

# the **Birmingham** plan

birmingham's local development framework



## The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

Supplementary Planning Document

November 2006



# theBirminghamplan

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## *The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces*

*(The Birmingham Parks and Open Spaces Strategy)*

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#### Acknowledgments

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# Foreword

Parks, recreation grounds and other public open spaces are a valuable community resource providing environmental, social and economic benefits to the residents of Birmingham. The improvement of parks is a vital part of creating sustainable communities. MORI polls in 2004 showed 73% of respondents using parks within the past 12 months, with 70% of those interviewed satisfied with the service. For many without private gardens, parks are an essential resource which contributes to the quality of life.

Birmingham has continually sought to improve parks despite the national trend of deteriorating standards and funding. Although highly valued by local people, many parks are in a poor state of repair. Positive action is required in order to reverse the cycle of decline, and the Parks Strategy represents a move forward towards improving the quality of parks. This will, in particular, be achieved by addressing new agendas such as health, education and sustainable development across broad partnerships and so engaging a new range of stakeholders.

The Birmingham Parks Strategy aims to reflect local community aspirations and priorities. By involving local communities in all aspects of park provision, design and management a greater sense of local ownership and pride in the external environment will be engendered. Birmingham City Council has carried out over 15 years of public consultation in relation to parks, and the involvement of local people in parks is a major success which will be continued.

Birmingham City Council has also been on the national working party of the 'The Urban Green Spaces Taskforce', which produced its final report, in 2002, "Green Spaces, Better Places"<sup>2</sup>. Birmingham City Council took the lead for the UK on a pan-European research project EU-Project- 'URGE'<sup>3</sup>, Development of Urban Green Spaces to Improve the Quality of Life in Cities and Urban Regions, (2001-2004); and the main findings of this research have also informed this strategy.

The Strategy will provide a positive structure for continuous community consultation, new development and investment and will set the vision for the future of Birmingham City parks and open spaces. This Strategy is intended to guide the planning, design, maintenance, management and provision of public open space in the city over the next 10-15 years.

We now need to rise to the challenges and take Birmingham's parks, and other valuable open spaces, confidently into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We must create a valuable community resource which not only provides for recreational enjoyment, but truly addresses the City's sustainability agenda by acting as a catalyst for economic, social and environmental regeneration.

I am very pleased to be involved in the launch of this Strategy and commend it to the local communities of Birmingham.



Councillor Ray Hassall  
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture





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# **executive summary**

## 2 Executive Summary

### 2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has been developed in tandem with the Playing Pitches Strategy and the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Birmingham. The three strategies provide a positive response to PPG17 - 'Planning for Open Space, and Recreation', which requires Local Authorities to assess the need for such facilities and to produce action plans. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has been produced as a part of the Local Development Framework, and is complimentary to the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) for Birmingham. The Strategy has been adopted by Birmingham City Council's Cabinet as a Supplementary Planning Document.

### 2.2 Background

2.2.1 Birmingham has a rich history of providing parks for public use. This has resulted in a wealth of parks and open spaces which are an essential part of the day to day life of Birmingham residents. The landscape of parks is not static and requires constantly evolving management. For too long a lack of investment in parks has caused them to deteriorate, resulting in many parks being in a poor state of repair. We must now develop a strategy of renewal to reverse this trend. The historical, ecological and archaeological significance of many of Birmingham's parks, and other green spaces, makes them very sensitive in terms of future improvements and a careful approach is required in order to conserve their essential character and qualities.

### 2.3 The Aim of the Strategy

2.3.1 This Strategy is intended to protect and guide the planning, design, management, maintenance and provision of parks and public open spaces in the city over the next 10-15 years. It is not intended to be overly prescriptive or to prevent worthwhile initiatives that are not currently included taking place. It provides the framework through which change can be effectively managed.

### 2.4 Regeneration and Funding

2.4.1 Good quality open space contributes to the overall social, economic and environmental quality of urban regeneration and the general appeal of neighbourhoods. New and regenerated parks and open spaces have proven to be a very successful means of regenerating inner city areas. The City Council aim to ensure parks form an integral part of social regeneration strategies and will devise park regeneration schemes and funding packages capable of delivering broader urban regeneration aims and objectives in terms of environmental improvement, community safety, community use/involvement and education.

2.4.2 In order to achieve the aspirations of the Parks Strategy even higher levels of capital and revenue investment are necessary. Many of the recommendations can be achieved by the redirection of existing resources, by the restructuring of existing responsibilities, by working in partnership with other agencies and directing S106 funding. However, there are a number of new initiatives which are over and above what is currently provided by the City Council. Seeking external funding is a key objective of the strategy. The City Council must maximise its ability to secure external funding sources for improving parks as it is unlikely that significant additional City Council funds will be made available to support the objectives of the Parks and open Spaces Strategy. Community involvement and partnership working is a key part of successful funding bids.

2.4.3 Certain of Birmingham's parks and civic spaces are worthy of particular mention as they have potential to contribute significantly to the renaissance of Birmingham in the years ahead and should be regarded as priorities for action. Canon Hill Park, arguably Birmingham's premier park, allied to the Midland Art Centre, is extremely popular and very heavily used, and consequently will require significant investment if it is to continue to be fit for purpose. Centenary Square will need to be revisited and redesigned should the opportunity to develop a new Central library for Birmingham adjacent to the civic space proceed. Eastside's Park will be the first new park in the City Centre for 125 years, and will provide a vitally important green space for the public living, working and studying in that quarter of the City.



## 2.5 Partnerships and Community Involvement

2.5.1 The City Council has carried out extensive public consultation and research. The strategy will create a framework for continuous community engagement, and for evaluating the success of new schemes. A collaborative process has been adopted so that the future development of Birmingham's parks is undertaken in partnership with all interested parties. The strategy has developed local Ward and Constituency visions which have been drawn up with stakeholder departments, external organisations, local residents, Park 'Friends' Group and community associations to facilitate wider acceptance and ownership.

2.5.2 It will also provide guidance on how services are delivered by a range of organisations and agencies across different disciplines. Open space cannot be considered in isolation from other local issues such as planning, transportation, economic, education, health and housing policy. It is envisaged that all City Council landowners and private landowners in the city, find the strategic nature of this document and the clear guidance it offers, as a very significant resource to help inform their land management. The strategy aims to promote a comprehensive approach to park regeneration and develop stronger partnership working and community involvement.

## 2.6 Site Based Staff

2.6.1 There are growing demands for the return of Park Keepers/Park Rangers throughout Birmingham to provide an approachable and authoritative presence on sites to help reduce anti-social behaviour and allay concerns for personal and community safety. The visible presence of a Park Keeper, Ranger, or other site dedicated staff, is a top priority with many people in Birmingham. The City Council will continue to develop a programme of full time Park Keeper/Ranger provision and summer time Assistant Park Keepers in order to provide a more permanent staff presence. This is to work in association with dedicated grounds maintenance teams in a number of the larger parks. The City Council will also work with Grounds Maintenance Service providers to provide site dedicated staff.

## 2.7 Sustainable Management

2.7.1 The strategy promotes a greater ecological emphasis and commitment to sustainable management principles. Birmingham is fortunate to have a network of open spaces, watercourses and canals which benefit both people and wildlife. Parks, recreation grounds and other open spaces are recognised as an important urban habitat which supports the City's flora and fauna. A comprehensive Nature Conservation Strategy was prepared and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance for the City in 1997<sup>6</sup>. The City Council will develop a Sustainability Checklist for Parks and Open Spaces, in conjunction with its partners and stakeholders. The Sustainability Checklist will be drawn up with local stakeholders to produce a set of criteria against which to assess open space, and to monitor progress.

## 2.8 Multiple uses and facilities which are accessible to all.

2.8.1 The Strategy aims to promote parks as venues for a range of activities from sport to education, from play to informal leisure and relaxation, making them relevant to the 21st century, and their local communities. The profile of parks has increased significantly over the last few years. One of the main aims of the strategy is to continue to raise the profile of parks both nationally and locally, in terms of city image, as cultural assets and as tourism venues which are accessible to a wide range of people. The aim of the strategy is to create a linked network of diverse public open spaces. Open space should be designed to be purposeful, meaningful, well integrated, and with a distinctive identity. It should also be socially inclusive, promoting and supporting social interaction and being accessible to all potential users.

## 2.9 Education and Training

2.9.1 The provision of lifelong learning is a key objective of the City Council in supporting its commitment to improve the quality of life for the people of Birmingham and its visitors. Parks and green spaces are an important educational resource and already contribute to delivering the National Curriculum in schools. There is potential for lifelong learning opportunities to be developed for many parks to cater for every stage of educational development from early childhood to old age. Staff training is an

essential component in achieving a higher quality of park's maintenance and customer service. There is a need for training to produce a highly skilled workforce at all levels, from site based staff to manager. There is also potential for further developing parks as a venue for skills training such as horticultural apprenticeships linked to colleges and universities.

### **2.10 Sport and Healthy Living**

**2.10.1** Improving health is a key objective of central and local government. The benefits of a healthy population are many, and obviously have a direct impact on the NHS. Parks have an important role to play in this respect by providing a venue for healthy activity, events and organised sports. The City Council will further develop park projects that will contribute towards health promotion. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has been developed closely with the City Council's Playing Pitches Strategy.

### **2.11 Community Safety**

**2.11.1** Recent public surveys undertaken show that the number one issue is that of community safety and the fear of crime. Park management must address community safety issues as a priority. This can be achieved through careful design and through events and increased activities. The City Council is to implement design and management proposals which address community safety and fear of crime and will upgrade and repair park facilities and buildings to deter crime and vandalism.

### **2.12 Information Management**

**2.12.1** Within the current comprehensive performance assessment and improvement climate it is increasingly necessary to develop reliable databases and sources of information upon which future decisions can be based with greater accuracy and confidence. A strategic approach to park management should include a mechanism for continuously monitoring and reviewing service delivery. It is proposed to introduce a Parks Management Information System which will be a central database of information on individual parks, facilities, consultation results and quality audits and can be used by all sections of Parks Management Staff and local community groups.

### **2.13 Site Management Plans**

**2.13.1** The importance of sites having their own management plan is becoming increasingly apparent. A rolling programme of site management plans will be commenced over the lifetime of the strategy. Management plans for individual parks need to be produced with local communities, setting out the approach to future design and management. A comprehensive site assessment tool is to be developed and implemented in close consultation with local community groups and other local stakeholders. The comprehensive site assessment tool will then be used to regularly review the quality of open space and the progress of the strategy on the ground.

### **2.14 Implementation**

**2.14.1** The Parks Strategy is both a policy and an action document and is presented in two parts:

1. The main strategy text which outlines the background to the strategy, the results of public consultation, and the principles, policies and guidelines for Birmingham's parks and open spaces
2. Local Open Space plans and schedules which present information on the existing parks resource for each Ward/Constituency

**2.14.1** These plans and schedules will form the basis of Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans, which are not part of the Supplementary Planning Document, and will be produced once the Parks Strategy is adopted. These Action Plans will reflect the extensive public consultation carried out for this Strategy and will indicate a confirmed list of target sites for the city. These target sites will become the strategic and local focus for resources and improvement, and will establish which parks are of greatest value to local communities on a Ward/Constituency basis. The Action Plans will be the vehicle for linking the Parks Strategy into the Constituency Community Planning Process.



# 3

## background

## 3 Background

### 3.1 Historical Background

**3.1.1** Birmingham has a rich history of providing parks for public use. This has resulted in a wealth of parks and open spaces which are an essential part of the day to day life of Birmingham's residents. Today, Birmingham possesses some 470 parks, recreation grounds and open spaces covering 3,200 hectares which are the responsibility of the City Council. In addition to parks and open spaces, there are also a significant number of allotments, green corridors, incidental open spaces and areas of valuable natural green space. These open spaces have been mapped on the Plans and Schedules which accompany this strategy and provide basic data on designations and facilities.

**3.1.2** Birmingham is often described as a "city of villages". Historic plans show a city rich in open space and surrounded by parks and green estates, many of which were gifted to the City to be laid out as parks for the citizens of

Birmingham. This tradition has been carried on down the years with successive generations increasing the legacy of parks and open spaces. The City is now the beneficiary of a very large number of parks and open spaces, many of which are historically significant, and relate to the former hamlets and villages now within the city of Birmingham. The process of land acquisition for the provision of parks, still continues today as demonstrated by the establishment of Newhall Valley Country Park, in Sutton Coldfield.

**3.1.3** The national switch from horticulture to grounds maintenance and the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering has had a major impact on the quality of parks. This switch has resulted in substantial revenue reductions, an erosion of capital programme funding, and a loss of many historical and horticultural features. This decline in standards has left many parks in a poor condition.

**Figure 3.1: Breakdown by facility**

Parks	Number of sites	Area (ha)
Allotments (public and private)	115	276
Amenity Green Space	140	191
Cemetery (public and private)	14	203
Civic Space	4	4
Green Corridor	74	111
Natural Green Space	146	1991
Park or garden (incl proposed)	162	1055
Provision for children and young people (incl proposed)	86	49
Outdoor Sports Facility (incl public/private/education playing fields, golf, leisure centres)	306	1524

3.1.4 Open space is now high on the political agenda. The release of the 'Green Spaces, Better Places' report from the Government's Urban Green Spaces Taskforce<sup>2</sup> has raised parks to the forefront of debate. Government policy is now encouraging renewed interest and investment in parks. After years of decline and a lack of investment parks are now seen to be an essential part of urban renaissance with parks forming the heart of many urban regeneration projects. More and more countries across the European Union are recognising the importance of parks and urban greenspace in helping to define the sustainable development of cities and urban regions as evidenced through the European Union Project 'URGE'<sup>3</sup>.



Parks are a tranquil retreat in the heart of the City

### 3.2 The Value of Parks

3.2.1 Parks are a valuable community resource providing environmental, social and economic benefits to the residents of Birmingham. They have traditionally been a popular and much loved aspect of urban living with many people enjoying the fact that they are 'just there'. They also bring direct and measurable health benefits<sup>4</sup>.

'Parks and green spaces are an essential element of liveable towns and cities in which people want to live. They can contribute to the urban renaissance by helping to regenerate and improve the economic performance of areas, enhance and support the ecology and biodiversity of the built environment, enable healthy living and lifelong learning opportunities, and foster local pride and community cohesion'<sup>2</sup>.

'At their very best, parks and green spaces can be delightful, beautiful, even enthralling places that contribute to our physical and psychological health with positive benefits for the NHS'<sup>2</sup>.

3.2.2 Parks make an important contribution to the visual quality of our urban landscape and are part of our cultural heritage. Many of Birmingham's parks have historic importance, and played an important role in the historical development of the City.



Parks as an historic, archaeological and educational asset



Parks can be a catalyst for economic and social regeneration



3.2.3 It is proven that they can improve mental health<sup>4</sup> and reduce levels of anxiety and stress. They help to reduce pollution, moderate urban climate and, along with domestic gardens, are an important resource for urban wildlife. There are also significant social benefits to parks as a resource for community development, education, health, sports and cultural events. Improved parks and green spaces make a real difference to the quality of life of Birmingham's residents and can reverse the cycle of decline in inner city areas. Parks have an important structural role as they provide a contrast and a break between urban settlements and development. Parks and open spaces in Birmingham contain well-preserved archaeological remains, historic buildings and landscapes, some of which are nationally important.

3.2.4 Improved accessibility to parks can bring significant social benefits, providing the venue for improved social cohesion, community development and an increased sense of citizenship. They are particularly important for those residents who do not have private gardens. They are a recreational resource and a venue for organised sports as well as informal recreation. In this way activities in parks can contribute towards health promotion and form the basis

for preventative health care. Parks can also be a resource for education and lifelong learning and are increasingly used as outdoor classrooms. Park use and design should increasingly be seen as a reflection of the local community and can be the venue for a rich and diverse range of cultural events.

3.2.5 High quality open spaces can also be a contributor to economic improvement and act as a catalyst for urban regeneration, with up to 11% added value to property prices adjacent to such sites<sup>4</sup>. Parks offer opportunities for direct employment, revenue generation and provide the ideal venue for sustainability demonstration projects. In addition there are less tangible off-site benefits such as the attraction of new investment, the retention of businesses and their work forces in a safe, clean and green local area. The tourism potential for parks has yet to be properly developed, but already they make a significant contribution to the appearance and sellable image of the city. Parks and open space play a key role in attracting and retaining City residents, since they contribute to a range of quality of life issues. As well as attracting new investment to the City, parks can also contribute to attracting employees, in making a place in which they want to live and work. Parks are, therefore, an essential component of urban renewal.



Parks are a resource for community development, play, health, sports and cultural events.

### 3.3 The Need for a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

'Local authorities should commit themselves at the highest level to a green space strategy that integrates its objectives with the Community Plan and local strategic partnerships. Green space strategies should be clearly linked to other local strategies to improve the local quality of life, and to those for housing and community development, economic regeneration, healthcare, education and the effective use of land'<sup>2</sup>

3.3.1 A strategic approach is needed to address long-term issues and to address the current poor condition of parks. The popularity of many parks makes them subject to pressure from general usage, event activity and a push for ever more new features. Separate initiatives from a range of interest groups and organisations can result in piecemeal changes which can threaten the integrity of the park. Most importantly, decisions need to be made in a well considered and informed way and the parks strategy will allow a more co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to be adopted. Given the importance of parks to the people of Birmingham, there is a need for a strategy that is fully endorsed by the City Council and the local community.

### 3.4 The Scope of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

3.4.1 The strategic planning policy context for public open space is provided by the Birmingham Plan 2005<sup>5</sup>. Planning policies in this document relate to both public and publicly accessible private open space (see Appendix 1). The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is firmly set within the context of these statutory land use policies and sits alongside other planning and corporate documents such as the Nature Conservation Strategy for Birmingham<sup>6</sup> which has been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance; the Conservation<sup>7</sup> and Archaeology Strategy<sup>8</sup>; the Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2000-2005<sup>9</sup>; the Biodiversity Action Plan for Birmingham and the Black Country 2000-2005<sup>10</sup>; and the EU-Project 'URGE' 'Making Greener Cities – a Practical Guide'<sup>13</sup>. The Parks Strategy also responds to Planning Policy Guidance Note 17<sup>11</sup> which provides Government guidance on Open Space, Sport and



Recreation. The aim is for the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document which will be taken into account when deciding planning applications and appeals.

#### Definitions

*For the purposes of the Unitary Development Plan, "open space" is defined as "all open land of recreational or public value, including playing fields, which primarily consists of natural elements such as trees, grass and water. It may or may not have free public access. It may or may not be used or held by the City Council for recreational purposes".*

*For the purposes of the Unitary Development Plan, "public open space" is defined as "open space, including playing fields, owned by the City Council or to which there is a public right of access, used by the public primarily for recreation purposes. It does not include private or education playing fields, nor does it include municipal or private golf courses, cemeteries, or open areas within housing estates which substitute for private gardens".*



3.4.2 According to the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce<sup>2</sup> and Planning Policy Guidance Note 17<sup>11</sup> open space includes a mixture of private and public, formal and informal landscape and townscape within the urban environment. It can include streets, boulevards, plazas, pedestrian areas, footpaths, cycleways, squares, parks and green space as noted in Figure 3.2.

**Figure 3.2: Open Space Typology suggested by the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce<sup>2</sup> and Planning Policy Guidance Note 17<sup>11</sup>**

Greenspaces	Parks and gardens	Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events
	Natural and semi-natural Greenspaces, including urban Woodland and Country Parks	Wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness
	Green corridors	Walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel, and opportunities for wildlife migration
	Outdoor sports facilities	Participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics or countryside and water sports
	Amenity greenspace	Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.
	Provision for children and Young people	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, ball courts, skateboard areas and teenage shelters
	Allotments, community gardens And urban farms	Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion
	Cemeteries, disused Churchyards and other burial Grounds	Quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity
Civic spaces	Civic and market squares and other hard surfaced areas designed for pedestrians	Providing a setting for civic buildings, public demonstrations and community events

**3.4.3** The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is a hybrid document which addresses planning policy and park management issues. Whilst Planning Policy addresses a range of public and publicly accessible private open space, the management aspect of the Parks Strategy is focused on land within the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture, which is the responsibility of the Local Services Strategic Directorate and Local Services Constituencies. It does, however, acknowledge the importance of open space owned by other Council departments and external organisations as part of the wider network of open space. It is envisaged that all City Council landowners and private landowners in the city, find the strategic nature of this document and the clear guidance it offers, as a very significant resource to help inform their land management.

**3.4.4** It is also important to note that contribution which parks and open spaces in neighbouring authorities make to the people of Birmingham as usage catchments do not stop at local authority boundaries. Birmingham City Council will work closely with colleagues from neighbouring local authorities to promote the aims and objectives of the Parks Strategy in these areas.

### **3.5 A Vision for Local Communities**

**3.5.1** The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy reflects the vision of local communities for the future of parks and open spaces in Birmingham and their involvement has driven the whole of the strategy process. The development of this vision has been advocated by government guidance<sup>12</sup> which has stressed the importance of identifying a qualitative vision of what communities want as a fundamental element of assessing local need.

**3.5.2** The results of community consultation carried out by the City Council, and through the leisure survey undertaken by BMG Research, have highlighted a range of concerns and aspirations relating to parks and open spaces in Birmingham. These have been summarised in the vision statement which is presented below:-

**'Birmingham's parks and open spaces must be planned, designed, maintained and managed to provide high quality, diverse, readily accessible and safe landscapes that are available to all groups of people and are vital places for wildlife. They are to be treated as essential multi-functional community facilities which will cater for events and activities and have a selection of well-used facilities, in good condition, that meet local needs'**

### **3.6 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy Aims**

**3.6.1** This Strategy is intended to guide the planning, design, management, maintenance and provision of parks and public open spaces in the city over the next 10-15 years. The strategy aims to address local concerns by promoting a comprehensive approach to park regeneration and through developing stronger partnership working and community involvement. Specific policy objectives are detailed in later sections of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and address the following issues of concern:-

- Deliver peoples' visions for their parks and green spaces and respond to community need
- Guide future provision and improvement of parks and open spaces through the planning process
- Following adoption of the Parks Strategy as a Supplementary Planning Document develop a prioritised list of open space improvements through the production of Local Open Space Action Plans which will guide the future allocation of resources
- Publish a 'Sustainability Checklist' for Parks, to cover all aspects of park design, management and maintenance
- Promote urban regeneration and socio-economic development
- Develop partnerships with all relevant public, private, voluntary and community agencies and the local community; and will explore how to create a parks orientated Member-led partnership body.

- Create comprehensive networks of diverse, accessible, high quality and sustainable open spaces
  - Increase use levels and promote social inclusion
  - Develop as a community resource
  - Encourage sport and health initiatives
  - Increase use of parks as an educational resource
  - Address community safety issues
  - Co-ordinate the introduction of new facilities and events
  - Preserve and enhance the specific character and integrity of parks, especially parks of historic significance
  - Identify, protect and make enhancements for wildlife in parks
- Improve the profile and promote the relevance of parks to local communities
  - Increase the role of parks and open spaces in attracting inward investment
  - Improve the appearance, perception and identity of parks and open spaces within the whole city image, tourism and inward investment perspective
  - Implement relevant UK Government and EU guidance
  - Review, evaluate and restore the training and skills programme throughout the whole parks services workforce and management and re-create a positive career development image
  - Review and invest in existing staff resources to meet the requirements of the parks strategy



Illustration showing Queen Victoria's visit to Aston Hall



# community engagement

# 4 Community Engagement

## 4.1 Over a Decade of Community Research

4.1.1 Community involvement is essential to the successful creation and long term sustainability of parks and open spaces. Community visions for the development, maintenance and management of Birmingham's parks and open spaces have been identified from the outset in developing this strategy so that local people feel fully involved in the design and management process and have a greater sense of ownership in their local green space.

4.1.2 Birmingham City Council has undertaken a considerable number of community consultation exercises seeking the views of local people concerning parks in Birmingham over the past 15 years, undertaken at all levels of project development with the assistance of Dr Peter Moynihan of Urban and Rural Research (formerly Oakleigh Ltd).





4.1.3 This consultation has been carried out, not only for the Parks Strategy, but also as part of the City Council's commitment to involving the local community in the design and management of park improvement projects. Much of the development data was site specific although wider consultation on grounds maintenance took place. Hundreds of interviews were undertaken which have contributed to the Parks Strategy consultation process generally. This consultation process has been highlighted as Best Practice in 2002 Government guidance<sup>12</sup>. A detailed summary of the Parks Strategy consultation process formed part of the Supplementary Planning Document consultation and is available on request. The following paragraphs outline some of the key issues arising.

## 4.2 2004 Local Facilities Survey

4.2.1 Consultation carried out in summer 2004. Birmingham City Council Local Services and Planning Directorates commissioned public consultation to achieve compliance with Planning Policy Guidance 17<sup>11</sup>. This consultation consisted of 5,000 (4,000 within the City boundary, and 1,000 outside) randomly selected door to door interviews using a standard questionnaire as part of a 'Leisure and Local Facilities Survey'<sup>13</sup>. The survey work was carried out by BMG Consultants and is the most statistically robust of our consultations.

- 4.2.2 Respondents were asked questions in 2 sections:
- Behaviour or habits in relation to open space usage
  - Open space rating in relation to quality and facilities: changes or improvements which might persuade them to increase the frequency of their use.

4.2.1 In addition, respondents were asked to list their 3 priority sites for targeting additional staff resources and fund-raising efforts. This information has fed as one factor into the 'Action Plan' process.

## 4.3 MORI Survey 2004

4.3.1 The MORI poll (2004) placed parks as the most important leisure service for 42% of respondents, with 73% of respondents using parks within the past 12 months. Satisfaction has increased by 10.7% since 2001. In this poll 70% respondents were satisfied with the parks service.

## 4.4 BV 119e

4.4.1 BV 119e is a Government assessment tool which measures resident satisfaction of parks and open spaces every 3 years. Between 2000 and 2003 Birmingham's score for user satisfaction with local parks declined from 75 to 65 compared to an average rise from 63 to 72 in England as a whole.



Photographs showing positive park uses



#### 4.5 City Living Report 9

4.5.1 The City Living Panel is a panel of 1000 randomly selected people, who match the profile of the City, organised by an independent market research organisation. The panel are asked various questions regarding the Leisure & Culture services provided by the City Council including usage, reasons for non usage, frequency, and satisfaction. The findings from this type of research helps the Department identify areas of improvement and to track trends.

4.5.2 Findings from the most recent City Living Report 9 indicate that 73% of all Birmingham residents use their Park, an increase of 6% since 1999, with above average usage by Black Minority Ethnic Groups and young people. The main reasons for using the parks is identified as being; relaxation, relief of stress, fitness and interest. Most people use their park at least twice a week - to walk. The biggest reason why people do not use their park is because people have no time or are too busy. This is also biggest reason why most people do not use other Leisure and Culture services. People are 70% satisfied with the parks provided by the Council.

#### 4.6 2002 Parks Strategy Consultation Stage 1

4.6.1 To provide a basis for the formulation of the Parks Strategy, a process of public consultation was started in 2002 by Dr Peter Moynihan (Urban and Rural Research). This has provided detailed insights into the aspirations of Birmingham's communities. This consultation consisted of three separate elements:-

- City-wide consultation via Ward Committees gathered 434 response sheets
- a City-wide consultation via schools was carried out which produced 1,130 separate response sheets.

4.6.2 Overall, this survey produced approximately 2040 individual comments on approximately 170 city sites and reflected opinion from every post code district within the City boundary.



**4.6.3** The majority of community comments relating to open spaces are primarily concerned with improving sites, making them safe and enjoying nature. In particular, comments relate to a need to upgrade facilities in parks, address safety issues and reintroduce park keepers. The majority of issues reflect the lack of investment that has taken place in parks over the last few decades. To address this would involve allocating more resources, particularly through the re-introduction of dedicated and trained staff to help develop and look after parks and other green spaces in Birmingham.

**4.6.4** An analysis of respondents' visions for sites highlight the need for measures to improve Birmingham's parks. Sites were identified as being "on target" (ie fulfilling local community expectation), "wanting" (lacking in certain aspects) or "off target" (not fulfilling community expectations at all). Overall, only 12% of respondents believed that the City's parks and open spaces were "on target" in terms of these visions.

**4.6.5** The findings clearly highlighted the importance of local sites to local communities with respondents generally using the park or open space in their immediate locality. The importance of local sites provides a clear steer to the direction of the Parks Strategy and highlights the importance of providing good quality parks for a local catchment, with parks generally functioning at a local/neighbourhood level. The consultation highlights the need to retain and create more good quality open space.

#### **4.7 Site-based before-and-after surveys.**

**4.7.1** Farm Park, Calthorpe Park and Balsall Heath Park were the subject of periodic surveys over 18 months. 100 responses were collected door to door every 6 months and asked about the household use of their local facility. This survey showed was important as it showed the increase in pattern of use in relation to improvements in the parks. Improvements were carried out as a result of need perceived need from previous consultations.

#### **4.8 Ward Development Plans**

**4.8.1** A content analysis of the City's 40 Ward Development Plans has identified which strategies, policies and programmes were cited for particular Wards in relation to parks. This provides a guide to the types of issues identified as being of local importance through previous consultations. Improvements to parks and open spaces are included in virtually all Ward Development Plans. Broader issues are also highlighted which reflect the City Council research and the need to address very basic issues such as crime and community safety. A number of strategic themes have been identified from the Ward Development Plans which have a direct relevance to parks:-

- Crime, community safety, lighting, anti-social behaviour and victim support
- Regeneration, employment, partnerships
- Transport, car parking, walking and cycling
- Nature conservation and environment
- Water quality, litter, fly-tipping, dog and pest control
- Health issues and alcohol consumption
- Youth, children and family support
- Education, access and special needs (including truancy and bullying)
- Town planning
- Social inclusion, equalities, asylum seekers and travellers
- History, arts, events and culture.

#### **4.9 Parks and Open Spaces Strategy Second Phase**

**4.9.1** All 39 ward meetings (subsequently all 40) were visited between November 2003 and April 2004 by an officer from the Parks Service presenting information on the Parks Strategy. In addition, all 485 schools in the City were sent a plan, schedule and questionnaire for the ward in which they were situated. The relevant large scale plan and schedule displays with questionnaires were placed in all of the neighbourhood libraries in the City, and were sent to 62 Neighbourhood Forums and 156 Residents Associations. In excess of 100 other community Groups (eg Friends of Parks, Wildlife Organisations) and individuals were consulted (by post). The data source for this list of

consultees was the Planning database and information from Parks Service officers. A parks feature was also placed in the freely distributed Council Newspaper the 'Voice'.

#### 4.10 Monitoring Community Views

4.10.1 The consultation process has also been invaluable in evaluating the success of park regeneration projects. In order to measure the use levels of regenerated sites, the City Council (with the assistance of Dr Peter Moynihan of Urban and Rural Research (formerly Oakleigh Ltd) has developed methods for assessing the success of schemes through comparing park use before and after a park improvement project has been implemented. Research and repeated consultation exercises have been undertaken over the past three years, to monitor the results of three park improvement schemes, within certain inner city areas, at Farm Park, Calthorpe Park and Balsall Heath Park. The results have highlighted sustained increased use levels at each site with tangible improvements to the quality of life for the surrounding community. Parks and green spaces can make a real difference to our quality of life. City Living has also tracked trends over the past 5 years. Usage is increasing (6.1 %). Usage by all minority groups has increased, and also the frequency of use has increased. Monitoring work has also been carried out on the parks and open spaces project in Soho by the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust. Monitoring of community views will also be carried out as part of the Constituency Community Planning Process.

#### 4.11 Constituency Community Development Plans

4.11.1 The Constituency Community Development Plans will respond to the City's Community Strategy 'Birmingham Forward 2005-2010' Action Plans and targets. The 'Greening the City' Action Plan will highlight all parks, open space and biodiversity targets. These Constituency Community Plans offer the opportunity to tackle issues holistically across the range of Constituency Strategic Partners. The Parks Strategy, and particularly the Constituency Open Space Action Plans when they are produced, will feed into the Constituency Community Development Plans.

#### 4.12 Summary

4.12.1 The results of community consultation show the importance of local parks to local people, and their enthusiasm to get involved. The results also reveal the key barriers to usage as being community safety, lack of time and a lack of facilities. Motivations for use have been identified as relaxation, fun, the natural environment, family activity, social activity, and stress relief. This indicates the parks use helps to improve the quality of life. The consultation has confirmed that people generally wish to see improved facilities, safer areas, activities, events and the opportunity to enjoy nature. The key improvement which has been identified is the desire to see a return of site based park keepers. The City Council needs to address safety and negative site use alongside encouraging and supporting forms of positive use.

4.12.2 The data collected from the above surveys has provided the backbone for the policy embedded in the Birmingham Parks Strategy. The variation in satisfaction levels between these surveys needs to be considered further and monitored over the period of this strategy. The need for site-based staff, the desire for partnerships and community involvement, the need to harmonise usage by different user groups and create safe environments are just some of the demands being made by open space stakeholders.



# 5

## **policy and strategy**

# 5 Policy and Strategy

## 5.1 Strategic Context

**5.1.1** In order to understand how parks and open space contribute to the life of Birmingham, it is necessary to have an overall appreciation of how the City functions. Today, Birmingham is a truly international city and is connected to the world's network of major cities through a range of financial, educational, industrial, commercial, cultural and sporting links. Birmingham also possesses a diverse range of communities defined by socio-economic and demographic criteria and characteristics. A key City Council objective is to ensure that all of its people, particularly disadvantaged communities, benefit from the financial rewards of the city's international status. Creating modern cities to be socially inclusive, involves creating more high quality parks and green spaces to act as links to, and as breaks from, other land uses.

**5.1.2** Parks and green spaces can become the stages upon which the lives of communities are played out. The strategy acknowledges the involvement of a host of other departments, agencies, partners and the voluntary sector; and provides guidance to deal with a variety of design, development and management issues regarding the City's parks and green spaces.

**5.1.3** Parks and open spaces cannot be considered in isolation from other local issues. Planning, transportation, economic, education, health and housing policy all have an influence on the way open spaces are developed and used. This strategy needs to be considered alongside other strategies being implemented by Birmingham City Council and other agencies working in the city.

**5.1.4** The City Council have always worked strategically regarding the improvement and management of the City's parks and open spaces. The Parks Strategy links very clearly to a number of related existing or draft City Council strategies that seek to address the current concerns within Birmingham. The overarching strategy is the 'Taking Birmingham Forward - A Community Strategy for Birmingham 2005-2010'<sup>14</sup> with the Birmingham Plan 2005<sup>5</sup> providing the strategic planning context. The Parks Strategy sits underneath these two strategies, but links to a host of other key themes and issues (see Figure 5.1)



Figure 5.1: Parks and Open Spaces Strategy Links



## 5.2 Corporate City Council Strategic Aims

5.2.1 The Parks Strategy reflects the following 3 corporate aims which have been identified and adopted by the City Council:

- 1) To move Birmingham forward as a city of vibrant urban villages
- 2) To improve services; aspiring for excellence in all our services
- 3) Investing in improvement

5.2.2 The Birmingham Community Strategy has been produced by the Birmingham Strategic Partnership. The Community Strategy emphasises the role of partnership working towards delivering a new vision for the City. Figure 5.2 presents the Vision for the Community Strategy. The Community Strategy will deliver an annual action plan, through its many partners; the one entitled 'Greening the City' will feature all parks and biodiversity actions.

5.2.3 Parks and open spaces are a community resource that can be used for learning, for keeping people healthier, and making the City a more successful, safer, cleaner and greener place. The Strategy assists in engaging people locally and contributing to a more proactive and responsive modern local authority organisation. The implementation of the Parks Strategy can only be achieved through effective partnerships with all potential and existing stakeholders. This approach is seen very much as the way to move the management of parks forward in Birmingham.

## 5.3 Policy Context

5.3.1 The strategic planning policy context for the Parks Strategy is provided by a number of national, regional and local guidance which are summarised in the following paragraphs. **The Birmingham Plan 2005<sup>5</sup>** - Unitary Development Plan (UDP) details specific policies which relate to parks and open spaces in the City (see Appendix 1). The development plan provides a framework for environmental and economic change within the City and aims, amongst other matters, to promote good design. Open spaces and landscape are factors to be considered alongside other urban design considerations. The general aim is to develop an integrated and linked network of open space throughout the City including a range of open space

typologies. Policies for assessing open space, playing field and play area provision are currently based on quantitative standards although quality issues are acknowledged as an important factor. The Parks Strategy retains existing planning policies and standards as a basis for the planning, design and provision of parks and open spaces.

5.3.2 This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) builds on the Birmingham Plan 2005. The UDP is the sole statutory land use plan for Birmingham and contains both broad strategic policy and more detailed local planning policies.

5.3.3 Strategic Policy contained in the UDP includes policies aimed at protecting open space, and it sets standards against which existing provision will be measured. These are 2ha per 1000 population for public open space and public playing fields, and 1.2ha per 1000 population for public and private playing fields. They are based on the National Playing Field Association's **Six Acre Standard (NPFA standard)**, adapted to reflect the built up nature of Birmingham.

5.3.4 Information on existing provision of public open space across the City is available separately. The UDP should be referred to for all matters of general open space policy.

5.3.5 Public open space requirements for new residential development are contained in a draft Supplementary Planning Document entitled Public Open Space in New Residential Development<sup>5a</sup>.

5.3.6 Past practice has been to require public open space pro-rata in accordance with the 2ha per 1000 population standard. Children's play facilities are included in this requirement and are expected to be provided where there is no existing facility within walking distance of the new development. It has not been practice to require public open space on developments of less than 20 dwellings / units.

5.3.7 Past practice has been successful in raising awareness of the need for new public open space to serve the needs of people in new residential development. The majority of developers have co-operated with the City Council in negotiating new or improved public open space and / or children's play facilities.

5.3.8 The policies are in line with existing Government Guidance:

5.3.9 **Planning Policy Guidance 3 on Housing** refers to “Greening the residential environment” and specifically states that “local planning authorities should have clear policies for the protection and creation of open space and playing fields, and new housing developments should incorporate sufficient provision where such spaces are not already adequately provided within easy access of the new housing”. (“Easy access” is not defined in PPG3, but the UDP states that public open space and children’s play should be provided within 400m of all dwellings but taking into account physical barriers such as busy roads).

5.3.10 **Planning Policy Guidance 17 on Open Space, Sport and Recreation** gives advice on providing new, and protecting existing, open space. Whilst it does not prescribe national standards for provision of open space it requires local authorities to carry out assessments of need for open space, sport and recreation facilities within their area and to then use this information to guide policy and to determine planning applications. The Guidance recognises that these assessments will require time to prepare and provides guidance on how to deal with these planning applications in the absence of up to date assessments of need.

5.3.11 PPG17 also refers to the use of planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure the provision of public open space, recreational and other community facilities as part of new developments. This SPD is designed to fulfil the PPG17 requirement that local Plan policies make clear what types of development will give rise to such Section 106 agreements.

5.3.12 Other Government Guidance of relevance to the Strategy include **PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development, PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation and related Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and Their Impact with the Planning System, PPG 15 Historic Environment<sup>15</sup> and PPG 16 Archaeology<sup>16</sup>.**

5.3.13 **Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands: RSS11** was published in June 2004. Policy Q.E.4: Greenery, Urban Greenspace and Public Spaces says

that Local Authorities should carry out audits of provision and assessments of local need and develop strategies to ensure that there is adequate, accessible and high quality urban greenspace. The policy goes on to emphasise certain aspects. Of relevance to this SPD are the aims of improving the quality of public spaces, improving residential settings, improving accessibility and enhancing sports, playing fields and recreation grounds. The Strategy makes reference to Biodiversity Enhancement Areas which are to be implemented in the West Midlands area.

5.3.14 Also of relevance is Regulation 37 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 which requires Local Authorities to include policies in their planning documents that encourage “the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna”.

5.3.15 **The Urban White Paper, Our Towns and Cities: the future**, also refers to the benefits of well managed public open spaces and their contribution to enhancing our quality of life.

5.3.16 The DLTR published ‘**Green Spaces, Better Places**’ the Final Report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce in 2002. This promotes the positive benefits that can be derived from open space and covers recreation and health benefits together with funding issues.

5.3.17 **Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener<sup>17</sup>**. This document sets out the Government’s approach to making safer, cleaner, greener public spaces. It recognises the many examples of good practice are happening across the country but states that more needs to be done, especially in the most disadvantaged areas. The report represents the Government’s commitment to improving public space and presents the Government’s response to the Urban Taskforce report. One of the main recommendations of the report was the extension of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment’s role into the promotion of quality open space through the creation of CABE Space, which has since happened.

5.3.18 **Living Places: Caring for Quality<sup>18</sup>**. This document reviews activities which have a clear impact on the quality and management of external public space, and the roles of particular manager and stakeholders. The report then

focuses on the delivery of services and varying approaches taken from examples across the country. The report concludes by bringing together new strands of thinking with a view to providing a framework for questioning current practice. It strongly recommends a move towards a more integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to the effective management of public space in the future.

#### 5.3.19 The Nature Conservation Strategy for

**Birmingham**<sup>6</sup> provides Supplementary Planning Guidance for the protection and enhancement of the City's Nature Conservation resource and the engagement of people in that appreciation and process. The strategy utilises the Accessible Natural Greenspace approach promoted by Natural England<sup>19</sup>. The strategy also identifies those parts of the City which are particularly valuable from a nature conservation aspect, acknowledges and recognises the value of green corridors and networks, and includes many areas which form part of the City's open space system. The strategy establishes some significant principles. Critical Natural Capital relates to the sum of all the highest quality sites in the city, the strategy broadly acknowledges that this should be protected against development, as it cannot be re-created or effectively compensated for. Constant Natural Assets refers to the Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCS) upon which development would be resisted but accepted where necessary, with the loss effectively compensated for both financially and in replacement habitat. Wildlife Action Areas define themselves as being those parts of the city in which people cannot reach a site of quality within easy reach of their home, (ie. 400m). There are also clear aims to establish Local Nature Reserves.

5.3.20 **The Birmingham Economic Strategy** has some specific actions relating to the City's parks and green spaces. A specific action is to encourage the incorporation of green and open spaces in housing areas and improved accessibility to services, in order to create sustainable communities and enhance quality of life. There is also a specific action to secure commitment to and bring forward major landmark projects including the development of a new urban City Centre park.

5.3.21 Public open space provision must be considered as part of the overall design and layout of new development. It will be negotiated within the context of other SPG published, or to be published, by the City Council, including "**Places for Living**" (revised Design Guidance for New Residential Development), "**Conservation Strategy**", "**Sustainable Development**", "**Canals Action Plan**" and '**Mature Suburbs**' SPD.

#### 5.3.22 Making Greener Cities – A Practical Guide, Project URGE<sup>3</sup>.

The manual consists of a synthesis of work from across Europe. Specific tools have been developed during the project, which are designed for all practitioners and planners dealing with urban green spaces. The guide provides a toolbox for the analysis of the urban green structure for a whole city and for the evaluation of individual green spaces. As such the manual gives guidance on how to improve the condition and status of urban green spaces. The manual contains a good practice guide from 15 European cities together with visions for a green city of the tomorrow.

5.3.23 In addition, the 2002 Scrutiny Report on Birmingham Parks and Urban Green Space<sup>20</sup> has highlighted a range of issues which need to be addressed in the planning, design, maintenance, management and provision of open space. A comprehensive list of current issues is detailed below and have been addressed in the Parks Strategy:

- Improve the level of provision of good quality open space through the planning system
- Upgrade the quality of parks and open spaces
- Promote parks as a catalyst for urban regeneration
- Address many years of under investment and the effect on open space infrastructure and staff morale
- Address crime, community safety, security and anti-social behaviour
- Promote healthy living
- Encourage education and lifelong learning
- Foster social inclusion and improving access
- Develop effective methods of community consultation and partnerships
- Develop a diverse range of inclusive community events and activities
- Promote environmental sustainability and nature

- conservation
- Preserve Birmingham's cultural heritage
- Develop enhanced levels of tree maintenance
- Promote the return of park keepers
- Address the lack of management information

#### 5.4 Quantity and Quality Issues

5.4.1 Birmingham possesses some 3,200 hectares of public open space. The level of open space provision varies considerably across the city. However, some Wards in Birmingham still have not yet achieved the target level of provision of public open space of 2 hectares per 1,000 head of population, due to the built up nature of the City. Most Wards also fall short of the target level of provision of playing fields of 1.2 hectares per 1,000 head of population and the general quality of much of the public open space and playing fields is not good. The adjacent figure indicates the level of public open space provision on a Ward by Ward basis.

5.4.2 It is important to shift the strategic arguments about parks from crude statistical approaches to more specialist needs-based approaches. Demand assessments, therefore, are important in terms of evaluating the existing and potential need for open spaces and related facilities.

5.4.3 The issue of quality and quantity regarding the provision of public open space is the subject of an ongoing debate which requires careful consideration, as there are significant problems with the provision and distribution of public open space in many Wards throughout the city.

5.4.4 Understandably, in most areas people want to retain their public open space and playing fields. Community consultations have highlighted that small, local spaces are highly valued by residents. However, in some cases public open space may be poorly located, not readily accessible, of dubious quality, unsafe, poorly equipped and little used. In addition there are currently insufficient resources to improve the situation significantly in the foreseeable future.

5.4.5 Poor quality, peripheral open spaces can still be highly valued by local communities if there is no other form of provision. The value of open space therefore, needs to

be considered in the context of open space provision in the area, and the value which local communities place on them.

5.4.6 Serious consideration therefore needs to be given to ways and means of providing better quality, better equipped, better resourced, better used and more attractive public open space. In certain instances, newly created public open spaces have been poorly sited, particularly in Wards with low levels of public open space. This has led to maintenance and management problems. A more sustainable approach creating better sited areas of more usable open space needs to be adopted.

5.4.7 Existing open space is sometimes surrounded by inappropriate forms of development or placed at the back of properties with limited natural surveillance. This results in the public open space being little used and becoming very quickly run-down.

5.4.8 Public consultation has revealed concerns about the continued loss of open space, including playing pitches. This suggests that the current planning policies are not sufficiently robust to adequately protect this resource that local residents value so highly. These issues will need to be addressed through the Local Development Framework process.

5.4.9 Where there are shortfalls in open space provision, the City Council will work proactively to bring forward new areas of publicly accessible open space. Where the provision of new public open space is limited, the utilisation of existing areas of private open space for public use is to be pursued. The City Council will work closely with private landowners to achieve this.

5.4.10 New public open spaces need to be well located and designed if they are to contribute to improving the quality of life for a community. New public open space should be developed to be overlooked by housing and other forms of development with active frontages to provide the highest level of natural surveillance and safety for the users of such spaces. Where it proves difficult to bring forward good quality, well sited new public open space it is likely to be more effective to transfer the funding to upgrade existing, better sited and better used public open space. A standard assessment tool would help determine this on a case by case basis.



### Wards which achieve or exceed the UDP target for public open space (POS)

Ha/1000population



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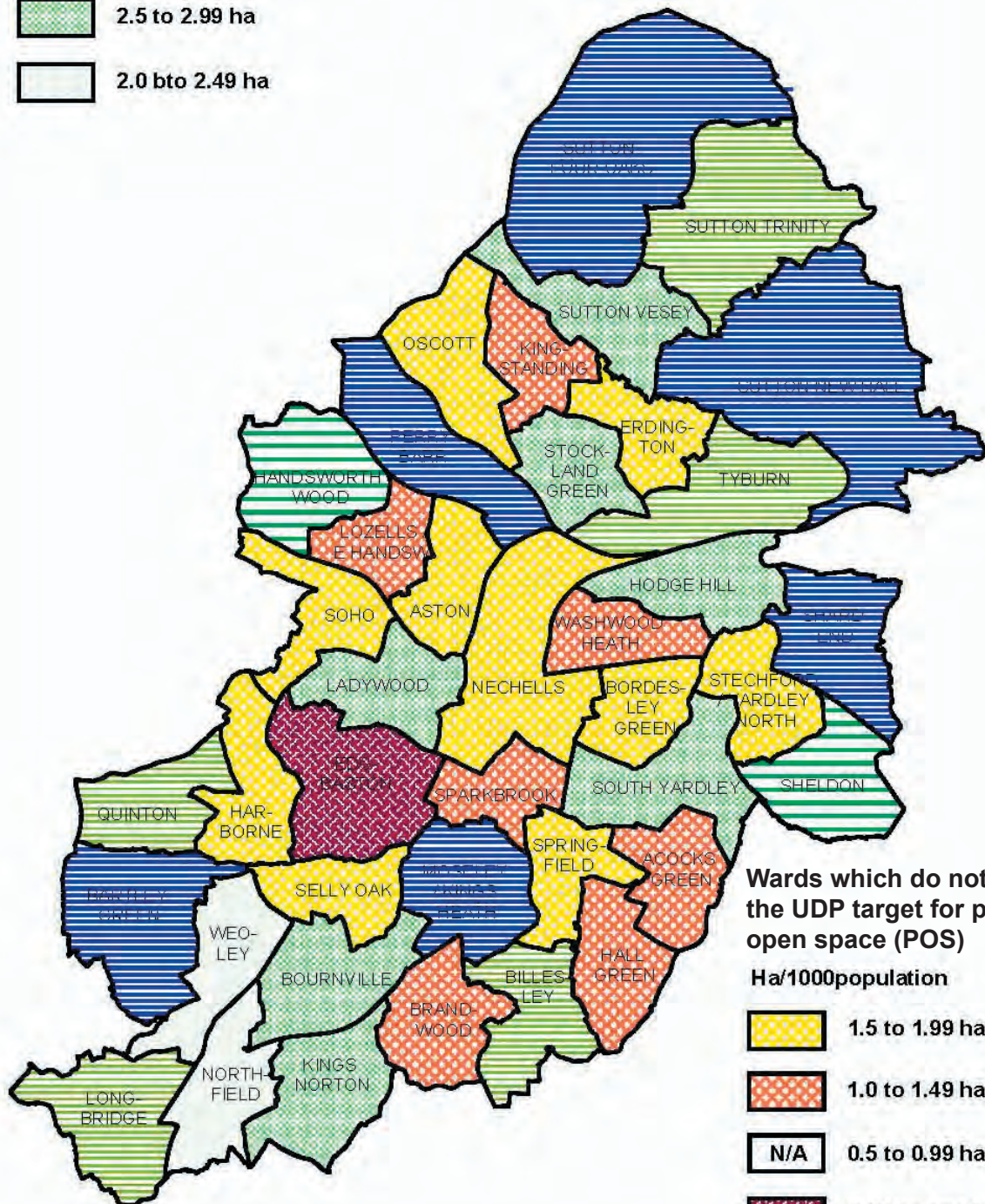


Figure 5.2: Public Open Space Provision Per Ward in Birmingham



*5.4.11* Comprehensive regeneration initiatives present an opportunity for more radical approaches to be considered, such as, the redistribution and redefinition of public open space. This redistribution can result in better physical relationships between private and public space. In exceptional circumstances this approach may result in lower levels of open space provision in order to improve the quality of retained public open space. However, it is always the intention to achieve the required quantity standard whilst also seeking to achieve a high level of quality which is sustainable for the foreseeable future.

*5.4.12* In order to achieve improvements and to provide quality open spaces it is crucial for the open space issues to be addressed at the earliest stage of the planning process. Development and all regeneration proposals should be assessed and developed in the context of the Constituency Asset Management Plans, the Birmingham Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (and other related strategies) and the associated Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans which have been produced.





*5.4.13* The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy could be further developed to form part of a comprehensive landscape public realm strategy for the City co-ordinating parks, streets, road corridors, wildlife corridors and all areas of public open space.

*5.4.14* In order for the intended planning process to be effective, there needs to be a visible connection between the Birmingham Plan 2005, the Community Strategy, the Asset Management Plans, the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, Constituency or Ward plans, neighbourhood plans, right through to individual site management plans. Constituencies, Wards and Neighbourhoods are therefore encouraged to try to devise this additional layer of local detail below the strategic plan, that will help to deliver real tangible changes and improvements for local communities and individual site users.

*5.4.15* The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy document will inform the formulation of the City Council's Development Plan Documents, which will ultimately replace the Birmingham Plan 2005. As part of this new process the City Council will produce a statement of community consultation. This statement should refer to the need to review the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy in 2011.

*5.4.16* Community consultation has revealed that quantity is an equally important consideration to quality, which highlights the need for protection. Local communities have expressed that there should be no net loss of open space. This desire should be reflected in future Development Plan Documents and in the formulation of locally based standards. The comprehensive site assessment tool, which is discussed later, will address strategic provision and will be developed with community groups.

## **5.5 Parks as a Catalyst for Urban Regeneration**

*5.5.1* Good quality open space contributes to the overall social, economic and environmental quality of urban regeneration and the general appeal of neighbourhoods. It helps to attract new businesses and investment thereby creating new jobs and increased property rentals and values. Good quality open space also plays a role in attracting a quality workforce. The upgrading of open spaces and the public realm in general are acknowledged as having contributed significantly to the urban renaissance of our cities in this country and right across Europe, over the past decade.





5.5.2 New and regenerated parks and green spaces, which are appropriately planned and managed, have proven to be a very successful means of regenerating inner city areas, such as Attwood Green, Farm Park and the proposed new City Centre Park in Eastside. The Parks Strategy will be the means to do the same for all of Birmingham's communities over the long term.

5.5.3 The City Council aims to ensure parks are at the centre of social regeneration strategies and will devise park regeneration schemes and funding packages capable of delivering broader urban regeneration aims and objectives in terms of environmental improvement, community safety, community use/involvement and education. Park schemes can play a vital role in the fight against crime, as a park project can play a role in recovering a sense of community ownership, cohesion and pride.

### Policy 1 Planning and Regeneration

The City Council will implement the policies relating to open space as stated in the Birmingham Plan 2005 which seek to protect and improve open spaces and the open space network.

In addition the City Council will:-

- Seek to address shortfalls in public open space and playing pitch provision, and access to it, whilst acknowledging that addressing deficiency is difficult due to the built up nature of the environment
- Continue the open space audit process to provide updated information on all public and publicly accessible private open space
- Continue to assess and review the need for open space and will formulate locally based standards appropriate to Birmingham
- Continue to assess and review the provision of accessible natural greenspace and seek to identify any shortfalls
- Seek to provide an area of safe, attractive and useable public open space, accessible to all sectors of the community within reasonable walking distance (400m) of all dwellings
- Ensure that open space provision is considered early in the development process and in development briefs and urban design frameworks
- Ensure that parks are at the centre of social, economic and environmental regeneration strategies
- Rationalise open space only in exceptional circumstances in the context of comprehensive regeneration and to significantly improve the quality of open space provision
- Work closely with private landowners to achieve the utilisation of existing areas of private open space for public use





# achieving quality in open space management



# 6 Achieving Quality in Open Space Management.

## 6.1 The Parks Management Service

6.1.1 Accessibility and quantity are delivered and protected primarily by the planning system, but are sustained by good management and maintenance.

6.1.2 The City Council provides a comprehensive design, management and landscape development service relating to the City Council's public open spaces. The Council are responsible for the overall delivery of the management and maintenance of parks and open spaces throughout the City, including Country Park management.

6.1.3 In addition to a central parks management team and the centrally based Landscape Practice Group, there are locally responsive teams which deliver services at a Constituency level. The services available at a Constituency level are:- a Constituency Parks Manager, a Parks Development Officer, Tree and Allotment Officers, a Playground Services Manager and the Birmingham Parks Ranger Service.

6.1.4 The Constituency Parks Manager (CPM) is supported by a Parks Development Officer (PDO), who are both very accessible to representatives of the community. This is either through "Friends of Parks Groups", Residents Associations, Neighbourhood Forums, Ward Advisory Boards, Police, Local Members, other City Council Departments or, most importantly, through ad – hoc enquiries from individual parks users. They also carry out an equally important role of supervising the Horticultural Grounds Maintenance Contract on behalf of all of the City Council Departments. The continued fostering of this relationship between the Parks Managers team and the community is recognised in the partnership approach they have taken in the joint bidding and overall delivery of funding schemes such as Single Regeneration Budget, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and Lottery funding.

6.1.5 The Grounds Maintenance Service incorporates the horticultural maintenance of Birmingham's parks and open spaces, highways, school grounds, social services land, housing land, cemeteries and sports grounds. Since the year 2000, five grounds maintenance and tree specialist service providers have provided this service, operating to the new principles of 'Best-Value'.

6.1.6 A reduction in resources has been a major issue for Birmingham's parks since the 1970s. The introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the 1980s made price the primary measure when letting grounds maintenance contracts. This has led to round upon round of budget cuts and an associated decline in standards, expectations and the skills requirements of the workforce.

6.1.7 The Best Value Review and Audit Commission Inspectors Report<sup>21</sup> assessed the Parks, Sports and Events Service as 'providing a good 2 star service that will probably improve'. Within the report a number of changes





are proposed to the management of parks in Birmingham in order to address the decline in the overall infrastructure of parks and open spaces as a result of under investment. This has been endorsed through a Regular Performance Assessment (RPA) of Cultural Services, undertaken by the Audit Commission in 2004<sup>22</sup>; the overall score was again 2 star- good service, likely to improve.

**6.1.8** The Best Value Review and Audit Commission Inspectors Report<sup>21</sup> highlighted a number of issues in Birmingham. One of these major issues was fragmented funding of open space management and management responsibility. The similar recommendation was that of creating a single 'green-estate' budget and single portfolio responsibility. This is to be reviewed in the medium term for Birmingham. One conclusion that is achievable in the short-term is absolute clarity over responsibilities, and to ensure budgetary commitments each year towards green-space management, perhaps through a joint report mechanism.

**6.1.9** One other key conclusion was the loss of human resource from the local authority run parks services, and the removal of staff from sites replaced by 'contractual' labour and performance systems that were only 'task-orientated'. A lot of community links have been broken as a result. Now partner organisations are often better placed to address this gap, rather than local authority staff. The new 'Best-Value' approach encourages such partnerships.

## **6.2 Quality Standards**

**6.2.1** The quality of park management is a critical factor in creating clean, green and safe parks and open spaces. Litter and graffiti are significant problems in many areas and their immediate removal is a necessary measure in order to maintain a positive image.

**6.2.2** The performance of grounds maintenance contractors is monitored according to Birmingham City Council's specification for grounds maintenance. Performance is also measured against the City Council's core standards and the performance criteria of the Green Flag Award.

**6.2.3** Following on from the Best Value Review undertaken by the Parks Service in 2001 all Ranger sites are required

to produce an Annual Performance Management Plan. This document sets specific (SMART) objectives for the coming year and reports back on the success of the previous years targets. Constituency Park Managers also produce an annual grounds maintenance report on a Ward by Ward basis.

**6.2.3** The outcome of the Leisure, Sport & Culture Scrutiny Committee overview of the current arrangements for grounds maintenance grass cutting and weed control services by the three Service Provider Partners and the arrangements for the new contracts which expire in 2008 will also be taken into account in terms of how those services core standards are delivered to the Constituencies through Service Level Agreements and how they are delivered to the City Council's highways, housing, schools, cemeteries and other Council owned areas.

### **Policy 2 Maintenance Standards**

The City Council is committed to improving maintenance standards across all parks and open spaces.

The City Council will:-

- Ensure that all parks and open spaces meet the City Council's core standards
- Ensure that one new park each year is submitted for the Green Flag Award or similar award
- Ensure that at least one Green Flag Award or similar award is sustained per Constituency

## **6.3 Community Consultation**

**6.3.1** The community consultation findings highlight the central role of communities in parks and open space regeneration. Consultation work over the past decade has been beneficial for everyone involved and should be continued and developed in an appropriate manner to underpin the planning, design, maintenance and management of all parks and open spaces. This process of consultation needs to continue in order to develop peoples' visions for the sites they value.

**6.3.2** The new Council has 120 Ward Members all committed to the new Localisation and Devolution agenda,



which by definition seeks to bring more influence and a greater role for Members at the Ward and Constituency level. It is proposed that from the inception of the strategy, each member becomes a 'champion' for their local park. From this point on it will be vital that Members are involved at the very outset of park regeneration initiatives in order to influence the scheme locally. Their role as mediator, able to talk through changes with local people, seeking to avoid confusion and the possibility of antagonistic resistance. They can act as a supporting voice for local communities or the park's Friends group. A role which would be much valued.

**6.3.3** The localisation of Council services and the devolution of political accountability to the Ward and Constituency level provide a forum through which change to parks can be instituted. Local decision making is essential to capture local enthusiasm, knowledge and history. Through management in partnership with the community it is hoped that local concerns can be addressed, so helping to bring back a sense of pride and ownership for people's local parks and the wider neighbourhood.

**6.3.4** The City Council aims to become even more skilled at resolving conflicts of interest and dealing with unrealistic expectations where they may arise. Community consultation has identified two key cases of conflicting interest. Firstly, the needs of young people versus the concerns of older community groups; one of the major factors related to this is that all polls suggest that by far the largest user groups are young people, but community groups tend to be represented by older members of society, so getting a balanced view is inherently difficult. Secondly, there are major concerns about negative types of open space use and general anti-social behaviour in parks and open spaces; as stated elsewhere this is often identified as the primary barrier to use.

**6.3.5** Members and officers need to listen to, and work through issues fully with local communities. This will allow communities time to gain the required confidence to express opinions on proposals so that inappropriate decisions are avoided whereby certain stakeholders lose out. The European research project, EU-Project 'URGE' drew a very significant recommendation in this regard, to adopt this open approach to local engagement, as surprisingly this is not a common practice across Europe.

**6.3.6** In order to continue to monitor community views relating to open space the City Council will develop a rolling programme of research to sample public opinion and monitor park use, visitor attitudes and needs.

### **Policy 3 Community Consultation**

The City Council is committed to fully consult the local community in relation to the planning, design, management, maintenance and provision of parks

The City Council will:-

- Fully consult the local community when delivering park improvement projects
- Develop a rolling programme of market research to sample public opinion and monitor park use, visitor attitudes, user needs and other measurable benefits
- Continue the annual MORI Leisure poll relating to all the Park's Services
- Use the internet as a means to share information and promote services and events
- Work in association with other City Council departments and external agencies and partners to involve hard to reach groups in future consultations
- Increase customer satisfaction and levels of use within all Birmingham parks in line with national trends

## **6.4 Partnerships and Friends Groups**

**6.4.1** The comprehensive renovation of parks and open spaces in Birmingham can only be delivered by the City Council in partnership with a range of different organisations and agencies.

**6.4.2** Birmingham City Council has successfully worked with a range of different partners and nationally registered environmental charities, such as the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust, Groundwork Birmingham and Solihull, CSV Environment, Birmingham Civic Society and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), who are able to provide additional resources in the field of community and environmental regeneration. They and other smaller such charities and agencies are active in the city and offer a potential avenue for delivering environmental projects on

the ground in close co-operation with local communities. Neighbourhood forums and other trusts are also important partners, alongside private sector companies. The City Council will commit through this strategy to extend the range of working partners and stakeholder organisations to deliver park improvements.

**6.4.3** As part of the Best Value grounds maintenance contracts all 5 of the service providers employed by the City are committed to the development of a partnership approach that facilitates the delivery of the grounds maintenance service that meets the needs of the City Council and its people. Through this strategy the Council will seek a pledge from each of its external service provider partners, formally recognised through their Contract Documentation, to endorse the Strategy and agree to work to its aims and objectives.

**6.4.4** Growing interest has been expressed in setting up “Friends of Parks Groups” for the many parks across the city. Friends Groups combined with Consultative Steering Committees are already established for all the city’s major parks and country parks. A simpler model would be appropriate for more local sites. A network of “Friends Groups” called the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) has been set up to exchange ideas and good practice.

**6.4.5** It is intended to organise an annual conference supported by the City Council in association with Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums. These groups are supported by Parks and Ranger Service staff. The role of Parks Staff needs to adapt to provide appropriate support to further embrace aspects of community engagement, security, sports, youth and play development.



**6.4.6** Partnership working is essential if sites with strategic significance, such as Sandwell Valley, are to be managed comprehensively. In particular, it is essential that adjacent local authorities and partners work closely together to agreed common objectives eg Project Kingfisher, River Cole.

**6.4.7** The City Council will explore how a Member-led partnership body can be created for Parks and Open Spaces that would seek to mimic the successful and well-established model of the Nature Conservation Policy Group. This broad partnership body was established following the adoption of the Birmingham Nature Conservation Strategy to oversee its implementation. A similar body would ensure the implementation of all the policies contained within this strategy, and in particular monitor progress on the Constituency based annual Parks & Open Space action plans.

#### **Policy 4 Partnerships and Friends Groups**

The City Council are committed to working in partnership with the local community, local businesses, Parks Friends Groups, all agencies, and other organisations in the planning, design, maintenance, management and provision of public open space.

The City Council will:-

- Seek to support the development of Friends of Parks Groups to provide a comprehensive network
- Support the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum
- Support the Birmingham Trees for Life initiative in conjunction with the Birmingham Civic Society
- The City Council will work closely with key stakeholders and local interest groups to develop and support both ‘Friends’ Groups and Consultative Steering Committees
- Further develop partnership working arrangements with voluntary organisations, the private sector and other external agencies and partners
- Further develop partnership agreements with Grounds Maintenance Service Providers
- Will work closely with other local authorities to develop and manage strategic linkages
- The City Council will explore how to create a parks orientated Member-led partnership body.

## 6.5 Site Management Plans

6.5.1 From every perspective, the importance of sites having their own management plan is becoming increasingly apparent. What has been proven time and again is that this documented proof of a vision for a site that is jointly 'owned' by all stakeholders, is often the key requirement for any funding body or agency. To help support this fact and to offer some guidance and set a universal benchmark, CABE Space have published a recommended version, which Birmingham Parks Services are currently testing, in combination with a nationally adopted software package for country parks, which together should provide a single standard to be adopted. The level of detail associated with a management plan will vary according to the size and complexity of issues relating to the open space.

6.5.2 For the purposes of the Park Strategy the aim of Birmingham Council would be that a rolling programme of open space management plans is commenced over the lifetime of the strategy. It is intended to produce a management plan for the agreed target sites, with 11 management plans produced per year.

6.5.3 The Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan for Birmingham has a set of sustainability Indicators which are monitored annually. One of these indicators is to check how many sites of quality for nature conservation have an 'active' management plan in place. Through this strategy the Parks Service will extend this city indicator to measure how many sites over the 10 -15 year period, have got such 'active' site management plans in place.

6.5.4 Local people want to be involved in developing the schedule of works for their particular site. Management plans for individual parks need to be produced with local communities, setting out the approach to future design and management. The site manager or Constituency Park Manager will have ultimate responsibility for implementation. The role of existing parks staff will need to develop to embrace other activities such as community and cultural engagement, sports and healthy living, nature conservation, environmental awareness, youth and play development. In this way parks can be used to host a range of activities in response to local community demand.

6.5.5 Training and support will be offered to all Friends Groups and facilitating organisations, voluntary sector agencies, operating in Birmingham, in order to ensure there is a consistent application of a standard management plan model.

6.5.6 A best-practice model is one that is capable of applying to any site and be prepared at any scale or level, from a few pages to a substantial book, appropriate to the site in question. What is essential is that these documents serve as a mechanism to capture local knowledge, points of interest and ideas which demonstrate the level of support and commitment there is to the particular park. The management plans will need to be reviewed regularly and kept up to date in order to maintain their effectiveness.

6.5.7 The landscape of parks are not static and require constantly evolving management if piecemeal changes are to be avoided. The aim of management plans is to allow a more co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to be adopted. Management plans should be flexible and act as a guide to how change should be made. Management plans should address the key issues which relate to an open space and should provide a mechanism for discussing and resolving conflicts. The management plan should identify appropriate locations for introducing new elements and provide a programme for delivering improvements.

### Policy 5 Site Management Plans

The City Council will implement a programme of management plan production for all priority parks

The City Council will:-

- Identify with local groups which parks require draft management plans and agree their timescales for implementation
- Develop a set of SMART objectives for each management plan, by local agreement and consultation
- Formulate and trial agreements between the City Council Parks Management, Grounds Maintenance Service Providers and Friends Groups to develop and monitor management plans.
- Adopt the principle of commissioning a management plan and sketch masterplan, with local consultation, prior to the implementation of each major park refurbishment project.



## 6.6 The Importance of Design

**6.6.1** Government guidance in the form of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce<sup>2</sup> report places great importance on the role of design in the provision of quality parks. Good practice has highlighted the role of landscape architects in green space planning. The greater emphasis on design is a significant opportunity to promote parks, recreation grounds, open spaces and help protect, promote and enhance the important areas of semi-natural green space, in the city. Design guidance is needed to enhance the standards of urban design adjacent to open spaces.

**6.6.2** Good design should not only resolve functional issues but also inspire a creative solution to the treatment of outdoor spaces. Good designs should aim to promote local distinctiveness, address issues of community safety, and provide solutions which benefit the local community. Indeed, the involvement of the community in the design process is critical in order for a sense of local ownership to be created. It is essential that adjacent developments overlook areas of open space and follow guidance contained in Birmingham City Council design guidance 'Places for Living'<sup>23</sup> and 'Places for All'<sup>24</sup>.

### Policy 6 The Importance of Design

The City Council is committed to a high standard of design for parks and developments which relate to parks.

The City Council will:-

- Demand a high standard and environmentally sensitive design from developers through the planning system
- Ensure a positive relationship of new built form to open space and existing landscape features
- Involve the local community in the design of parks and park facilities
- Address and prioritise community safety issues
- Respect and seek to celebrate the local context and landscape character
- Produce sustainable design guidance for development in relation to open space
- Work in partnership with other agencies in the enhancement of Birmingham's parks and open spaces.

'Ordinary people, as well as many professionals, recognise that design often lies at the heart of what makes a successful urban green space. Design is also a key part of tackling many of the barriers to use of urban green spaces. It is not just a one-off thing that happens when a new park or green space is created, but an attitude of mind and an approach to solving problems that should also be an integral part of the ongoing management of urban green spaces (in the same way that thinking about management should also be a key part of the design process)'.<sup>2</sup>





## 6.7 Crime, Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour

6.7.1 Consultations that have been carried out for the Parks Strategy reveal that the main issue to be addressed is that of community safety and the fear of crime. This is repeatedly stated as being a key barrier to use, across all age groups, social classes and gender groups. People generally do not feel safe in parks. They repeatedly tell us of how they 'judge' the signs of a perceived threat such as high levels of anti-social behaviour, vandalism, graffiti, intimidation, theft, robbery, prostitution, drug use, joy riding and dumping of stolen vehicles, fly tipping, begging, busking and rough sleeping. Other problems include the use of parks by travellers, drinking areas, gay "cruising areas". Crime rates in Birmingham vary on a Ward by Ward basis. This is both a national and international problem of urban living, it is in no way confined to Birmingham.

6.7.2 There is a clear desire amongst local people to have access to safe, good quality open space rather than have large areas of poor quality open space which appear poorly cared for and are little used. Feedback from residents who live in such areas tell us of how 'powerless' they feel to have any voice or say over the management of these areas. This creates a lack of ownership, with no-one appearing 'accountable' for their condition or tackling their mis-use. There have been several occasions where the police have had to intervene, as residents have chosen to take matters into their own hands to 'deal' with repeat offenders. This clearly represents a 'failure' for all the authorities involved in their ability to work together to tackle these issues.

6.7.3 There are a range of regional and national strategies related to crime and community safety which affect Birmingham. These strategies promote inter agency working in order to tackle crime in a comprehensive manner. In addition to the on site Ranger staff and the mobile Ranger Patrol, there are a range of service providers who can work together to combat such problems which includes various City Council Departments, West Midlands Police, the Probation Service, local communities and special interest organisations including volunteers. Police support and involvement in parks development schemes has been extremely helpful and will continue to be developed. Liaison with the Police Architectural Liaison Officers concerning the



'Secure by Design'<sup>25</sup> scheme that the police promote has further helped to reduce vandalism and other anti-social activities.

6.7.4 Community 'ownership' of parks is an essential part of addressing community safety. This is particularly important in terms of local youth problems and anti-social behaviour. Community involvement is necessary in both the design and on-going management of parks, especially through the setting up of Neighbourhood Watch schemes and Park Watch schemes (such as Cabe Space 'Parkforce'). This will enable on site staff and park users to work in partnership with the local Police.

6.7.5 A review of security arrangements in parks, including byelaws, is to be implemented and a strategy for increasing safety and security in parks developed. The City Council is to implement design proposals which address community safety and fear of crime and will upgrade and repair park facilities and buildings to deter crime and vandalism.

6.7.6 It is generally accepted that increased positive use of parks reduces crime and anti-social behaviour within parks. Cycles of negative site use and abuse have become so entrenched in some places that local communities have asked for them to be closed and developed for something else. These attitudes threaten the very existence of some of the City's existing sites and highlight the need for a comprehensive quality audit to ascertain which sites are needed and which sites could perhaps be better developed for other purposes.

6.7.7 Park management must address community safety issues as a priority. It is reasonable to assume that through encouraging greater numbers of people into parks and other public open spaces, the opportunity for anti-social behaviour to occur can be significantly minimised. This can be achieved through careful design and through community events and increased Ranger-led activities.

6.7.8 The approach taken to grounds maintenance service delivery has the potential to change through the devolution process. The City Council is set to introduce a more comprehensive and co-ordinated Neighbourhood Management approach to tackling the public realm, including community safety, at an increasingly local level in order to create a safer, cleaner and greener environment.

## Policy 7 Crime, community safety and anti-social behaviour

The City Council is committed to address and prioritise issues of community safety in parks and open spaces.

The City Council will:-

- Implement design proposals arrived at through extensive consultation, that seek to address all community safety fears, and encourage community ownership.
- Continue to develop both locally based and citywide Community Safety Partnerships with all the relevant partners such as West Midlands Police, the Probation Service, local groups and other agencies; to work together to tackle crime and people's fear of crime.
- Encourage and promote 'Neighbourhood and Park Watch' schemes
- Continue with a rolling programme of rationalisation and upgrade to all park facilities and buildings to deter crime and incidents of vandalism
- Review security arrangements in parks, including byelaws
- Develop a strategy for increasing safety and security in parks, including reviewing the implications for Neighbourhood Management.
- Address 'out of hours' security issues through the Parks Patrol service, and where required, the appointment of night time security officers and the installation of lighting and CCTV systems.

## 6.8 Site Based Staff

6.8.1 Following a decline in park keeper numbers there are growing demands for the return of Park Keepers throughout Birmingham to provide an approachable and authoritative presence on sites to help reduce anti-social behaviour and allay concerns for personal and community safety. The visible presence of a Park Keeper, Ranger, or other site dedicated staff, is a top priority with many people in Birmingham. Stakeholders ask that Park Keepers are able to provide an immediate response and undertake small tasks, such as repairs, litter clearance, or other tasks requiring an immediate or localised response.





*6.8.2* The provision of grounds maintenance services has changed in emphasis under the principles within Best Value. The City Council is aiming to introduce a rolling programme of full time Park Keeper provision and summer time Assistant Park Keepers in order to provide a more permanent staff presence. This is to work in association with dedicated grounds maintenance teams in a number of the larger parks. The Ranger Service has provided an on site presence at country parks for over 15 years.

*6.8.3* The future role of Park Keepers will include grounds maintenance, community development and site security to provide an immediate response to site issues. This role is to be complementary to, but distinct from, that of the Ranger Service and the dedicated grounds maintenance teams. Rangers will continue to cover education, conservation and community engagement objectives.

### **Policy 8 Site Based Staff**

The City Council is committed to the reintroduction of site based staff and park keepers in response to community demand.

The City Council will:-

- Continue with the rolling programme of introducing and supporting dedicated site staff, in liaison with partner organisations
- Ensure that service providers work towards clustering sites in terms of grounds maintenance teams to provide continuity of staff on the same sites.
- Introduce clearer arrangements and greater recognition for volunteering across all parks and open spaces, with a view to safely increasing the opportunities for and the levels of public participation.

## **6.9 Transport, Car Parking, Walking and Cycling**

*6.9.1* Birmingham's Transport Strategy<sup>26</sup> highlights rising levels of private car use and ownership as well as increasing levels of commuting into Birmingham from outside the City boundaries. The strategy highlights a general trend of outward-migration of affluent households from the more deprived Wards which are being replaced by less affluent households. In the most deprived Birmingham Wards, levels of car ownership were the lowest, unemployment levels the highest, and community safety problems the worst. Consequently, in terms of the parks provision, it is vital that residents in Wards where deprivation is high have adequate access to local, high quality park facilities. Birmingham's Cycling<sup>27</sup> and Walking Strategies<sup>28</sup> also highlight the need to reduce existing levels of private car use through the provision of an alternative network of walking and cycling routes. The City Council has published cycling and walking maps in 2006. The City Council will produce plans to promote cycling and walking trails within and between parks, incorporating leaflets and signage.

*6.9.2* Many of Birmingham's parks and open spaces form part of this cycling and walking network and those strategies aim to extend this network over the next few years. Related strategies, such as the 'Safer Routes to School' scheme, encourage children to walk to school more safely through the implementation of traffic calming schemes and the use of the 'walking bus' initiative where children can walk together in groups with parental help.

*6.9.3* The promotion of cycling and walking also aims to address health issues, in particular, health problems associated with a lack of exercise. This activity, therefore, links closely with the Birmingham Sports and Physical Activities Strategy and the Walk 2000 initiative (see 6.14). The Ranger Service have appointed a ranger to promote the River Rea Cycle Route and to encourage use of the corridor by cyclists and pedestrians. The City Council will continue to link parks into the strategic cycle and footpath networks, provide cycle parking facilities in parks and play areas, and promote the use of routes through Ranger activities. Where appropriate, byelaws will be revised to encourage cycling.



6.9.4 The Birmingham Plan 2005<sup>5</sup> also seeks to promote urban greenways through the utilisation of canals and the open space network. Canals are important open spaces. Through the network of canal towpaths, they make a significant contribution to the cycle and footpath network, and offer key transport and recreational links. This policy also seeks to preserve and protect wildlife corridors. The City Council is also producing a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' which is to be produced by 2007. An assessment stage is currently being carried out analysing the quality and condition of routes and existing levels of usage in order to understand how the network currently performs. The improvement plan is linked into the local transport plan and emphasises the importance of the network and linkages and the role of rights of way in relationship to local services. The City Council will work with access, walking and cycling fora to deliver these strategies.

6.9.5 Car parking is an important issue in many parks which needs to be addressed. This is a particularly important issue for events in parks which can attract a large number of visitors from around the region. In order to encourage forms of transport other than the car, the City Council has published a 'Parks by Bus' leaflet which not only encourages visitors to use public transport but also promotes the parks of Birmingham to a wider audience. As part of any future development proposals parking and access matters should be carefully considered. Ways and means of providing adequate off-street parking and improved access for car and coach borne visitors to parks and playing fields shall be sought.

6.9.6 Government guidance such as 'By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice'<sup>29</sup> has highlighted the need to develop more pedestrian friendly streets. The Home Zone approach aims to reduce the dominance and speed of cars in residential areas through environmental traffic calming and are to be encouraged in residential areas to provide safer places for children to play.

### **Policy 9 Transport, Car Parking, Walking and Cycling**

The City Council will continue to promote sustainable forms of transport.

The City Council will:-

- Continue to prioritise the linking of all parks and open spaces into the strategic cycle and footpath networks
- Provide safe and secure cycle parking facilities in all parks and play areas
- Continue to promote the 'Parks by Bus' initiative and the Walk 2000 initiative
- Address car parking issues through facility improvement and promoting alternative modes of transport.

## 6.10 Fostering Social Inclusion and Improving Access to Facilities

6.10.1 The City's strategies related to social inclusion are currently being consolidated through the Birmingham Citizen's Constitution. In certain parks and open spaces, particularly in inner city areas, there are real issues in terms of accessibility and usage. In some areas there appear to be very low levels of use by specific groups which include women, elderly people, young children and people with disabilities. Provision of appropriate facilities within parks and open spaces should address the needs of all sectors of the community of all ages.

6.10.2 A current priority would appear to be for young people in the age range 12-18 in particular. It would be sensible to develop and encourage both organised and less formal activities for this age group, in order to draw more people into such spaces and thus develop the confidence in all sectors of the community. This issue has successfully been addressed in some parks by the provision of appropriately sited youth shelters and multi-use games areas. Where such facilities have been introduced they have reduced the inappropriate use of younger children's play areas and provided more suitable gathering points for young people. Park staff also need to tackle anti-social behaviour directly, in partnership with the Police, where it occurs.

6.10.3 The needs of the elderly are often overlooked, and can be particularly excluded through fears of personal security. Facilities which have been suggested through consultation include seating, toilets and attractive areas to sit. Safety is a key issue and contact numbers need to be provided. The quality of the environment is paramount alongside cleanliness. The provision of guided walks is a positive measure to involve this user group. This is a sector that is growing nationally and therefore, provision will be increasingly important.

6.10.4 In addition to promoting parks for all users, the City Council will develop activities, programmes and events aimed at specific cultural groups. It will also ensure design and management proposals improve access to all, and are sensitive to the requirements of different cultural groups.

6.10.5 The City Council will aim to ensure that new and existing facilities are accessible to people with disabilities in line with the Disability Discrimination Act. It will develop links with organisations such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the Royal National Institute for the Deaf to increase access to a greater range of users. In particular, play areas will include equipment which is accessible to disabled children. Through this strategy the City Council will place this challenge before all national playground equipment manufacturers to help address this group of users' needs.

### Policy 10 Fostering Social Inclusion and Improving Access to Facilities

The City Council is committed to ensuring access to its facilities for all residents.

The City Council will:-

- Ensure that all park facilities (eg play areas, entrances) are accessible and welcoming to all, especially those people with disabilities, to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Establish targeted consultation user- groups to evaluate parks in terms of access to disadvantaged people (eg disabled, ethnic groups, Asylum Seekers/ Newly Arrived people).
- Continue to work with specialist consultees and access organisations, to ensure maximum progress and momentum is maintained in addressing all aspects of equalities
- Ensure design and management proposals respond to and celebrate cultural requirements and diversity.
- Ensure all new play areas contain at least one piece of equipment fully accessible to children with a disability, and all play areas
- Continue to develop in partnership with others, activities, programmes and events aimed at including specific targeted disadvantaged groups.
- Seek to establish a Young Peoples Parks Forum
- Provide more facilities which address the needs of the elderly





**6.11 Environmental Sustainability and Nature Conservation**

6.11.1 Natural England<sup>19</sup> state that accessible natural greenspaces have an important contribution to make to the quality of the environment and to quality of life in urban areas. Such sites are valued by the community, provide important refuges for wildlife in otherwise impoverished areas, and are beneficial to public health and wellbeing. The provision of natural areas should be considered as part of a balanced policy to ensure that local communities have access to an appropriate mix of greenspaces providing for a range of recreational needs.



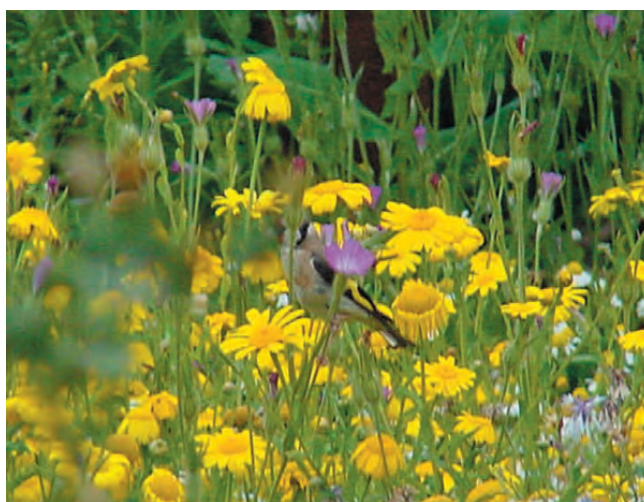




6.11.2 Birmingham is fortunate to have a network of accessible natural green spaces, watercourses and canals which benefit both people and wildlife. Parks, recreation grounds and other open spaces are recognised in the Biodiversity Action Plan as a vital urban habitat in their own right which support the City's flora and fauna. Together with domestic gardens and vacant development sites across the City, they represent a vital ingredient for local biodiversity. The importance of nature conservation is not just about conserving a habitat for flora and fauna, but also for the benefit of people who seek contact with nature. These areas of natural green space offer a refuge that is both attractive to wildlife and people, with some such sites statutorily protected as National Nature Reserves (NNR), Local Nature Reserves (LNR) Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).



6.11.3 Birmingham has some very important semi-natural sites, including Sutton Park which is England's only urban National Nature Reserves, most of which is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Other parks are designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, and many as Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation. All parkland in the city contributes to the background capacity of the city to support wildlife. This Strategy seeks to protect, promote and enhance the biodiversity potential of all these spaces.



6.11.4 A comprehensive Nature Conservation Strategy<sup>6</sup> was prepared and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance for the City in 1997. The strategy was based on a major review of sites, and uses legislative and planning guidelines to conserve and protect designated sites of nature conservation importance. The Strategy identifies those parts of the City which are particularly valuable from a nature conservation aspect, acknowledges and recognises the value of green corridors and open space networks. Policies aim to ensure that local biodiversity objectives, appropriate site management and adequate public access are achieved. It establishes zones for improvement (Wildlife Action Areas) and also encourages public awareness and appreciation of wildlife sites and community involvement and empowerment in managing sites. It seeks to establish greater interaction between schools and their local environment. The Birmingham Parks Ranger Service plays a key role in delivering the Strategy. The Nature Conservation







Strategy is due for review and renewal in 2007, and to facilitate this, an annual programme of ecological surveys of Sites of Quality commenced in 2004.

6.11.5 Other key documents are the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Birmingham and the Black Country (2000-2005)<sup>10</sup>, the Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2000-2005<sup>9</sup>. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan contains a Habitat Action Plan for Parks and Open Spaces, and several other action plans with direct relevance to parks and open space. Local biodiversity information is maintained in the EcoRecord, the ecological database for Birmingham and the Black Country.

6.11.6 The role of parks and green spaces for air cleansing and anti-pollution is mentioned in a number of strategies, and research studies, such as the Birmingham Transport Strategy<sup>26</sup> and the Nature Conservation Strategy and the 'Trees & Sustainable Urban Air Quality' study<sup>30</sup>. The Birmingham Plan<sup>5</sup> also includes reference to this continuous background benefit of sites.

6.11.7 The geology and geomorphology of the City's parks and open spaces is also of relevance. Some open space sites are important for their geology, and offer opportunities for the study of geology and geological processes.

6.11.8 In addition to promoting biodiversity, parks and other green spaces also have a broader sustainability role by promoting cycling and walking, good practice in relation to park building management and recycling. The local sourcing of materials and labour is also encouraged. The recycling of materials is to be promoted, such as green waste, timber and soils. Consideration should also be given to develop the potential for timber and biofuel production from coppiced woodlands in appropriate locations.

6.11.9 Good practice in parks management can also include grey water recycling, rainfall harvesting, water

collection and storage. Parks and open spaces can also be an important element in the implementation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and groundwater protection schemes. The 3-year Sustainable Management of Urban Rivers and Floodplains (SMURF) project highlighted the contribution open space makes to river and floodplain management using the River Tame as its case study with demonstration projects in two parks. The project has informed the production of a Supplementary Planning Document - the SMURF Planning Framework - for development located in the River Tame corridor. This guidance integrates land use planning with the Water Framework Directive and will aim to mitigate development impacts on the river and its floodplain and improve access to and amenity of the river landscape.

6.11.10 The City Council will develop a Sustainability Checklist for Parks and Open Spaces, in conjunction with its partners and stakeholders. The Sustainability Checklist will be drawn up with local stakeholders to produce a set of criteria against which to assess open space, and to monitor progress. The checklist will then be used as a basis for reappraising site management approaches and will be incorporated into site management plans where appropriate.





## Policy 11 Environmental Sustainability and Nature Conservation

The City Council will protect the biodiversity and geodiversity of the City's parks and open spaces, and identify opportunities for further initiatives for management, enhancement and promotion in accordance with the adopted Nature Conservation & Sustainability Strategies and The Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

The City Council will:-

- Protect and preserve SSSI's, SINCS, as recognised by the Birmingham Plan, and LNR's by not normally allowing any development which may destroy or adversely affect their nature conservation value, and by seeking to prevent any other form of damage. This would be monitored as part of the Local Development Framework Annual Biodiversity Monitoring Report and presented to the Nature Conservation Policy Group.
- Support the Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity partnership, agree and monitor a comprehensive annual biodiversity action plan, through the Nature Conservation Policy Group, that will protect priority species and habitats.
- Produce management plans for all sites of importance for nature conservation that Birmingham City Council own
- Commence a full review of The Nature Conservation Strategy for Birmingham (1997)
- Continue process of managing existing Local Nature Reserves and aim to declare 1 new LNR per year
- Continue with a prioritised rolling programme of ecological assessment for all Sites of Quality and candidate sites across the city
- Undertake a nature conservation appraisal as part of site management plan process for all sites
- Continue with its rolling programme of annual public wildlife surveys for parks, school grounds and people's gardens; with the resulting evidence compiled and added to the region's EcoRecord
- Formulate and publish a Sustainability Checklist for assessing all Parks and Open Space Projects
- Provide opportunities for sustainable development through mitigation and enhancement of open space adjacent to rivers and floodplains and sustainable urban drainage schemes.

## 6.12 Education and Lifelong Learning

*6.12.1* The provision of lifelong learning is a key objective of the City Council, supporting its commitment to improve the quality of life of the people of Birmingham and its visitors. Parks and open spaces and parks services contribute to this in many different ways:- providing a setting and staff expertise to deliver the national curriculum, work experience and training opportunities, green space research, adult education and information about the environment and heritage. However, there is potential for far more – in particular parks and park services could contribute to all the outcomes identified for children and young people in Every Child Matters. The challenge for parks is to ensure that this vital role is fully recognised by the new Directorate of Children's Services.

*6.12.2* The Ranger Service currently engages tens of thousands of school children each year in environmental education activities covering all areas of the curriculum including citizenship. Two sites, Woodgate Valley Country Park and Birmingham Nature Centre, each have an outreach teacher offering curriculum sessions. In addition the Ranger Service delivers Study Support Programmes, INSET training for teachers, works with Youth Offending Teams, and provides work experience placements for Year 10 pupils and supports NVQ and University students.

*6.12.3* Demand for environmental education services vastly exceeds the resources of the service to deliver and pressure to meet this has led to fears of a reduction in quality at the expense of quantity. To address this the Ranger Service has sought both to increase the number of Rangers delivering environmental education through local NRF funding and introduced training to maintain and enhance the quality of provision. It has also embraced Every Child Matters and seeks to change the emphasis of parks and parks services from providing education about the environment to providing an environment for education.

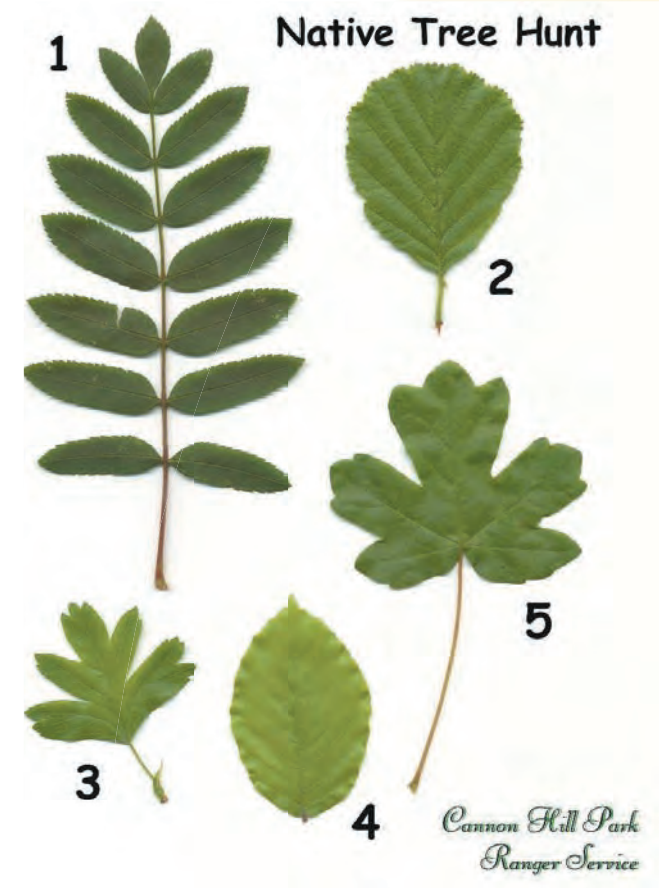
6.12.4 To achieve this the Ranger Service is leading the development of Forest School in Birmingham in partnership with Learning and Culture and other environmental organisations through the Forest Education Initiative Cluster Group. Forest School is an inspirational process that offers children and young people opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self esteem through hands on learning experiences in a local woodland environment. The Parks Ranger Service will be seeking to train Forest School leaders with conservation expertise and practical skills, develop suitable sites in parks and open spaces, and offer equipment and tools to support schools in accessing Forest School. It will also seek to offer practical skills training to teachers wishing to lead Forest School themselves and will continue to support the Forest Schools Network in Birmingham.

6.12.5 Formal adult training in horticulture and conservation management is currently provided at Kings Heath Park Training School and through placements with the Ranger Service leading to NVQ qualifications in Conservation Management and Animal Care. There is potential for further development of parks as a venue for formal skills training and using the expertise and skills of staff to deliver this.

6.12.6 Educational materials on park history, archaeology and wildlife are provided in a number of different ways to enable self-directed or informal learning. The Ranger Service provides interpretive displays at visitor centres and sites, education packs, website information and guided walks and talks. In-house training of staff, including those from other City Council divisions and other local authorities takes place to share knowledge and expand the skills base. Provision of information will continue and the Ranger Service will seek to ensure a consistent standard and quality of provision across all sites. Informal in-house training will be promoted and where relevant, offered to wider participation e.g. Friends groups.

6.12.7 Research into parks and open spaces and their value is a feature of Birmingham parks services. The EU-Project 'URGE' involved an international partnership between universities and local authorities across Europe, examining the development of open spaces to improve the quality of life in cities and urban regions. This project has informed the Birmingham Park Strategy.

6.12.8 Consultations with schools have been an integral part of designing play areas and school grounds in the city over the past decade. There has been significant input of Birmingham Schools into the parks strategy consultation which will be continued. Parks Services will aim to liaise more closely with the new Directorate of Children's Services to ensure that parks continue to play a key role in improving quality of life prospects for children. Resources will be sought to enable the service to develop effective local partnerships with emerging Extended School Clusters through study support, park development consultations and curriculum activities.



## Policy 12 Education and Lifelong Learning

The City Council will continue to develop parks and open spaces as an educational resource and increase lifelong learning and services to children as a priority across all parks services.

The City Council will:-

- seek to develop and extend educational links through effective local partnership with extended school clusters for consultation on service delivery and park development and will review existing links with colleges and universities
- continue to expand and improve the quality of curriculum provision and study support programmes for schools, through the introduction of new teacher and ranger posts such as Community Education Officer in Handsworth Park and outreach rangers,
- extend teacher training and continue staff development in delivering education activities
- support and develop Forest School in Birmingham as an accredited, quality standard for education in the natural environment to include
  - training Ranger staff
  - providing accessible Forest School sites in parks in each Constituency
  - offering training and support to teachers
  - supporting the Birmingham FEI Cluster Group in its networking activities
  - targeting groups that benefit most and their families
- expand the use of parks as venues and the role of staff to deliver formal training through accredited programmes and local colleges e.g.
  - Horticultural apprenticeships
  - NVQ Conservation Management and Animal Care
  - Forest Skills and Forest School Leader
- continue research into all measurable aspects of parks and open spaces and their value
  - input to UK and European research programmes and centres of academic excellence
  - provide placements for university students to undertake research projects
- provide and promote information in a range of ways to a consistent, quality standard across park's services, in partnership with others including Friends of groups e.g.
  - interpretive displays
  - education packs, leaflets and website information
  - walks and talks
  - informal training courses





6.13 Sports Development

6.13.1 Parks and open spaces are being used for an increasing range of physical activities including walking and cycling. These activities can assist healthier lifestyles and reduce levels of illness. High quality urban environments also contribute to the mental well being of residents.

6.13.2 The City Council has developed a Sports and Physical Activities Strategy for the City and also a Playing Pitch Strategy. The results of these strategies will feed into the Constituency Open Space Action Plans. Sports Action Zone Plans have also been produced for the City’s inner Wards. The City Council will continue to develop open space as a venue for sports development and, in partnership with sports development officers, identify community groups or clubs who may wish to use park facilities. The City Council will implement park projects that will contribute to the Birmingham City Council Sports Development Strategy and Sports Action Zones Action Plan. The Parks Ranger Service already engage with sports development colleagues. There is definitive scope to expand this future role for all parks based staff.

Policy 13 Sports Development

The City Council aims to utilise parks and open spaces as a venue for sports development and will protect playing pitches in accordance with policies in the Birmingham Plan 2005 and the Playing Pitch Strategy.

- The City Council will
- Work in partnership with sports development colleagues to identify community groups or clubs who may wish to use park facilities
  - Contribute to the targets identified in the Birmingham Playing Pitches Strategy
  - Implement park projects that will contribute to the Birmingham City Council Playing Pitches Strategy, the Sports and Physical Activities Strategy for the City and also Sports Action Zones
  - Expand the role of the front-line Parks Services to promote sports development activities within parks in association with Sports Development colleagues

6.14 Health Promotion

6.14.1 Improving health is a key objective of central and local government. There are many health related strategies and initiatives affecting Birmingham. At the Ward level local National Health Service Primary Health Care Groups have produced local health strategies. The benefits of a healthy population are many, and obviously have a direct impact on the NHS and on participation in the local economy. Parks have an important role to play in this respect by providing a venue for healthy activity, events and organised sports.





6.14.2 The 'Exercise on Prescription' strategy recommends that marked and measured walking routes are made available in at least one park per ward. Walk 2000 routes are generally 2km in length and are marked on the ground. Trim trails are also proposed as a means of increasing fitness levels for young people and children. The City Council will implement park projects that will contribute towards health promotion.



#### Policy 14 Health Promotion

The City Council now recognises Health as a key priority in the provision, design, management and use of all parks and open spaces:-

The City Council will:-

- Seek to use parks increasingly as the fitting venue for projects that contribute towards health promotion
- Work with partners and City Council colleagues to implement at least one Walk 2000 project per Ward across the City
- Ensure all General Practitioners are involved in the Exercise on Prescription scheme
- Seek funding with external partners and will work with colleagues to devise a fundamental new piece of research into the therapeutic affects of trees in the city and the role of parks and open spaces in affecting peoples quality of life in Birmingham.
- Seek to identify new health-based projects, initiatives and community events, that can be orientated around parks and open spaces, that seek to engage with 'at-risk' groups in the community, to bring about measurable health benefits.
- Through this strategy, Parks Services will endeavour to broaden its working relationships and agency partnerships with Health sector colleagues and organisations.



## 6.15 Children's Play and Recreational Provision for Young People

*6.15.1* Parks are an important resource for children's play, not just due to the provision of formal play areas, but also to the opportunities which park landscapes and nature conservation areas provide for informal, imaginative play, where children can actively follow their own ideas and interests in their own way.

*6.15.2* The creation of new play areas continues to improve the quality of play provision in the city. However, on a citywide basis Birmingham is in the lowest quartile nationally for the number of playgrounds and play areas per 1,000 children, compared to other local authorities<sup>21</sup>.

*6.15.3* The City Council will continue to inspect and monitor children's play areas to ensure that all equipment remains safe, and will establish play forums and liaise with local schools in the design and location of new play areas. The aim is for all play areas to be enclosed with fencing and self-closing gates, and to have safer surfacing, within the period of this strategy, to comply with British and European Standards. The UDP requires play areas to be provided

so that children do not have to walk further than 400m (5 minutes walk) to their nearest play area. In the past a large number of small play areas have been created in peripheral locations and there is a need to provide better located and better equipped play areas. They will be designed to increase access for all users, particularly children with disabilities.

*6.15.4* Multi use games areas have proved to be extremely popular with older children and teenagers where they have been installed across the City. The City Council aim to continue providing this type of facility so that children do not have to walk further than 800m for their nearest facility. Associated youth shelters have also been very successful and represent a facility for a user group that have traditionally not been catered for.

*6.15.5* The Every Child Matters Outcomes framework (September 2005) identifies play and recreation as being a priority under the Enjoy and Achieve Outcomes. This aims for all children and young people to have access to a range of recreational activities by providing safe and accessible places for them to play and socialise.





6.15.6 The City Council has produced a play policy entitled 'Every Child's Play Matters – A Statement for Play (2005)<sup>31</sup> and 'A Brighter Future for Children and Young People – A discussion paper (2005)<sup>32</sup> which will shape the future direction of play. It has also established a Playground Policy Group and is in the process of producing or reviewing strategy for youth shelters. The Play Strategy Group, a sub group of the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership, has identified as a priority the need to provide and encourage the use of open spaces and unsupervised play facilities.

6.15.7 Consultations have identified a need to provide more challenging equipment, whilst maintaining a safe environment. The content of play areas will be examined and explored with young people, and opportunities sought for children to experience challenge through play. Play forums are routinely set up for the design of all new play areas, involving local children/young people. New and existing play areas are regularly inspected by an inspector who is included on the Register of Play Inspectors International Limited, to ensure they are safe.

6.15.8 Skateboarding is currently a very popular youth sport which is reflected in the large amount of informal skateboarding use around Birmingham's streets and civic spaces. Skateboarding, however, is also a potential source of annoyance to local residents, due to noise and damage to public spaces. The location of formal skateboarding facilities generates particular problems and opposition from local residents. The City Council are in the process of producing a Skateboarding Strategy for Birmingham. The strategy aims to provide a range of facilities from central skate parks, where there are entry charges, through to smaller, more local skate parks.

### Policy 15 Children's Play and Recreational Provision for Teenagers

The City Council will improve parks and open spaces as a venue for formal and informal play, to cater for all ages of children and to provide play areas in accordance with UDP policies.

The City Council will:-

- Continue to provide new play areas and to maintain existing play areas to ensure all such facilities remain safe in line with UDP policies
- Recognise, protect and enhance the informal play value of open spaces
- Aim to provide fencing to all play areas to create dog free zones
- Establish community play forums, and liaise with local schools and play workers, for the design and location of new play areas; and continue to monitor research and development in play provision
- Increase access to play areas for all users, particularly children with disabilities
- Provide at least one item of equipment specifically designed for children with disabilities in all play areas
- Increase provision of multi use games areas, skateboarding and other youth facilities where demand is identified; and consult closely with all parties and the local community over their location within the chosen site.
- Work in partnership with the Play Strategy Group to support implementation of the proposed Play Strategy



## 6.16 Cultural Heritage, Tourism and the Arts

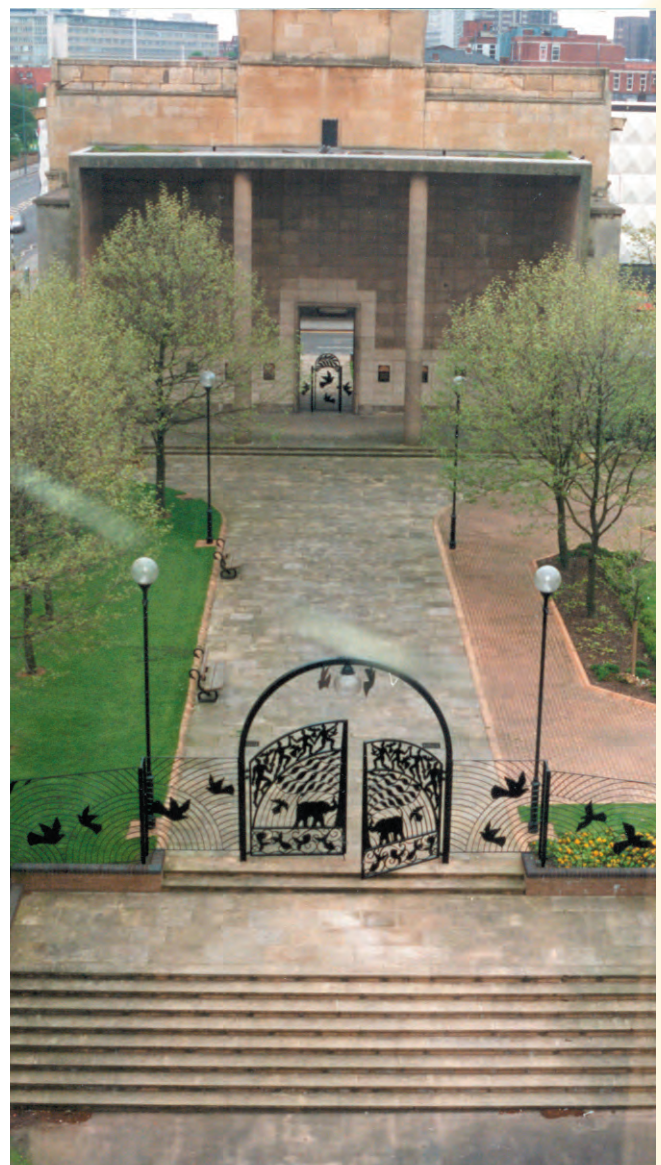
6.16.1 There are regional, City-wide and Departmental cultural strategies in existence. The strategies celebrate the diversity of communities in the West Midlands. The Parks Strategy recognises that there are a variety of stakeholder groups, all with interesting and differing needs. Whether by age, gender, disability, ethnicity and preferred leisure options in sites, from skateboarding to Tai Chi to public art, user groups naturally express themselves differently. The heritage of Birmingham's parks and their tourism potential has not been fully developed. Likewise the potential for environmental art such as Gallery in the Trees at the Lickey Hills and Summerfield Parks could be extended to other sites across the City. The City Council will increase the role of parks for tourism and arts development, and will develop parks as a cultural resource.

### Policy 16 Cultural Heritage, Tourism and the Arts

The City Council will enhance the role of parks as a cultural resource, and give credit to the city's network of parks and open spaces, nature conservation sites and general tree cover as a means of promoting Birmingham and the genuine contribution it all plays to the quality of people's lives.

The City Council will:-

- Ensure the City Council arts development strategy addresses parks and open spaces
- Support environmental art projects, such as the Gallery in the Trees, and encourage all Constituencies to participate
- Continue the Gallery in the Trees initiative and extend it to all Constituencies
- Increase the role of major parks and greenways as tourist destinations and routes through the city.





## 6.17 The Historic Environment

6.17.1 The historic environment is all around us, and includes archaeological remains, historic buildings and structures, and historic landscapes. Birmingham's parks and open spaces contain many well-preserved archaeological remains of various types and periods, including Roman Roads, prehistoric burnt mounds, medieval moats, mill pools and leats, ridge and furrow, and ancient hedgerows. All of the archaeological remains currently known are recorded in the Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record, the City Council's archaeological database. Archaeological remains contribute to local distinctiveness and a sense of place. They form part of the character of parks and open spaces but are finite and non-renewable and are vulnerable to damage or destruction through inappropriate management. Some of them are nationally important and are legally protected through designation as scheduled monuments. Most of the 13 scheduled monuments in the city are in parks or other public open space. Parks and open spaces also contain several historic buildings and structures, some of which are statutorily listed for their national architectural or historic importance.

6.17.2 Parks are also important as historic landscapes. Five of the city's parks are on English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens as follows:-

- Aston Hall and Park
- Cannon Hill Park
- Handsworth Park
- Highbury Hall and Park
- Sutton Park

6.17.3 The City Council's Conservation Strategy<sup>7</sup> emphasises the importance of the historic environment as part of local distinctiveness. The Archaeology Strategy<sup>8</sup> emphasises the range and importance of the city's archaeological remains. Both documents relate to government guidance in PPG16 (Archaeology) and PPG 15 (Historic Environment). Proper management of the historic environment is part of the City Council's sustainability approach and is included with the Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan<sup>9</sup>.

6.17.4 The historic environment also provides opportunities for lifelong learning and interpretation. Opportunities will be taken in park regeneration projects to celebrate and interpret

historic features, in association with local history societies, schools and interest groups. Parks need to be reinterpreted for 21<sup>st</sup> century life.

### Policy 17 The Historic Environment

The City Council will continue to protect the character and appearance of historic parks and their setting.

The City Council will:-

- Conserve and enhance parks with historic and archaeological interest and seek funding for their restoration
- Conserve, protect and interpret historic and archaeological features in all parks and open spaces
- Work with English Heritage to produce management plans for all City Council owned Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest
- Continue to work with English Heritage to review Birmingham's Victorian parks to identify potential sites to be added to the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest





## 6.18 Community Events and Activities

6.18.1 Parks provide a stage for community events which in themselves help celebrate diversity and engender community cohesion; the urban landscape is much the richer for them. The City Council currently supports a wide range of community events and activities in many of the city's parks. The Ranger Service organises over 200 events annually at parks across the City, and supervises over 3,000 volunteer days of community involvement in parks management and events each year. There is also an annual programme of City scale events hosted in parks, these larger events attract visitors from around the region making parks an attractive tourist destination. There is an increasing demand for even more community activities so consequently there is a need to consider how best to support and develop a balanced programme of community event. There is a need to evaluate the size of site, topography, service availability, access, training, sustainability, levels of community support and safety issues when matching events to venues to reduce possible negative impacts.

## Policy 18 Community Events and Activities

The City Council will promote park usage through an organised annual programme of community events.

The City Council will:-

- Continue to utilise parks and open spaces as the preferred venue for many significant public and cultural events in the city.
- Develop and implement a community events programme that celebrates the cultural diversity of the city and provide events appropriate to the type of open space
- Encourage all Constituencies to use their local parks to support at least one community event a year.
- Increase the involvement of, and support to, community groups organising events
- Devise and promote a simplified community events booking service, to help facilitate as many community events as possible within Birmingham's parks.
- Continue the 'Out and About' events programme organised and published by the Ranger Service.
- Seek wider community engagement particularly with local groups and Friends of Groups.







## 6.19 Establishing the Information Base

*6.19.1* Within the current comprehensive performance assessment and improvement climate, and to comply with PPG17 guidance, it is necessary to collect, capture, analyse and disseminate information for Parks and Open Spaces.

*6.19.2* A strategic approach to park management would include a mechanism for continuously monitoring and reviewing service delivery. Monitoring levels of parks and open space use and non-use has been the focus of considerable time and effort for the City Council over the last few years. Information and communication management is a key factor in achieving the goals and objectives of the Parks Strategy. Given the number of sites and the breadth of issues for Birmingham's parks the process of compiling and maintaining information is a major challenge. It is proposed to introduce a Parks Management Information System which will be a central database of information on individual parks, facilities, consultation results and quality audits.

*6.19.3* The City Council needs to develop reliable databases and sources of information upon which future decisions can be based with greater accuracy and confidence. Databases can also assist in the development and monitoring of appropriate Performance Indicators. The Parks Management Information System would provide a full inventory of parks and open space facilities and features. It would also aim to store the results of community consultations and details of how community visions relate to what happens on the ground and provide the opportunity for local community comments to be recorded and displayed. The system would contain an analysis of local demand and levels of use and non-use as well as a simple gap analysis based on 400m level of local park provision. Strategic information would also be available for viewing including open space audits and quality appraisals, Local Parks and Open Space Plans, management plans and site designs. In addition, a range of background information would be held on each site including historical data, ecological data, technical surveys, miscellaneous reports and photographs of sites. Up to date details of events would also be accessible, along with an interactive booking system for sports pitches.

*6.19.4* The aim for the Parks Management Information System is that it will be used by all sections of Parks Management Staff on a day to day basis as a means to develop and manage sites. The System would also link to other databases, such as the Planning Geographical Information System, the Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record and the EcoRecord. The Parks Management Information System also aims to be the platform for helping communities to keep their sites safe, crime free and well used. It will also be an important resource for Constituency and Ward committees, with Local Open Space Plans linking into the Community and Asset Management Planning process.

*6.19.5* The City Council does not currently have access to the full range of technology that is required to fully inform and engage people who live, learn, visit and work in Birmingham. In particular, advanced mapping databases and facilities are needed to help plan and develop sites. These systems would also act as bridges with other departments, agencies and local communities. Given the availability and use levels of Internet technology, local people would then be able to access, review and contribute to the local parks and open spaces action plans as well as monitoring progress on the ground.

*6.19.6* The system needs to provide a mechanism for local communities to remotely monitor sites and report problems to the appropriate agencies. The Parks Management Information System would also be used to publicise events in parks and green spaces, and generally act as a means of communicating and enhancing local culture.

*6.19.7* Ultimately, it is intended to make Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans and progress reports available to all stakeholders using the internet. This technology would allow local communities to safely and effectively report problems on sites and to express views on the design and management of their local parks and green spaces. This technology is still some way away and will require considerable financial investment and officer time. The City Council will seek funding to resource the development of this system.





## Policy 19 Establishing the Information Base

The City Council is committed to a process of information management to facilitate more effective management of parks involving the collection, capture, analyse and dissemination of information for Parks and Open Spaces for public use.

The City Council will:-

- Develop an integrated parks information management system to provide a database of parks and open spaces; monitor park use; register all facilities; catalogue visitor attitudes and behaviours
- Map and update open space sites for planning and management purposes
- Map Grounds Maintenance information as a basis for contract documentation and management plan purposes
- Maintain up to date websites for all parks services including mapping data, where appropriate, for public use
- Develop and publish a detailed programme for the implementation of the management information system

## 6.20 Tree Management

*6.20.1* Birmingham is fortunate to have a strong structure of tree-lined streets and roads which present a green approach to many parts of the city which are greatly valued. Trees in parks and open spaces are equally important and particular action is needed to address the decline in specimen and veteran trees in the City's parks. The city's tree stock requires constant management.

*6.20.2* Health and safety is a primary concern. The City Council has recently produced a Scrutiny Committee report on "Trees in the Public Highway". There is now in place a comprehensive Risk Register for Highway Trees and this now extends to trees on all land owned by all the City Council portfolios. A similar system is now in place to begin to address all the trees in the city's Parks and Open Spaces. Any trees which are identified for attention or require a more detailed inspection are dealt with.

*6.20.3* The City Council has a policy of replacing all felled highway trees with a new tree within the highway. However, there is no budget available to address the significant loss of trees within parks and open spaces which need to be removed if they become dead, dying or diseased. Individual capital funded schemes are currently the primary means for providing new trees within enhancement schemes.

*6.20.4* A revised Tree Policy is to be developed following the Leisure, Sport and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The City's current policy for trees is contained in a Cabinet Report entitled "The Maintenance and Management of the City's Trees"<sup>33</sup>. The tree programmes for Parks arise from the "Risk Assessment" process and survey work arising from this process, along with woodland management programmes. An electronic database is currently being developed which allows the capture of all the information required for inspecting and managing the City Council tree stock. Priority is being given to recording and inspecting trees on the Highway, in school grounds and playing fields, on Housing land and in Cemeteries and Crematoria grounds in accordance with the above detailed policy. This system will eventually have all the tree information for all the trees situated on City Council owned land. The City Council will also actively promote the 'Trees for Life' initiative in conjunction with the Birmingham Civic Society.



6.20.5 Two further significant areas of trees in parks and open spaces are:-

- (i) the city's urban woodlands, which receive little or no management. These range from small copses of recently planted native species, to mature secondary willow and sycamore woods and areas of semi-natural ancient woodland. There is an urgent need to address the issue of urban woodland management and veteran trees;
- (ii) the city's tree-lined river corridors, which from their very nature are difficult to access and of inherent nature conservation and archaeological value, but which carry their own problems of falling limbs which impede river flow.

6.20.6 For both of the above, the City Council will seek new resources through regional partnerships, funding bids and potentially new contractual arrangements; this will also encompass the sustainable disposal and recycling of all timber.

### Policy 20 Tree Management

The City Council aim to protect and maintain its existing tree stock in a healthy and safe condition, and will replace all felled trees with new trees.

The City Council will

- Implement the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee report into 'Trees on the Public Highway'; adopted February 2006.
- Support the Birmingham Trees for Life initiative
- Devise a tree strategy for Birmingham
- Seek funding to maintain its "at risk" register of trees within parks and open spaces
- Compile an electronic database of the city's tree-stock
- Seek resources to always involve school children, and where possible communities, in the planting and management of trees and woodlands.
- Seek additional resources and review its tree contracts to strengthen the city's management of urban woodlands and tree-lined river corridors
- Work in partnership with government agencies, service providers and others to devise a sustainable solution to its tree waste recycling
- Seek funding support to undertake research on the beneficial effects of urban trees.

### 6.21 Water and Drainage

6.21.1 Birmingham's parks and open spaces have a considerable influence over the quality and quantity of water entering the City's watercourses, most of which arise within the city. Many sites also have an important role as functional flood plains, for example the playing fields in Perry Hall Park, which shall be protected and enhanced. The improvement of the water bodies and watercourses is a fundamental objective in order to achieve a healthier park drainage system and additional biodiversity benefits. The use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) is to be promoted and support given to the Sustainable Management of Urban Rivers and Flood plains 'SMURF project'. Outputs of the SMURF Project will be used to guide future management decisions.

6.21.2 The management of lakes and pools within parks is being examined and reviewed through research and best-practice elsewhere. All parks pools form part of the city's drainage system and are therefore subject to storm surges, including nutrient rich organic material. This can quickly strip the water of its dissolved oxygen, so leading to fish kills, and later toxic algal blooms.

6.21.3 Waterfowl and fish populations and the management of the surrounding park landscape all affect the health of a pool. Through working with outside agencies and alterations to contracts improvements are being made.

### Policy 21 Water and Drainage

The City Council will

- Manage park drainage systems to improve water quality and encourage nature conservation in all parks
- Continue to liaise with Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency to pursue drainage and biodiversity improvements to all relevant parks; and build into best-practice solutions.
- Reduce pollution through the removal of all illegal sewer connections to watercourses in parks and open spaces
- Continue to work with planners and developers to encourage the use of SUDS schemes.
- Continue to link multi-agency partners to river corridors to achieve sustainable improvements



## 6.22 Toilet Facilities

*6.22.1* The findings of the community consultation exercises have highlighted the need to upgrade toilet facilities in parks. This is a reflection of the lack of investment that has taken place in parks over the last few decades. The inability to supervise toilets and address anti-social behaviour is a key issue. Preparatory work has started regarding producing a programme for lavatory provision in parks and open spaces. Particularly in periods of greater use, parks and green space users are requesting on-site facilities, even if only of a temporary nature.

### Policy 22 Toilet Facilities

The City Council will seek to provide more and better toilet facilities in parks, and will produce a policy and implementation plan for lavatory provision

## 6.23 Commercial Enterprises

*6.23.1* It is important that the potential for offering economic benefits to local communities should be explored and maximised wherever possible, for example by providing training/employment opportunities and opportunities for the creation of local commercial/social enterprises.

*6.23.2* There is significant potential for new catering facilities and it is also recommended that the City Council develop a new programme to return catering facilities to parks.

### Policy 23 Commercial Enterprises

The City Council will examine and test opportunities for sponsorship, commercial investment and franchises with regard to training, sports, catering, events, and facility / service provision







### 6.24 Allotments

6.24.1 Birmingham City Council has an Allotment Strategy in place which identifies the allotment provision, protecting the existing facilities and providing new facilities in areas where there is under provision<sup>34</sup>. The primary goal is one of local management coupled with expanding membership. The strategy aims to increase access to all sectors of the community, including disadvantaged groups. The EU-Project 'URGE' cited European examples of community plots within parks, this will be explored.

### Policy 24 Allotments

The City Council is committed to securing the long term sustainability of allotment sites.

The City Council will:-

- Identify potential sites for new allotment provision in areas of need in accordance with the allotments policy
- Continue to link Allotments with Health & Social Care initiatives.
- Explore the potential of community plots within parks suggested through the EU-Project 'URGE'
- Continue to pursue increasing involvement of school children in allotment gardening; and links with local colleges, leading to possible career development.
- Work with other partners and colleagues to support access to allotment sites for Asylum Seekers, newly arrived people and other socially disadvantaged groups
- Continue to trial and support allotment sites as venues for community composting schemes



## 6.25 Health and Safety

6.25.1 Health and safety is a fundamental issue for the successful management of parks and open spaces. It represents a fundamental factor that must be addressed before any enjoyment of the site can take place. The former Department of Leisure and Culture produced a raft of Health and Safety Guidelines all collated in "The Managers Guide to Health and Safety". The key components of this document are: -

- Health & Safety policy
- Water Safety Policy
- Health & Safety Welfare at Work Policy
- Risk Assessment policy
- Playground Policy

6.25.2 Procedures are in place to provide an annual risk assessment of all sites. Regular inspections are carried out for all play areas (daily) and pools, trees, lighting and other identified risks.

6.25.3 Health issues in parks have been highlighted as a major issue through community consultation. In particular, dog excrement is seen as a particularly important issue which needs to be addressed through the installation of dog proof fencing around play areas and dog excrement bins at key points in parks. This issue is also to be addressed through educating dog owners through an annual series of activities, information, promotions and publicising the policy of Dogs in Parks .

6.25.4 Rats are a particular problem in several parks. The presence of rats is a consistent source of complaint by park users, and represents a health hazard. Similarly, pigeons are notoriously difficult creatures to control as they breed at an alarmingly high rate and public opinion generally militates against really tough eradication or culling procedures. Nevertheless, the pigeons must be managed more effectively in order to create areas free of bird droppings. There are particular sensitivities regarding pigeon management in relation to social and religious beliefs and practices. This is an ongoing management issue which will involve liaison between staff in the City Council.

6.25.5 Large numbers of water fowl such as Canada geese, various species of duck, coots and moorhens are a problem in terms of their numbers and the level of excrement they produce. The City Council aim to follow best practice with regards to geese management as from the London Lakes Projects<sup>35</sup> which recommended integrated and regionally co-ordinated management.

6.25.6 Many of the City's parks and open spaces are suffering from the spread of invasive, non-indigenous plant species such as Japanese Knot weed, Himalayan Balsam or those notified as dangerous/toxic weeds, such as Giant Hogweed and Ragwort. Representations have been made from many user groups approaching the City Council seeking a solution to the management and eradication of some of these plants. The City Council is developing a policy based on the latest research into control methodologies<sup>36</sup>.

### Policy 25 Health and Safety

The City Council is committed to providing a safe and enjoyable environment for all those who use parks and open spaces.

The City Council will:-

- Continue the process of risk assessment and regular inspections, and implement required actions to maintain a safe environment, including At Risk trees
- Utilise dog owners as a key consultation group to promote greater responsibility for dogs in parks;
- Run an annual series of activities, information, promotions and publicise the policy of 'Dogs in Parks'
- Provide emergency contact details on play area signs for all play areas, and for all construction project sign boards
- Provide emergency out of hours contact details on signs in all open spaces
- Identify measures to manage Canada geese, pigeons and other wildfowl within parks
- Identify measures to control rats and other pests within parks
- Develop, through the Nature Conservation Policy Group, a Parks Pools Policy in liaison with all partners
- Develop measures and publish a policy to control invasive and toxic plant species



## 6.26 Marketing, Profile and Publicity

6.26.1 There is scope for raising the profile of parks in Birmingham through a more targeted programme of marketing and the development of a marketing strategy for parks. It has been recommended by the Audit Commission<sup>22</sup> that there be greater interaction and overlap with the city's wider tourism and international image. Local community and political champions are also an important means of promoting the interests of parks through the local Ward and Constituency Committees.

6.26.2 There is a need to develop event and site based publicity which is accessible to all groups. This can be achieved through leaflets and posters with appropriate elements in a range of different languages, and formats. The increased use of the internet as a means of promoting parks and events is also to be expanded upon. The City Council will liaise with all partners to devise and adopt new information standards.

6.26.3 One way of raising the profile of parks is through designations, national standards and awards. Greater use of these will be explored; and the City Council will seek to shape the future of new and more meaningful national accreditation mechanisms for all parks sites.

6.26.4 The Green Flag Award is one such scheme which aims to promote high quality standards. The scheme recognises the diversity and distinctive qualities of parks and green spaces, and their value to users, and commends management practices that have effectively involved local people.

6.26.5 The 'Out and About' leaflet has been a successful means of publicising events in parks, but this needs an even higher profile. The Ranger Service provide support to community groups in the running of community events. As more groups become active the balance of resources could shift between the direct running of City Council events to supporting many more community group-led events.

6.26.6 Signage and interpretation is a key means of strengthening a parks identity and providing information on site facilities and locations. The provision of signage is a key part of good management which will be continued.

6.26.7 The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act will require the production of rights of way plans to include information about walks and site interpretation. There is also an opportunity to produce Constituency and neighbourhood trails, and this would need the involvement of voluntary and community groups and external local partnerships, such as Constituency Strategic partnerships.

6.26.8 Audience development is a key part of ensuring that non users and excluded groups can be encouraged to use parks. Research has highlighted why different types of people do not use parks. Further work will be carried out to fully understand whether these barriers can be overcome and positive measures taken. To encourage increased participation a pro-active approach is required in which Rangers, Park Keepers and Friends Groups take a positive role in reaching out to the local community. The Heritage Lottery Fund have produced guidance on Audience Development which will be used as a basis for effectively engaging local community groups.

### Policy 26 Marketing, Profile and Publicity

The City Council will promote parks as a key community and citywide resource and attraction, in partnership with the local community.-

The City Council will:-

- Develop a marketing strategy for Birmingham's parks and open spaces, and all parks services
- Establish and support local community champions through the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum
- Develop greater interaction and overlap with the city's wider tourism and international image
- Liaise with all equality partners to devise and adopt new and accessible standards for all information.
- Increase use of the internet and develop interactive parks website linked to a parks management information system
- Develop a pro-active audience development plan and encourage participation from non users
- Deploy Rangers/Park Keepers/Friends Groups in this pro-active form of outreach.



- Raise the profile of the 'Out and About' Leaflet
- Encourage all Constituencies to produce Constituency and neighbourhood trails with voluntary and community group involvement and Constituency Partnerships, for all Constituencies
- Continue the introduction of park signage and interpretation
- Ensure that the balance between Ranger Service events and community events is reviewed

## 6.27 Training

6.27.1 The City Council will work at the regional and national level to have Continuous Professional Development and career progression fully recognised and adopted across the industry; sponsored and supported by all relevant agencies, Institutes, professional bodies, universities and colleges. The goal is to encourage far greater cross-disciplinary understanding and appreciation of horticulture and conservation management, and to achieve better representation from currently under-represented groups<sup>3</sup>. This must be tied to parks in their new emerging and critical role within the sustainable development framework of cities and regions.

6.27.2 Staff training is an essential component in achieving a higher quality of park's maintenance and customer service. Training needs to identify the necessary skills required for the job. Birmingham City Council has been awarded Investors in People status and is committed to improving the qualifications and skills of the workforce. The City Council will work with Grounds Maintenance Service

providers to implement the training necessary to produce a highly skilled workforce at all levels.

6.27.3 The Kings Heath Park Training School has developed a regional reputation for training excellence over a 50 year period. The challenge is to restore the skills lost from the industry and bring back that sense of real pride in the profession. The park apprenticeship programme run from Kings Heath Park has been extended to other parks and trainees have found permanent employment with the Grounds Maintenance Service providers.

### Policy 27 Training

The City Council will develop parks as a venue for training and employment.

The City Council will:-

- Exert influence at the regional and national level to have Continuous Professional Development and career progression for all parks staff, at all levels, fully recognised and adopted across the industry; and seek to address inequalities in the workforce representation profile.
- Fully commit to producing a highly skilled workforce, in its widest sense, across all sectors of the workforce, in conjunction with its partners and community volunteers
- Continue and seek to extend the Parks apprenticeship to all major parks
- Ensure all parks management staff have undertaken, or are working towards, appropriate qualifications
- Provide training for local community groups to assist with projects and funding proposals





# local visions

# 7 Local Visions

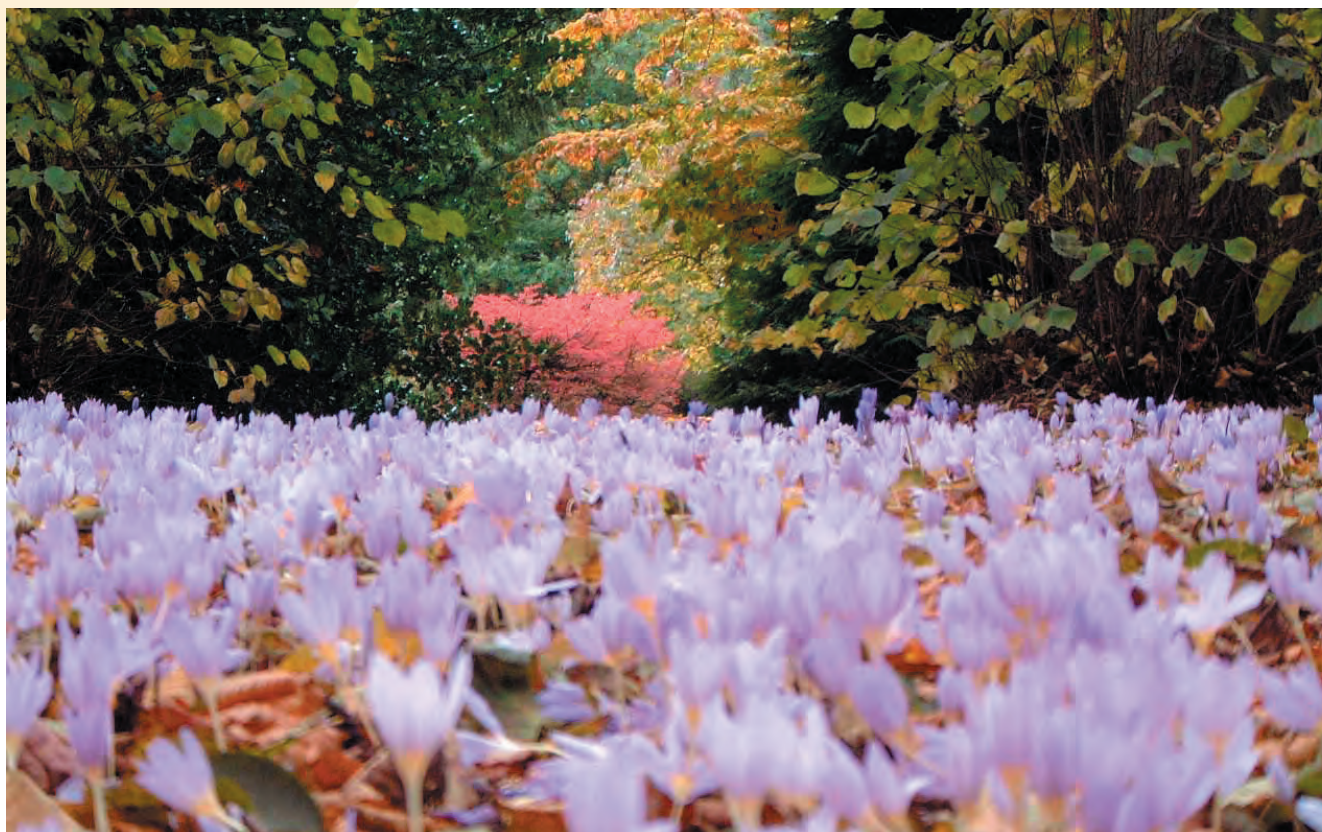
## 7.1 Local Parks and Open Space Plan Schedules and Maps

7.1.1 The translation of vision into reality on the ground is to be achieved through the production of Parks and Open Space Action Plans. The Ward and Constituency Parks and Open Space Plans and Schedules accompanying this strategy are a snapshot of the existing level of provision at the time of publishing the strategy. One of the main elements in the development of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has been the identification and mapping of all public open space and their facilities in Birmingham City Council ownership. The plans also show significant open spaces in private ownership based on information held by Birmingham City Council Planning Service. In addition to open space areas the plans also highlight facilities such as play areas, multi use games areas, skateboard facilities and teenage shelters. Another very significant local provision and Government target is that of Local Nature Reserves, these are now mapped and this strategy commits to the continuation of a rolling programme of their identification and declaration, through broad partnerships.

## 7.2 Park and Open Space Catchment

7.2.1 The results of Birmingham's consultation research has highlighted the importance of all types of parks, as they provide a range of different roles and functions. For this reason Birmingham has not adopted a rigid hierarchical approach based solely upon the size and status of its parks. Equal consideration has been given to the local importance of parks, their accessibility and the user catchment area.

7.2.2 Another vital factor that has emerged from research for the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and EU-Project URGE, is the importance of the context of a park as defined by its catchment. Its use, its wider appreciation and zone of influence, can extend beyond its physical perimeter. Busy roads, railway lines and rivers can act as barriers to pedestrian movement which should be considered.





### 7.2.3 Catchment areas are defined as follows

- Parks with city wide catchment area - important at a city level and attracts users from a wide catchment area across Birmingham and beyond
- Neighbourhood parks with Ward catchment (up to 3km catchment area) – main park for a particular ward incorporating a range of facilities
- Multi use games area (800m)
- Local park or open space (400m catchment area)
- Play area (400m catchment area)

### 7.2.4 In terms of facilities the following have been shown in the Ward maps

- Teenage shelters
- Multi use games areas
- Skateboard facilities
- Play areas

## 7.3 Gap Analysis

7.3.1 An analysis has been made on the level of open space provision at a Ward level applied at a basic standard of 2 hectares per thousand head of population in line with the Birmingham Plan 2005<sup>5</sup>.

7.3.2 Open space provision has also been assessed in terms of the user catchment area to give an indication of the role of parks and open spaces. A crude level of provision has been assessed by using a 400m catchment for each park and other areas of public open space, accepting that all open spaces are important on a local scale and provision needs to be made at this level.

7.3.3 The catchment of parks often covers a number of Wards, Constituencies or other local authorities. In this way the 400m catchment analysis provides an additional deficiency measure to the level of quantitative provision per Ward. It is important that parks are not seen in isolation but as part of a system of open space. Similarly, Friends Groups would include members from a parks catchment, and not just residents within a particular Ward or Constituency boundary. This simple gap analysis is to be used as a tool for informing the Parks and Open Space Action Plans with local community groups and prioritising projects to increase access and provision in areas of deficiency.

## 7.4 A Comprehensive Site Assessment Tool

7.4.1 In addition to the quantitative approach to open space provision a qualitative review is also required. Sites can be evaluated according to the following criteria:-

- Landscape condition
- Usage
- Location/accessibility
- Potential for improvement
- Community value

7.4.2 Parks and open spaces have also been classified into the following quality categories and are shown on the Open Space Schedules:

1. Good condition, good location, good access and well used
2. Poor condition and usage but in a good location with good access and potential to meet local needs if regenerated.
3. Poor condition, location, access and usage, no longer meeting local or strategic needs and little potential for improvement

7.4.3 The classification of open space into these categories is a starting point towards assessing the value of the City's portfolio of parks and open spaces. The value of open space is to be assessed according to the following criteria:-

- Value in terms of ecological, historical, archaeological interest
- Value in terms of scarcity of open space provision and their economic contribution.
- Local community value expressed through community consultations

7.4.4 This simple classification process needs to be refined into a more detailed comprehensive assessment tool. The **comprehensive site assessment tool** is being developed and implemented in close consultation with local community groups and other local stakeholders. The comprehensive site assessment tool will have a two-tier approach. It will provide a full review of the condition, significance, and strengths and weaknesses of a site, which will then assist in the selection of priority target sites at a Constituency and Ward level. Community groups have expressed the need to develop a sophisticated tool which addresses social survey methodology. The City Council will help trial and refine such

a site assessment methodology working with CABE Space, central government and other relevant agencies.

7.4.5 Any published assessment tool must be accessible and available to the user-community such as 'Friends Groups' or management committees. The comprehensive site assessment tool will be used to regularly review the quality of open space and the progress of the strategy on the ground.

### **Policy 28 A Comprehensive Site Assessment Tool**

The City Council will develop and implement a comprehensive site assessment tool in partnership with the local community.

The City Council will

- Develop and trial site assessment criteria for parks and open spaces, through a live project; this will seek to combine best practice from the EU-URGE project, the Local Nature Reserve criteria, and the Green Flag Award scheme, to include GPS recording for GIS analysis
- Undertake a full appraisal of this project in full consultation with the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, local friends groups, all key partners and external agencies for verification
- Adopt a Comprehensive Assessment Tool, and continue to revise its effectiveness through the above parties
- Seek to develop a two-tier assessment process, assisting in the prioritisation of sites at a Constituency and Ward level, and evaluating specific site requirements to assist in management brief or plan production. This would seek to include GPS recording, to inform GIS mapping of sites
- Progress will be reviewed periodically in order to check the direction and effectiveness of the strategy
- Continue to lobby at the national and European level to increase the political understanding and importance of parks and open spaces in improving the quality of life in urban cities and regions; and seek the full endorsement and adoption of the EU-URGE project findings.

## **7.5 Local Open Space Action Plans**

7.5.1 Once the Parks Strategy is adopted it is intended to produce detailed Open Space Action Plans to serve as improvement and development plans at the local level for every Ward or Constituency in the City. The Action Plans will identify agreed target sites based on public consultation and management objectives and will include a set of SMART objectives that can be used to identify progress on the ground.

7.5.2 The Local Open Space Action Plans will outline the intended programme of work within the local target sites. These plans will then be reviewed against other strategies before exploring the best means of implementation. Some of the improvements can be implemented through changes in day-to-day management, whilst more major improvements will be dependent on funding being made available or obtained externally.

7.5.3 Decision making at the Ward/Constituency Committee level is to be the basis for agreeing these Action Plans. Local communities and elected Members will be able to study their local open space maps and schedules in detail.

7.5.4 The aim is that local people take the lead in setting the agenda where they are able to add layers of specific knowledge, still within the context of the aims of the parks strategy, so that future management is done in partnership with, not in isolation from, the user-community.

7.5.5 The Open Space Action Plans will aim to include at least 3 target sites per Ward, with recommended timescales attached. The target sites will represent where the focus of activity will take place for the period of the action plan. The selection of target sites will be reviewed regularly with the open space action plan. This review and selection process will be carried out in partnership between Birmingham City Council parks management, Constituency Committees and local community groups.

7.5.6 In addition, to the production of Open Space Action Plans the Parks Strategy aims to develop a Sustainability Checklist and different categories of Management Plans for sites that would allow a suitable one to be selected for each of the 120 target sites; over the lifetime of this Strategy.



## Policy 29 Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans

The City Council will produce and maintain Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans for parks and open spaces that deliver community aspirations.

The City Council will:-

- Ensure that Action Plans are reviewed and updated annually and agreed at Ward/Constituency Committee level
- Ensure that all parks and open space improvements requested by the local community are reflected in all future Constituency and City Community Plans
- Develop a set of SMART objectives for each action plan
- Ensure that effective representation is secured through all partners and appropriate community representatives at every Constituency Strategic Partnership and relevant panel. This is to be expressed through Local Area Agreements and Asset Management Plans, to maximise all opportunities for obtaining funding, support and collaborative working for park projects.



## 7.6 Constituency Community and Asset Management Plans

**7.6.1** It is important that the Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans feed into the annual Constituency Community planning process, through the Community Strategy process. The Community Strategy is supported by themed action plans, one of which is entitled 'Greening the City', which contains all parks and biodiversity targets and action plans. It is for every Ward and Constituency to ensure suitable consultation and engagement arrangements exist to fully address this aspect of the Community Planning process. This Asset Management Planning process is underway and will involve parks and sports facilities, in addition to buildings such as leisure centres, community centres, play centres, libraries and so forth.

## 7.7 Funding

**7.7.1** The recent history of parks throughout the country has been a story of reduced expenditure and a lack of investment. The associated reduction in quality has led to a cycle of decline which has left parks in a generally poor state of repair which has turned people away. After years of decline and a lack of investment, parks are now being seen to be of greater importance, relevance and interest contributing to a revived period of urban renaissance. The importance of parks is now more widely appreciated by both politicians and the general public, which has resulted in increased capital funding at a national, though not at a local government level. Similarly, no additional revenue funding of significance has been forthcoming to date.

**7.7.2** In order to achieve the aspirations of the Parks Strategy even higher levels of capital and revenue investment are necessary, in order that good quality parks, recreation grounds and open spaces can be sustained for the use of future generations of people in Birmingham. Many of the recommendations can be achieved by the redirection of existing resources, by the restructuring of existing responsibilities or by working in partnership with other agencies. However, there are a number of new initiatives which are over and above what is currently provided by the City Council.

7.7.3 Seeking external funding is a key objective of this strategy. The City Council must maximise its ability to secure external funding sources for improving parks as it is unlikely that additional City Council funds could be made available to support the objectives of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. Working in partnership with other agencies, such as the nationally registered environmental charities (see 6.4.2) and local Friend's Groups, is an important means of unlocking additional funding sources.

7.7.4 Many local authorities simply do not have the capacity to carry out and pursue a rolling programme of funding applications. In the case of Birmingham, the City Council devotes a considerable, and increasing, amount of time to accessing external funding sources. However, in order to deliver people's visions for the parks and green spaces the City Council will undoubtedly have to devote even more time and effort to submitting applications and winning funds.

## 7.8 Sources of Funding

7.8.1 Park improvement projects fulfil a range of social, economic and environmental criteria. It is important to understand how parks and green spaces relate to other aspects of life in the City and beyond. Park regeneration schemes are not just about restoring the physical fabric of the park but are also about regenerating the social, cultural and economic value of the area, improving people's health and addressing community safety. It is therefore important to think laterally to ensure that environmental improvements are linked to other agency initiatives, such as reducing crime or promoting health, sports and education and link fully with the Sustainable Development agenda.

7.8.2 A crucial role of the Parks Strategy is to win support and funding for the further development, maintenance and management of the City's parks and green spaces. A number of funding sources are available from Central Government, the European Union or Lottery Distributors which cater for a range of park types or issues relating to parks, recreation grounds and open spaces. The City Council will work across partnerships such as the Economic Strategy's Strategic Funding team and Local Services External Funding Unit to be able to provide a funding database, identifying suitable funding sources for park related projects, available to all stakeholders.





7.8.3 The City Council will explore how a Member-led partnership body can be created for Parks and Open Spaces (see 6.4.7.) to try to generate wider access to a wider range of partners and stakeholders.

7.8.4 Community involvement is a key part of successful funding bids. The City Council will provide support to community groups in the preparation of funding bids and other technical areas. The aim is for local people to be trained in producing bids in order to build capacity within the local community for undertaking funding proposals for themselves. Community Groups have expressed frustration at the complicated nature of funding processes and measures need to be taken to streamline applications. The City Council has recently set up an external funding unit to support community groups.

7.8.5 Community groups have been particularly successful in Birmingham in terms of attracting external funding and there are many success stories. The Handsworth Park Association has been particularly influential in raising funds and driving forward the regeneration of Handsworth Park, as well as organising local events, activities and interest. To date capital funds secured through capital receipts, Section 106 agreements, Single Regeneration Budget, Heritage Lottery Fund and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Revenue funding has also been forthcoming in the area from the Heritage Lottery Fund (community education), NRF (horticultural apprenticeships), SRB (sports development) and ERDF (community development). Additional funding sources are also being sought for night time security and longer term funding for education and sports development. The project has been highlighted as an example of best practice in terms of maximising funding sources.

7.8.6 More work is required to involve the private sector in fund raising. Sponsorship of parks and facilities is a key area where the private sector could get involved. Similarly, the involvement of businesses in providing catering services has also been successful. Engagement with the private sector could also encourage their growing corporate social responsibility activities, and could extend beyond direct funding to more 'hands on', volunteer-day activities such as painting day projects.

7.8.7 In addition to external funding bids the City Council will aim to secure increased Birmingham City Council Capital and Revenue Programme Funding in line with the Audit Commission's Best Value Report<sup>21</sup> to target funding gaps, particularly in areas not fulfilling regeneration funding criteria or gaining Section 106 funding. By defining the specific contribution parks and open space can make to Government targets, parks and open spaces can then rightfully justify and demonstrate their role in improving the quality of life, within all urban neighbourhoods.

7.8.8 A full commercial review across parks and open spaces is required, to help determine the potential areas for private partnership or investment and franchise opportunities that might be offered; traditionally these were aligned with sports, catering and events. All income earned would then help offset revenue expenditure, raise standards, create employment and potentially diversify the business, which could attract more customers and lead to increased levels of satisfaction. The City Council will liaise with colleges and universities and with all the relevant services within the wider Council, (business support, economic development, tourism) and work through the member-led parks partnership body (see 6.4.7) to commission such a study.



## 7.9 Planning Obligations and Section 106 Agreements

7.9.1 The Birmingham Plan 2005<sup>5</sup> is the statutory instrument for implementing the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy through the planning process. Planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 can secure the provision of public open space, recreational and other community facilities as part of new developments. Government Circular 05/05 gives further guidance on the use of Section 106 agreements.

7.9.2 The strategy aims to identify deficiencies in terms of quality and quantity in order to direct funding through Section 106 Planning Agreements and other sources. Capital receipts from land disposal, Section 106 Agreements and joint venture agreements can be 'ring-fenced' in order to upgrade targetted open spaces. Together with Capital receipts from land disposal, and joint venture agreements, such capital funds will help to lever in additional external funds, and support a much needed programme of re-investment for parks and open spaces.

7.9.3 The emerging Public Open Space and New Residential Development Draft Supplementary Planning Document will provide more detailed guidance on the use of S106 Agreements. The production of Open Space Action Plans will provide a schedule of potential open space improvement projects, which will direct future funding secured through Section 106 Planning Agreements, and parks and open spaces should, wherever possible, be targetted for S106 funding and investment.

## Policy 30 Funding

The City Council will ensure funding proposals are developed in close co-operation with the local community and in response to community need.

The City Council will:-

- Ensure parks and open spaces are clearly within the city's and the regional sustainable development agenda, and at the centre of regeneration funding bids and strategies
- Devise park regeneration schemes and capital and revenue funding packages capable of delivering broader urban regeneration aims and objectives in terms of environmental improvement, community safety, community use/involvement and education
- Target the use of Section 106 Planning Agreements to deliver parks and open space improvements
- Accord a high priority to obtaining external funding opportunities, work through partnerships with other private, community and voluntary sector, and statutory agencies, to allow increased opportunities to access external grant aid
- Develop a Heritage Lottery Funding strategy
- Develop a funding database to assist in identifying suitable funding sources for park related projects. Within this exercise explore and test opportunities for commercial investment, sponsorship and franchises with regard to sports, ethical catering, events and revenue posts.
- Identify and prioritise opportunities for site improvement funding within the Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans and forge links and opportunities with Constituency Strategic Partners.



# 8

## **future challenges**

## 8 Future Challenges

### 8.1 Timescales

8.1.1 For the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy to be successful it must be viewed as a living document that is used as a guide for the way parks and open spaces are delivered and managed on the ground. The strategy is to be delivered by a range of organisations and partnerships through a range of mechanisms. The following Figure 8.1 highlights how the strategy brings together planning, design, maintenance and management of open space in close co-operation with local communities.

### 8.2 Monitoring and Review

8.2.1 The aim of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is not to produce a document that sits on the shelf, but a working strategy that is regularly reviewed and updated. The development of the strategy is to be regularly reviewed as additional work is undertaken. The intention will be to review the Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans annually at the start of each financial year to feed into the Constituency Community Plans and the budget process, and have them agreed at the Ward and Constituency Committees.



Figure 8.1: Parks Strategy Development



8.2.2 Community involvement is essential to this process of monitoring and review and City Council officers need the help of local communities and elected Members to make this vision a reality. With all stakeholders working together and supporting each other, shared visions will be achieved, and a legacy of rejuvenated parks and green spaces will be capable of being enjoyed now and by future generations.

### 8.3 Future Work

8.3.1 To develop the strategy further, a range of more detailed work is required which has yet to be carried out. This additional work is detailed below:-

- Following adoption of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy as a Supplementary Planning Document develop a prioritised list of open space improvements through the production of Local Parks and Open Space Action Plans which will guide the future allocation of resources
- A detailed open space quality appraisal of all land owned and maintained by Birmingham City Council produced on a Ward by Ward basis
- Develop a Sustainability Checklist to be used to assess existing and proposed parks.
- Develop a rolling programme of market research to sample public opinion and monitor park use, visitor attitudes and needs
- Develop an integrated parks information management system to provide a database of park use, facilities, visitor attitudes and events
- Develop additional supplementary planning documents for parks and open space design.
- Develop a database of funding sources to assist in identifying suitable funding sources for park related projects
- Develop partnerships with other private, community and voluntary sector and statutory agencies to allow increased opportunities to access external grant aid.
- Explore and test opportunities for sponsorship, commercial investment and franchises with regard to sports, catering, events and revenue posts.
- Facilitate a Birmingham Network of Parks Friends Groups and Consultative Committees working in conjunction with the Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums and the Constituencies

(The Birmingham Open Spaces Forum).

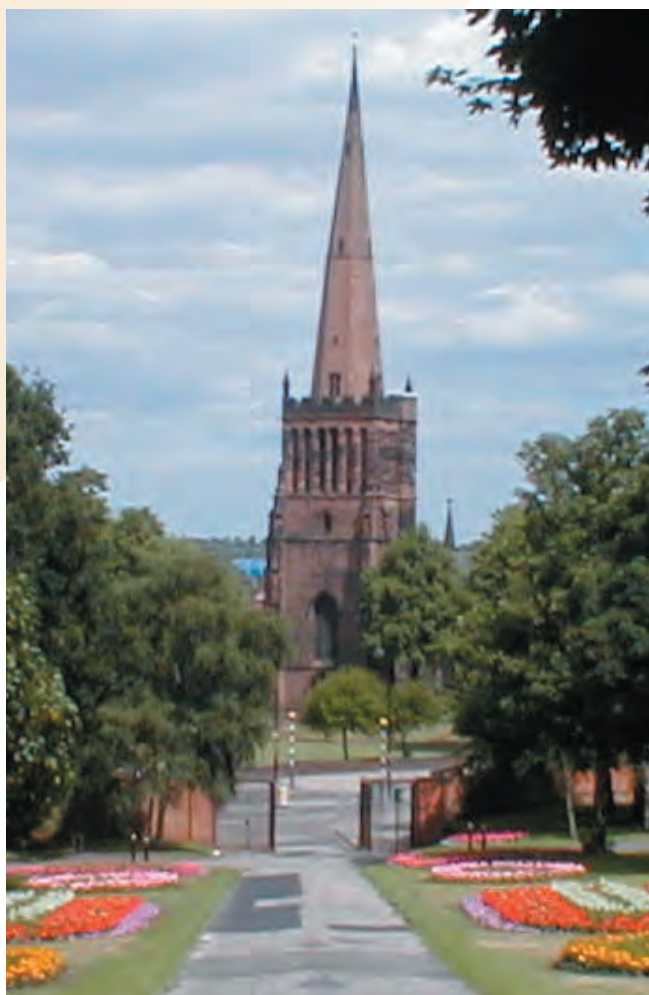
- Introduce a rolling programme of full time park keeper provision
- Present research findings of project URGE and input to UK centres of academic excellence regarding urban and environmental research.
- Monitor success of all improvement projects (eg Handsworth Park and Attwood Green) and management improvements
- Ensure that new and existing facilities and information are accessible to people with disabilities
- Develop a working relationship with CAGE Space and Greenspace and contribute to research into the value of parks and other open spaces

8.3.2 A number of policy statements and strategies already exist and through this Strategy a number have been identified to be revised or new documents created. Existing policies in need of revision are:-

- Angling Policy
- Allotment Strategy – to continue to identify potential in areas of shortfall
- Byelaws - Review and update for individual parks and Country Parks
- Catering facilities – a review of existing outlets, performance and potential
- Community events - a review of the booking system and Equality Standard impacts
- Dogs in Parks Policy- to review current best-practice
- Friends Groups/Consultative Steering Committees – to review their standard procedures and constitutions.
- Invasive Weeds Policy- to review and keep abreast of national research
- A review of the existing Nature Conservation Strategy, and reassessment of the ecological status of all existing, and potential, sites of quality.
- Parks Pools Policy – to review best-practice and controls for Canada Geese, pigeons, rats and other pests within parks
- Ranger Service Report – to produce an annual report to report back on performance and propose future direction
- Security arrangements – to review safety and security in parks

### 8.3.3 New policies or documents that are required :-

- Art in parks strategy
- Cemeteries Strategy
- Cultural resource strategy for parks
- Full facilities survey for parks using the Comprehensive Site Assessment Tool - as part of the wider Asset Management Strategy to include Toilet provision
- Golf Course Strategy
- Heritage Strategy
- Marketing strategy for parks to include a review of their tourism potential
- Trees in the Public Highway Policy
- Tree Strategy for Birmingham and action plan to implement recommendations



# **glossary and references**



# 9 Glossary and References

## 9.1 Glossary

### ACCESSIBILITY

The ability of people to move round an area and to reach places and facilities, including elderly and disabled people, those with young children and those encumbered with luggage or shopping.

### AUDIT COMMISSION

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively.

### AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Term used to refer to how audiences can be built and visitor numbers increased.

### BEST VALUE

Best Value arrangements exist to secure continuous improvement in the performance of functions by public service organisations. Continuous improvement seeks to balance quality and cost considerations, and is achieved with regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, the equal opportunities arrangements, and sustainable development.

### BIODIVERSITY

The number and variety of organisms found within a specified geographic region.

### BIRMINGHAM OPEN SPACES FORUM (BOSF).

Birmingham wide voluntary organisation providing a forum for park friends groups.

### BURNT MOUNDS

Mounds of heat-shattered stones and charcoal that are the debris from cooking in water boiled with hot stones, or from bathing in steam produced by pouring water over hot stones.

### CABINET MEMBER.

Elected member with specific portfolio responsibilities for particular Council services.

### CABE.

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment responsible for the promotion of high quality design and architecture to raise the standard of the built environment.

### CABE SPACE.

Part of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment responsible for promoting public spaces.

### CAPITAL AND REVENUE FUNDING.

Specific types of funding generally related to expenditure on 'one-off' projects (capital) or maintenance (revenue).

### CAPITAL RECEIPTS.

Income derived from the sale of land.

### CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

An area appraisal identifying distinguishing physical features and emphasising historical and associations.

### COMMUNITY PLAN.

The community planning process aims to involve local communities in the formulation of Council policy through the development of a Community Strategy. Constituency Community Development Plans will respond to the City's Community Strategy.

### COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Comprehensive performance assessment is the framework that the Government uses to assess how well councils are performing.

**COMPULSORY COMPETITIVE TENDERING.** Procurement procedure where services are tendered competitively and evaluated on the basis of price.

### CONTEXT

The setting of a site or area, including factors such as traffic, activities and land uses as well as landscape and built form.

### DEFENSIBLE SPACE

Public and semi-public space that is 'defensible' in the sense that it is surveyed, demarcated or maintained by somebody. Derived from Oscar Newman's 1973 study of the same name, and an important concept in securing public safety in urban areas, defensible space is also dependant upon the existence of escape routes and the level of anonymity which can be anticipated by the users of the space.

### DEMAND ASSESSMENT

Analysis of current and predicted demand.

## DESIGN GUIDE

A document providing guidance on how development can be carried out in accordance with the design policies of a local authority or other organisation often with a view to retaining local distinctiveness.

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

An expression of one of the basic design ideas at the heart of an urban design framework, design guide, development brief or a development.

## DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

A document prepared by a local planning authority, a developer; or a jointly, providing guidance on how a site of significant size or sensitivity should be developed. Site-specific briefs are sometimes known as planning briefs, design briefs and development frameworks.

**DEVOLUTION AND LOCALISATION.** Process through which City Council services and decision-making is provided at a local level through the creation of Constituency Committees and Local Area Offices.

## EXERCISE ON PRESCRIPTION

Initiative to promote a healthy lifestyle through GP's and Primary Care Trusts

## FLORA

All members of the plant kingdom: higher ferns, ferns and fern allies, mosses and liverworts, algae and phytoplankton, fungi and lichens.

## FRIENDS GROUPS

Local community group with interest in local park or open space.

## GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS)

Spatially referenced database linked to digital mapping system.

## GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM (GPS)

GPS is a satellite navigation system which can be used to accurately pinpoint and map locations.

## GREEN FLAG AWARD

The Green Flag Award scheme is the national standard for parks and green spaces throughout England and Wales.

## GREEN FUNDING DIRECTORY

Environment related sources of funding.

## GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Contractors employed by Birmingham City Council to carry out horticultural and park maintenance related tasks.

## LANDSCAPE

The character and appearance of land, including its space, form, ecology, natural features, colours and elements and the way these components combine. Landscape character can be expressed through landscape appraisal, and maps or plans. In towns 'townscape' describes the same concept.

## LEATS

Manmade channels constructed to carry water for various purposes, including powering water mills.

## LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS

Agreements between the City Council at the Constituency level and other service providers setting out how local services are to be provided.

## LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS

The positive features of a place and its communities which contribute to its special character and sense of place.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTORATE AND CONSTITUENCY SERVICES

The devolution of Birmingham City Council has resulted in the creation of 10 Constituency offices (providing local services) and a Strategic Directorate (providing centralised and strategic services).

## NATURAL SURVEILLANCE

The discouragement to wrongdoing by the presence of passers-by or the ability of people to be seen out of surrounding windows. Also known as passive surveillance (or supervision).

## NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

Local community public meeting.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH AND PARK WATCH SCHEMES

Initiatives to encourage community participation in creating more secure neighbourhoods.

**ODPM.**

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

**PCT**

Primary Health Care Trusts

**PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Measures which primarily address quality issues.

**PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE NOTES (PPG'S)**

Documents embodying government guidance on general and specific aspects of planning policy to be taken into account in formulating development plan policies and in making planning decisions.

**PROJECT-'URGE'.**

The European Union Project URGE (Urban Green Space) was a European Union project addressing the quality of green spaces across Europe, identifying examples of good practice and providing a manual and tool box for all practitioners and planners dealing with urban green spaces.

**PUBLIC ART**

Permanent or temporary physical works or art visible to the general public, whether part of the building or free-standing: can include sculpture, lighting effects, street furniture, paving, railings and signs.

**PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY (PROW)**

Those paths and tracks recorded on the Definitive Map and having a right of access on foot (footpath), horse back, cycling and walking (bridleways) and byways (or BOAT's) (access for all'.

**RIDGE AND FURROW**

The remains of a cultivation method in which the soil is raised up into parallel ridges to improve drainage and to increase soil depth.

**ROSPA**

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

**SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS.**

Section 106 Agreements enable the Local Authority to secure provision or improvement of existing infrastructure necessary to meet the needs of the occupiers or users of new development.

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT.**

The City Council has a number of scrutiny committees covering different areas of service.

**SMART Objectives.**

Objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time related.

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP.** Strategic Partnerships exist to provide a forum for interested partners and agencies at a Constituency and City level.

**SUSTAINABLE URBAN DRAINAGE SYSTEMS (SUDS)**

A sequence of management practices and control structures designed to drain surface water in a more sustainable fashion than some conventional techniques.

**SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT.** Planning document which provides additional guidance in support of a Development Plan Document.

**SURVEILLANCE**

The discouragement to wrong-doing by the presence of passers-by or the ability of people to be seen from surrounding windows.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Defined by the Brundtland Commission (1987) as 'Development which meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to achieve their own needs and aspirations'. The UK's strategy for sustainable development "A better quality of life" was published in May 1999 and highlights the need for environmental improvement, social justice and economic success to go hand-in-hand.

**URBAN DESIGN**

The art of making places. Urban design involves the design of buildings, groups of buildings, spaces and landscapes, in villages, towns and cities, and the establishment of frameworks and processes which facilitate successful development.

**WALK 2000 INITIATIVE**

Initiative to encourage healthier living through the marking out and use of 2km walking routes within Birmingham's parks and other green spaces.



## 9.2 Key References

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- <sup>10</sup> Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group (2000) *Biodiversity Action Plan for Birmingham and the Black Country (2000-2005)*
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- <sup>20</sup> Birmingham City Council (2002) *Parks, Sports and Events report of the Local and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the City Council Major Scrutiny Review of Parks and Open Spaces* Department of Leisure and Culture
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- <sup>22</sup> Audit Commission - Cultural Sector RPA 2004
- <sup>23</sup> Birmingham City Council (2001) *Places For Living* Birmingham City Council
- <sup>24</sup> Birmingham City Council (2001) *Places for all* Birmingham City Council
- <sup>25</sup> Secured by Design (2004) *Secured by Design Principles*, Association of Crime Prevention Officers (ACPO)
- <sup>26</sup> Birmingham City Council (2003) *Transport Strategy* Birmingham City Council
- <sup>27</sup> Birmingham City Council (2006) *Cycling Strategy* Birmingham City Council
- <sup>28</sup> Birmingham City Council (2006) *Walking Strategy* Birmingham City Council
- <sup>29</sup> Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions and Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (2000) *By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice*, London: Thomas Telford.

<sup>30</sup> Trees & Sustainable Urban Air Quality' study

<sup>31</sup> Birmingham City Council (2005) Every Child's Play Matters – A Statement for Play

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# appendices



# Appendix 1 Planning Policy

Extract from the Birmingham Plan 2005,  
Birmingham City Council, Department of  
Planning

## Trees and Landscape in the Urban Environment

**3.16A** Trees are important for their visual amenity, benefits to health, historical significance and nature conservation value. They help to improve air quality and can be used to screen development and soften building lines. The City Council will continue to protect trees through Tree Preservation Orders, planning conditions and conservation legislation. Developers will be expected to give priority to the retention of trees, hedgerows and natural features on development sites, and existing landscaping should also be kept and protected where possible. Where trees or hedgerows are lost as a result of development, replacement trees will be required and, wherever possible, replacement hedgerows. Suitable additional planting will be required to complement and enhance existing landscaping, where this will not result in the loss of other existing semi-natural habitats. Species planted should be appropriate to the locality, and a variety of species will be sought across the City. The City Council will continue to promote tree management plans where appropriate in order to ensure the long term amenity of an area. These will include the management of street trees which are coming under increasing threat from redevelopment

or from the renewal or replacement of underground public utilities.

**3.16B** The City Council will itself, and in liaison and partnership with others, seek to expand the City's woodland resource by encouraging the planting of new woodland wherever appropriate.

## Historic Landscapes

**29.29** The City Council will continue to work with English Heritage to complete the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest for Birmingham. Historic landscapes which do not merit inclusion in the National Register, but which have special local significance, will be added to the City's Local List (see above). Planning proposals should respect the historic context of sites on the Register of Parks and Gardens and their settings. In determining applications the Council will take full account of the historic significance of these areas and seek to protect their distinctive characteristics. Similarly, development proposals that would adversely affect the character and appearance of other parks, gardens and open spaces and their settings will not normally be permitted.

## Canals

**3.34** Birmingham lies at the heart of the national network of canals, which played an important part in the town's early industrial development. The historic importance of canals is acknowledged, and wherever

possible, important groups of canal buildings and features will be protected. Consideration will be given to the designation of canal settings as conservation areas. Canals are a major focus for urban regeneration. Accordingly, new developments adjacent to canals will be expected to enhance their setting and use. Where appropriate, the enhancement of canals and their settings will be secured through S106 agreements. All new canalside developments should be designed in accordance with the Canalside Development in Birmingham - Design Guidelines, which are being prepared as Supplementary Planning Guidance to this Plan. In addition, the City Council will have regard to the advice set out in PPG15.

**3.35** Most of the City's canals pass through inner city areas. Since 1983, the City has been a partner in the Canal Improvement Programme, which has secured improvements to and restoration of canals as part of the strategy for the physical and environmental regeneration of inner city areas. Some improvements are identified in the Constituency Statements, and further improvement and restoration schemes within the City will be supported.

**3.36** Canals are also important for wildlife and make an important contribution to the City's network of "Key Wildlife Corridors" as set out in the Nature Conservation Strategy for Birmingham. In addition, they offer further potential for tourism, recreation and leisure, as well as for freight transport, and as commuting routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

Proposals which seek to promote these activities, and which do not detract from the canals' historic character, wildlife importance or create conflict with other users, will be encouraged. Canal use for water transfer and other public utilities, such as cable laying, will be considered on their merits and in line with the principles set out above. A strategy for future improvements to the canal network will be set out in the Birmingham Canals Action Plan, which will be prepared through the Birmingham Canals Partnership as a Supplementary Planning Document.

## Nature Conservation

**3.37** The importance of safeguarding and enhancing the natural environment of the City is recognised. This involves both the protection of existing areas of nature conservation importance and measures to improve the diversity and quality of wildlife habitats throughout the City. Development in, or likely to affect, any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) will be subject to special scrutiny. Where such development may have an adverse effect, directly or indirectly, on the SSSI it will not be permitted unless the reasons for development clearly outweigh the nature conservation value of the site itself and the national policy to safeguard the national network of such sites.

**3.37A** Development likely to have an adverse effect on a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) or Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) identified in the UDP, or subsequently

identified, will not be permitted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there are reasons for the proposal which outweigh the need to safeguard the substantive nature conservation value of the site or feature.

- 3.37B** Where development of any SSSI, LNR or SINCR is permitted, planning conditions may be imposed and/or planning obligations sought to promote the management and conservation of the nature interests involved and to provide appropriate compensatory measures. However, permission will not be granted for the development of any SSSI, LNR or SINCR simply because the nature conservation value of the site has reduced since designation due to a lack of good management.
- 3.38** Schemes including reclamation of derelict land, and new developments, particularly those on open land, will be expected to respect, and where possible enhance, the local environment, for example through the retention of existing trees and through planting and landscaping schemes using native species where appropriate, with the objective of maximising wildlife value. The retention and enhancement of existing tree cover, hedgerows, wildlife habitats and geological features will be supported in order to ensure that the natural heritage of an area is not lost. Development proposals which lead to the loss of a valuable wildlife habitat should make provision for a replacement habitat of equal value.
- 3.39** Development which may harm the integrity or continuity of landscape

features which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora (including features such as river and stream corridors, canals, active and disused railway corridors, natural greenspaces, urban wasteland sites, hedgerows, ponds and small woods) will only be permitted where the reasons for development clearly outweigh the need to retain the feature and in such cases developers would be expected to provide appropriate mitigation measures. Appropriate management of features will be sought by the imposition of conditions, by the use of planning obligations, and by concluding management agreements with landowners and developers.

- 3.39A** A comprehensive Nature Conservation strategy has been prepared and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. This identifies those parts of the City which are particularly valuable from a nature conservation aspect, acknowledges and recognises the value of green corridors and networks, and includes many areas which form part of the City's open space system (see also paragraph 3.47). Those parts of the City currently lacking in wildlife habitats are identified in the strategy as Wildlife Action Areas. Policies to ensure local biodiversity, appropriate management and adequate public access are included. These may be secured through the use of Section 106 agreements. In addition, the Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan provides additional information supporting the Nature Conservation Strategy.



**3.40** Existing natural areas will continue to be conserved and enhanced in a variety of ways:

- (a) The two existing Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) - Sutton Park and Edgbaston Pool - and any others which may be designated will continue to be protected in accordance with their statutory status. Sutton Park will be protected in accordance with its additional status as a National Nature Reserve.
- (b) 42 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) are identified in the Constituency Statements. These sites, which have all been identified by English Nature, will be protected. The designation of additional areas as SINCs will be supported where there is adequate justification, and other sites with known wildlife importance will also be protected wherever possible.
- (c) Five Local Nature Reserves have been declared, at Bromwich Wood, Hill Hook Rubery Cutting/ Leach Green Quarries, Moseley Bog and Plants Brook Reservoirs. It is proposed that a further site from category (b) will be given the additional statutory protection of being declared and managed as Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), thus safeguarding the natural features and providing an educational resource for both school children and adults. The proposed LNR is at Merecroft Pool. Further LNRs will be established as appropriate.
- (d) In addition a range of other sites will continue to be managed by the City Council and other organisations for conservation purposes and there will be an increased emphasis on enabling

and encouraging local groups in their conservation initiatives.

- (e) Further, it is recognised that the management of a range of landscape features of major importance to wild flora and fauna should be encouraged.

## **Open Space\***

**3.47** The policy will continue to be to develop an integrated and linked network of open space\* throughout the City ranging from the Green Belt including Green Wedges to local play areas and including Country Parks, informal open space, formal parks, playing fields, golf courses and woodlands. The linking element is provided by linear open spaces ensuring a range of recreational facilities accessible to all and enabling the natural wildlife of the countryside to penetrate deep into the urban area.

**3.48** Complementing and forming part of linear open space is a system of interlinked walkways often utilising canals and rivers. The completion and extension of this network, including footpaths within the rural areas of Birmingham, will continue to be a priority, in particular to ensure that full public access is provided to all linear open spaces and to the countryside. Every opportunity will also be taken to enhance and improve links into the national system and to promote Birmingham's strategic importance at the hub of existing and proposed long distance routes.

**\*Definitions:**

*For the purposes of the UDP, “open space” is defined as “all open land of recreational or public value, including playing fields, which primarily consists of natural elements such as trees, grass and water. It may or may not have free public access. It may or may not be used or held by the City Council for recreational purposes”.*

*For the purposes of the UDP, “public open space” is defined as “open space, including playing fields, owned by the City Council or to which there is a public right of access, used by the public primarily for recreation purposes. It does not include private or education playing fields, nor does it include municipal or private golf courses, cemeteries, or open areas within housing estates which substitute for private gardens”.*

- 3.49** The importance of the canal systems which also form part of the linear open space will continue to be recognised.
- 3.50** Proposals for development which would have an adverse effect on this open space network will not be allowed, and the completion and extension of the network of open space will be a priority.
- 3.51** In the City Centre open spaces make a particularly valuable contribution to the quality of the urban environment. As a consequence the development of any open space in excess of 1000 sq.m. will be resisted in the central area.
- 3.52** It should not be assumed that isolated areas of open space are of less importance. Local areas of open

space, and in particular play areas for small children, are of special significance.

- 3.52A** Proposals which would result in the loss of open space will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. In determining whether exceptional circumstances exist, the City Council will take account of the availability of public open space nearby, its quality, and how well it meets local needs. It is unlikely that developers will be able to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist where:-

- (a) existing public open space provision falls below the standard of 2.0 hectares per 1000 population (see para 3.53); and/or
- (b) there would be a loss of land from the open space network.

Where developers are able to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist to justify the release of open space for development, the practice will be to seek an appropriate recreational community benefit of equal value to compensate for the open space loss, that is at least as accessible to current and potential users, and at least equivalent in terms of size, usefulness, attractiveness and quality. Conditions may be imposed on planning permissions, or planning obligations sought, in order to secure the exchange of land, ensure any necessary works are undertaken and that the new facilities are capable of being maintained adequately through management and maintenance agreements.

## Public Open Space

**3.53** The distribution and accessibility of public open space, is also important. The standard of 2 hectares of public open space per 1000 population will be used to assess the adequacy of existing public open space provision across the City. Provision will normally be calculated on a Ward basis. However, fluctuations in provision within Wards, and provision within adjoining Wards where sites fall close to Ward or City boundaries, will also be taken into account, subject to the minimum standard above, and subject to the cumulative provision for adjacent Wards meeting the above standard. Currently public open space is below the standard in almost half the Wards in the City and there is a deficiency in most parts of the inner area. Redressing the inequality in provision is important, but difficult due to the built-up nature of the environment. Every effort will be made to encourage the provision of new public open space, incorporating new nature conservation interest where appropriate, in areas of existing deficiency where the opportunity arises. One means of achieving this is through the provision of public open space to serve the needs of new residential development and policies to achieve this are set out in paragraphs 5.20B-5.20E. Improvement in the quality of public open space is equally important. In localised areas where existing provision meets the standard of 2 hectares per 1000 population, it may be more appropriate to improve facilities on existing public open space rather than provide new areas.

**3.53A** Improvements may include measures to improve safety and security such as lighting and natural surveillance, to provide or improve play and recreational facilities or to improve access. The overall objective is to provide an area of safe, attractive and useable public open space, accessible to all sectors of the community including carers with pushchairs and people with disabilities within reasonable walking distance (400m) of all dwellings.

**3.53B** New residential developments generate a need for public open space and children's play facilities to serve the occupants of the new homes. These will be secured through S106 agreements, where appropriate. This will normally be provided within the curtilage of the site but in certain circumstances off-site provision or improvements to existing local facilities, including playing fields, may be more appropriate. Policies are set out in paragraphs 3.61 and 5.20B – 5.20E.

**3.54** - See paragraph 3.52A

## Playing Fields

**3.55** A standard of 1.2 hectares per 1000 population of playing fields provision (excluding education playing fields) will be used to assess the adequacy of existing playing field provision across the City. This standard is only reached in 6 of the 39 Wards in the City and, as in the case of public open space, opportunity to improve this situation is limited, due to the built up nature of the environment.



- 3.55A** In Wards where existing provision is below 1.2 hectares per 1000 population, consideration will be given to using contributions in lieu of public open space secured under planning obligations on new residential developments towards meeting this shortfall or to bringing existing pitches into more beneficial use through, for example, improvements to drainage and the provision of changing facilities.
- 3.56** Playing field provision falls into three main categories:-
- Playing fields provided by the City Council as part of its leisure and recreation function, including tennis courts and bowling greens.
  - all other playing fields - eg. company sports pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens.
  - school playing fields and school tennis courts.
- 3.57** Playing fields have fallen under increasing pressure for development in recent years. Development of such playing fields will not normally be allowed particularly in areas which fall significantly below the standard of 1.2 hectares playing field provision per 1000 population. Where, in exceptional circumstances, permission is granted for the development of a sports field this will be subject to the provision of equivalent long-term recreational community benefit (where appropriate, through the use of S106 agreements). Planning permission will not be granted for development simply because a playing field has fallen out of use and become derelict.
- 3.58** Some school playing fields are also used by the general public outside school hours. This 'dual use' of educational facilities will continue to be encouraged.
- 3.59** Some school playing fields will become surplus to educational requirements. In these circumstances development will not normally be allowed and the site will be expected to remain in playing field or open space use, especially in areas where existing provision falls significantly below the standard of 1.2 hectares per 1000 population. However, in some cases, other uses may be more appropriate, but such uses will only be acceptable where there will be an appropriate community benefit, which will be secured through a S106 agreement.
- 3.60** The quality of sports pitches is also important. Encouragement will continue to be given to improvements, for example to changing facilities, and to the provision of all-weather pitches, which can be used more intensively than grass pitches. An all-weather pitch is considered to be the equivalent of 2 grass pitches and will be assessed on this basis in calculating the extent of existing sports pitch provision in an area.
- ### Children's Play
- 3.61** It is important that a safe and accessible play area is available for all children. This will normally be expected to be provided within 400m safe walking distance of all dwellings

and will also take into account local neighbourhood identities, the demographic profile and physical barriers such as busy roads. Careful attention should be given to the design and location of play areas to avoid the risk of disturbance to nearby residents. Children's play areas will normally be required in all new residential developments of 20 or more dwellings in accordance with policy outlined in paragraphs 3.53B and 5.20B-5.30E. Where appropriate, this will be secured through the use of S106 agreements.

### **Allotments**

**3.62** Allotments provide a much needed facility especially in areas where private gardens are limited and they will continue to be protected. There is uneven provision of allotments across the City. Redressing this inequality is important, and every effort will be made to encourage the provision of new allotments in areas of deficiency, where the opportunity arises.

**3.62A** Planning permission will not be granted for the redevelopment of allotments simply because the allotments have fallen out of use and become derelict. Where it can be demonstrated that the demand for allotments has fallen, consideration will be given to alternative uses for surplus allotments. Such uses will be alternative recreational, nature conservation or horticultural uses, subject to the policy set out in paragraph 3.52A. If in exceptional circumstances planning permission is granted for other forms of development on part of the site this

will be subject to the provision of an appropriate, equivalent, long-term recreational community benefit.

### **Sports Facilities**

**3.63** The increasing demand for a variety of indoor sports facilities, including multi-purpose buildings is recognised and a spread of facilities throughout the city will be encouraged. Where there is an identified demand for particular sports and physical recreation facilities, redevelopment of existing facilities for other purposes will not be allowed until either adequate replacement for their loss has been secured, or adequate alternative facilities have been identified.

**3.63A** Public swimming provision is important and a chain of leisure pools and traditional local pools will be maintained across the city. The provision of an international standard 50m pool will be supported.

**3.64** Dual use facilities within the City's schools provide a useful contribution towards the recreational and leisure requirements of the City. The service offers educational opportunities through sports coaching and provides the springboard for participation in sport for all ages. Their continued use will be encouraged, as will proposals for any new dual use facilities.

## Appendix 2 - Contacts

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# the **Birmingham** plan

birmingham's local development framework

## The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

Supplementary Planning Document

November 2006



If you would prefer this information in another format please contact 0121 303 4562