservation Area and is an important element of the original designed suburb. Consequently being a fundamental public component of this early council estate the Rec has considerable historic value.

## Routes and access

The routes into the open space are part of the original designed layout of the garden suburb and therefore have some historic value in their own right.

The route across the southern part of the Rec was probably formalised at a later date, although it is still an important aspect of the sites significance particularly with its formal line of trees providing greater sense of enclosure to both the sports pitch area and the newly defined wilder/informal area in the southern corner.

## Communal value

The space is actively used by the Shire Colts under 18s football team.

Local young people’s groups make regular use of the space such as the local scouts and guides groups.

The space is in daily use by dog walkers and other exercise activities including walking, running and Tai Chi.

## Wildlife and nature

The Rec is an important local green space.

The fruit trees and meadow area together with the hedged boundary of the Rec provide wildlife opportunities particularly for bird life and flowering plants.

Blackberry picking in late summer is a popular local activity along the boundaries.



## Our Spirit of Place

# 4



# Our Spirit of Place

The Our Spirit of Place workshops with officers and members of the community defined a broad identity of the Rec as an inclusive community green space for all to enjoy.

Given the original intention for the space it is noteworthy that the over arching theme of the Rec relates to sport and recreation particularly for young people. This means that organised sports are focused at the under 18 years.

The workshops identified two other themes for the Rec that help to form a set of principles for the future use and management of the park:

- A place for people to enjoy nature. The successful introduction of the natural area in the southern corner of the Rec and the wild hedged boundaries were seen as positive features
- A community space. The Rec has a strong sense of community that is felt to be welcoming and accessible.

## A place for young family recreation



## A place for people to enjoy nature



## A community space



# Our Spirit of Place

A set of place principles has been established within each of the Our Spirit of Place themes.

These principles set out a broad approach to the future management of the Rec by all stakeholders; council officers, community groups and users of the space.

## Young people's football and recreation

The existing sports use is an important asset and partnerships between the football club and wider community present significant opportunities following these principles.

### Place principles:

- Family and child friendly space for sport and recreation events and gatherings
- Free at the point of entry
- Information about the events and activities is accessible and up-to-date

## Wild areas

Access to the natural environment within this neighbourhood setting is important for the whole community.

### Place principles

- Preserve and enhance the natural areas of the Rec
- Promote family nature and wildlife activities such as nature trails, bat walks, planting days, bird box making etc
- Support and partnership with Nature Recovery Network proposals
- Ensure that views out of the Rec are maintained

## A community space

All these themes are connected to the positive use of the community use of the space. These principles aim to ensure that the Rec continues to be an inclusive and welcoming space.

### Place principles

- Ensure entrances are accessible and welcoming and marked with appropriate signage
- Support the continued community development of the club house as an inclusive community asset



