



The Land Trust  
Working together to  
change lives for the better





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“At the Land Trust we understand the value that spending time outdoors can have on physical and mental wellbeing”

### About the Land Trust

The Land Trust is a charity committed to the long-term sustainable management of open space for community benefit. When the Trust was established in 2004, the concept was to create an organisation that could offer a long term sustainable land management solution. We call this stewardship and our vision is to improve the quality of people's lives through the creation and management of sustainable, high quality green spaces that deliver real and lasting, environmental, social and economic benefits.

The Trust has five key charitable objectives. These set us apart from other green space management providers and ensure we deliver places that change people's lives for the better.

These objectives are:

- Environment and biodiversity
- Health and wellbeing
- Community and social cohesion
- Education and learning
- Economic vitality

We currently have ownership and responsibility for over 2,500 hectares of open space across the country. Our diverse portfolio includes amenity spaces, country parks, SANGs, SuDS, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, nature reserves and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. While we want as many people as possible to enjoy using our spaces we are passionate about protecting the wildlife and biodiversity that calls them home.

### Building new communities – from Placemaking to Placekeeping

The housing developers, local planning authorities and key stakeholders we work with seek to create, establish and maintain communities which thrive for decades after the final house is sold.

One area where we are making a real difference – and one which will continue to be a focus for us into the future – is in building new communities. With an expanding population the need for new housing has never been more acute. However, what often gets forgotten or neglected is how we turn these new properties into a community and turn houses into homes.

Our Placekeeping approach ensures that we provide a service that provides excellent value for money for residents, protects them from price increases and creates significant economic and social value.

This is just the beginning, and working in partnership with developers, the Land Trust is helping to build and maintain new, healthy, thriving and inclusive communities across the country.

### Why our model works

Historically the management of green spaces has had a chequered history, particularly within residential property developments funded through service charge. When it goes wrong, it has a detrimental impact on these new communities, the mental health and wellbeing of residents and property values. Any number of things can cause these issues but common factors include poor legal set up, over inflated service charges, poor management and lack of accountability and no engagement with the local council and other stakeholders.

We don't claim to be perfect and we've learned a lot of lessons from our management of these kind of sites over the last few years.

So how do we make it work? How do we deliver against wider policy aims, treat residents fairly and transparently and deliver added value? What is the key to our success?

We establish partnerships.

With communities. With landowners, developers and local authorities. Working with these stakeholders, we identify appropriate solutions for managing our green spaces for the long term and in a way that delivers maximum community impact.

Working with the community and our passionate and hardworking managing partners encourages emotional ownership and a sense of pride in the place where they live.

"We don't claim to be perfect and we've learned a lot of lessons from our management of these kind of sites over the last few years."



## The Land Trust at Upton - engaging with our customers

After ten years of managing green spaces such as country parks and nature reserves, in 2015 the Land Trust started exploring a new area of business in the form of residential green space management, paid for by the residents in the form of a service charge.

We identified a real need for an organisation such as ourselves to take on the public open space within a development, add real value and manage it with fairness and the best interests of the residents at heart.

We now have a number of these sites in various locations across the country and we are delivering real social change with our communities.

The first of these sites we took on was in Upton, Northampton, in 2016 and since then we have learned a lot of lessons along the way.

Taking on a site like Upton is never easy, particularly when you don't always know what residents have been told or the way in which previous management companies may have managed the site.

Upton also came with its own unique challenges with SUDS management a key part of the Land Trust's work at the site and other facilities such as lighting and the Fountain in the main square. On this particular estate, many of the residents were not happy with the performance of the incumbent contractor.



However, our community based approach turned this situation around. Our Estates team worked very hard to get a thriving residents group up and running, to give them a voice and allow them to play a key role in the future direction of the site's management.

After a thorough consultation process, a joint decision was made between the Land Trust and the residents group to remove the incumbent contractor and tender for a replacement. The chair of the working group was part of the tender panel and represented the views of the residents when it came to making the decision about which contractor to choose for the future management of the public open space within their development.

Perhaps surprisingly, the residents, in collaboration with our team, chose to appoint a more expensive contractor as the most important combined aspiration, was to provide a service that met the expectations of the community. The estate is now in a much better place with our management contributing significantly to the social cohesion of the area.

What turned this situation around was our willingness to engage with people, implement our learnings and come up with a solution that worked best for all parties involved.

"Quite a lot of management companies won't engage with you. They're not interested. The Land Trust have taken a very different approach to this in that they're happy for us to engage with them.

"A new estate like this doesn't have its own personality, you need to develop its personality so it becomes a place full of character. Slowly we're doing that, and it's with the Land Trust's help that we're achieving that."

Nick Sturgess-Alex, Chair,  
Upton Meadows Resident's Association



### Creating and measuring social value

The long term success of our spaces is important to the reputation of the Land Trust, our managing partners and the developers and landowners we work with. But above all, it is most essential to the communities we work with. We understand that our role goes beyond simply managing green space and is about creating communities and places where people want to live, work and play.

Our Social Value model, developed in partnership with AMION Consulting, allows us to measure our impact by assessing the benefits of our green space management against our five key charitable objectives of:

- Environment and biodiversity
- Health and wellbeing
- Education and learning
- Economic vitality
- Community cohesion and volunteering

In 2019-20 for the first time, the Trust analysed the economic and social value created on its service charge sites, with the model showing that nearly £2.5 million was created from the management of the green spaces around the Trust's service charge sites.

Contributions to this overall economic and social value from the Trust's service charge sites come from a variety of areas and are either classified as a cost saving to the public purse or gross value added. These results are hugely encouraging and continue to highlight the excellent work the Trust is doing on behalf of over 4,400 homeowners across the country.





### Who we work with: Service Charge customers

At all Land Trust sites we pride ourselves on building positive relationships with our service charge customers and we begin engaging with them at the earliest possible stage. Taking this approach allows us to educate them about our work and philosophy and gives them an early opportunity to raise any concerns or ask any questions they may have.

We use a phased approach of communication as we take on our service charge sites. Homeowners should be aware of the Land Trust service charge through their purchase information but we know this isn't always the case which is why we take the following steps to introduce ourselves to our customers.

#### Stage one – Introduction & Welcome Pack

The first stage is to write to our new customers, introducing them to the Land Trust, explaining the service charge and our management approach,

giving them an approximate estimate of what the first year's costs will be, and providing contact details and access to a private Facebook page. It's very important to us that our first correspondence with our new customers does not include an invoice or request for payment.

On taking over responsibility for the site, we then send our customers a bespoke Welcome Pack, which contains more detail about the Land Trust, a copy of their first invoice and details on the various payment options available. We also include a map, which shows customers the land we will be managing on their behalf.

#### Stage two – Meet the new customers

The next stage is to begin engaging with our customers face to face. This normally incorporates a meeting led by a member of the Trust's estate management team where the residents can come and meet with us in person for the first time. We use these meetings to talk about our plans for the site,



gather opinions and understand resident priorities. At this early stage we like to raise the prospect of establishing a Resident Working Group.

Once the Land Trust is established on site we commit ourselves to an annual meeting for residents to attend. We also regularly survey our customers to understand if there are any areas of our service requiring improvement.

#### Stage three – Residents Working Group

Our Residents Working Group is the key to good communication and accountability and they help us to achieve the best outcome for the open spaces around their new homes. Our staff are highly motivated by this active engagement and the shared pride it engenders.

We also liaise with residents to ensure that their views are incorporated at key milestones. For example, when a new landscape management plan is set up, or when a new contract is tendered.

Examples of this include having a member of the Resident Working Group on the tender and interview panel when interviewing new contractors.

Alongside residents these meetings will also often include representation from the Local Authority and Parish Council.

#### Stage Four - Evaluation and improvement

At the Land Trust we are always looking to improve the service we offer to the residents.

We carry out an annual survey of all our service charge customers, gathering their views on our stewardship and identifying any potential areas for improvement.

We report the results to our customers and highlight if there are any changes to be made as a result of their feedback.



### Customer complaints policy

We always hope that issues can be resolved locally with good dialogue and we provide our customers with access to a telephone helpline and email address to help them raise concerns.

However if an issue can't be resolved we confirm receipt of complaint within two working days and will issue a full response within five working days. The complainant then has 14 working days to lodge an appeal and will receive a final response from a Director or Chief Executive within 10 working days of the appeal being lodged.

If more time is required to investigate the issue, we confirm this to our customer within the time scale shown above.

Engaging with our communities is a huge part of what we do and we go to great length to help

customers understand and have a say in how the green space around their home is managed.

While the response from a Director or Chief Executive is the final response from the Land Trust, since February 2021 we have been working with The Property Ombudsman (TPO) who have been providing consumers and property agents with an alternative dispute resolution service since 1990.

Having an independent body in place to deal with a situation like this, should it arise, provides reassurance to our customers, that we are an open and transparent organisation and one that wants to work with them positively and collaboratively.

TPO will review the case independently and provide a final ruling.

### Who we work with: St Luke's Park retender

The Land Trust has been managing the public open space within St Luke's Park since 2019. After taking over the management, we began our programme of engagement with residents and after being involved with the site for a number of months it became clear that they felt the contractor was underperforming.

The Land Trust listened to these views, and after a period of working closely with the contractor, monitoring their activity and trying to improve their performance, acknowledged that the service being provided wasn't good enough.

Following this decision, the Land Trust served notice on the contractor and appointed an interim management company to take over the maintenance of the public open spaces while the process to appoint a new one was ongoing.

Before going out to tender we surveyed the residents to understand what they felt the priorities should be going forward. We reviewed these results and presented them to a smaller Residents Working Group where we discussed the new tender document, which would be issued to organisations who were keen to manage the public open space.

The initial responses were reviewed by the Land Trust's Estates team, with a recommendation made to the Residents Working Group about the appointment of a new contractor. However the working group expressed the view that they would like to go back out to tender to get a broader range of options for them to review.

The decision to do this was made easier by the excellent performance of the interim contractor. The Land Trust's estates team also committed to informing the residents on works completed, providing a weekly update on the residents Facebook page.

Following the second tender, a number of companies were interviewed by the Land Trust and a member of the Residents' Working Group. Following this process, a preferred company was identified and subsequently appointed. The new contractor is now providing an excellent service to our customers.

"Over 70% of residents at St Luke's Park said the green spaces managed by the Land Trust had a positive effect on their physical and mental wellbeing."





**Who we work with:  
Local authorities and councils**

When managing service charge sites in the long-term, it is important that we establish a good working relationship with the relevant local authority or council, who may have responsibility for providing residents with services such as bin collections or site maintenance. This could relate to pot-holes in roads, uneven pavements or poor street lighting.. They may also be responsible for issues such as anti-social behaviour or dog enforcement. Our Estates team actively manage these relationships so that we can discuss our customers' issues and then point them in the right direction of the appropriate person at the Council who can help them.

If the local authority wishes to have formal engagement, we will set up a liaison group of interested stakeholders, who will initially meet on a quarterly basis. Terms of reference will be agreed, to ensure that relevant stakeholders and partners have a guiding influence in how the greenspace is managed to ensure it delivers their aspirations.

**Who we work with:  
Other management bodies**

On some of our sites there are other management bodies involved with providing services to our service charge customers. We ensure that we have full knowledge of all organisations involved so that we can assist our customers should they be unsure who they need to contact if there is a problem with some aspect of the development.

#### Who we work with: Managing partners/contractors

A key part of our success on all our sites, is establishing an excellent working relationship with the managing partner or contractor who carries out the maintenance on behalf of the Land Trust.

When choosing an organisation to work with we look for companies that share our passion for delivering added value to the communities where they will be working. Building positive relationships with our customers is crucial to this. Our Estates team set the working priorities for the contractor involved, explaining why the land may need to be managed in a certain way. We then ask our team to provide us with regular updates on works completed so that we can keep our customers up to date with what is happening on site. This enables our customers to know exactly what their service charge is contributing towards and how their money is being spent.

When the time comes to change or appoint a new contractor we liaise with the residents to involve them in the process of securing a new contractor to ensure they feel involved and have a say in the future of the land they call home.





### Who we work with: Developers

At the Land Trust we understand that our relationship with the developer and new residents is crucial. We aim to work collaboratively and in partnership with them to ensure the public open space within the new development delivers the widest possible range of economic, social and environmental benefits to the new homeowners and wider community.

Ideally, we get involved at the very earliest stage to ensure that the Masterplan focuses on long-term stewardship of green spaces and retains as much of the existing green infrastructure, such as SUDS, right from the beginning of a development, ensuring that ecology enhancement is also prioritised.

This relationship is particularly important on a multi-phase development where the Land Trust and the master developer may be working side by side for a number of years until all the land eventually

transfers to the ownership of the Trust. It is therefore especially important all parties manage their areas of land to a similar specification so that residents across the whole development are getting a uniform service of the same high standard.

We are also experienced in dealing with promoter led (developer consortium) schemes where we work directly with a number of house builders on large multi-phased developments. Our aim with these is to ensure that the whole long term stewardship model is addressed at the earliest stage which ensures a strong, consistent management framework is established from the outset and maintained right through to the end of the build.

This approach facilitates a consistency in the design style and management of the whole Public Realm that adds significantly to the overall appeal of the best new housing schemes.



### **Making green spaces more accessible to all**

During the COVID-19 pandemic it has become clear that the ability to exercise and for people to generally enjoy getting out into open space has been vitally important to peoples' mental health and happiness. For those lucky enough to have had the ability to use well managed green open space this is positive; but not everyone has the facility. More and more Local Planning Authorities are now using their Section 106 powers to ensure that the long-term stewardship of Public Open Space attaching to high volume housing schemes is addressed at an early stage in the development process. We see this as a really positive outcome and we will continue to support this agenda to the very best of our ability.



The Land Trust  
7 Birchwood One  
Dewhurst Road  
Warrington WA3 7GB

T: 01925 852005  
E: [enquiries@thelandtrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@thelandtrust.org.uk)  
[www.thelandtrust.org.uk](http://www.thelandtrust.org.uk)

 [Twitter/@thelandtrust](https://twitter.com/thelandtrust)  
 [Facebook/thelandtrust](https://facebook.com/thelandtrust)  
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