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Green space management in Bristol

"... a measure of a city's greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and squares"

John Ruskin

Bristol's parks and green spaces face a positive future with the recent adoption of the city's *Parks and Green Space Strategy* which outlines a 20 year investment programme for the future provision, improvement and management of green space and the facilities that should be provided. The strategy is part of a wider focus on how the city as a whole will develop via a new planning framework for the city – the Bristol Development Framework.

The quality and provision of facilities is currently below what people expect them to be. Based on the views of over 6,000 local people who have participated in its development, the strategy sets out proposals for raising quality, and giving people across Bristol more equitable and better access to a variety of types of green space and facilities – such as children's play (with up to 70 new place spaces proposed), natural areas and traditional parks with new, customer friendly Park Keepers. These improvements have significant cost to them – over £100m at 2006 prices – and this funding will take time to raise, which is why this is a 20 year strategy.

For more information and to download a copy of the Parks and Green Space Strategy – see www.bristol.gov.uk/parkstrategy

1 Vision for green space in Bristol

Over 25 million visits are made by 83% of the Bristol population to parks and green spaces in Bristol every year, making it the most used leisure facility in the city. Bristol's green space vision describes:

"A City with good quality, attractive, enjoyable and accessible green spaces which meet the diverse needs of all Bristol citizens – and visitors to the regional capital of South West England".

Within twenty years everyone in Bristol will have easy access to:

- A high quality traditional park, staffed by a park keeper in daylight hours, with features such as mature trees, ornamental planting, seating, toilets and a café.
- Good quality playing fields and changing rooms providing for a variety of sports, games and exercises.
- Open, welcoming and well managed natural green space, either meadows, woodland or riverside, with protected wildlife habitats.
- Well-kept, well-maintained, imaginative and challenging play facilities, from traditional equipped playgrounds to natural play spaces, wheels parks or games areas.
- Well maintained green space for informal recreation.

2 Objectives of the parks and green space strategy

1. Raise the quality of parks and green spaces.
2. Encourage greater use and enjoyment of Bristol's parks and green spaces by all sectors of the community.
3. Contribute to the wider planning of the urban fabric of the city by providing a range of good quality parks and green spaces, which play a significant role in meeting the needs of balanced and sustainable communities and enhancing the urban landscape, to help make Bristol a green and sustainable city.
4. Protect needed green space from development.
5. Rectify shortages in particular types of green space across the city to ensure all residents have access to formal, informal, natural, sports and children & young people's spaces.
6. Provide a clear basis for beneficial investment in green spaces – identifying those areas of Bristol where investment and improvements in green space are most needed, helping the council 'spend better'.
7. Encourage active and healthy life-styles and promote social inclusion.
8. Encourage community participation in the improvement and management of green spaces.

3 What areas and types of green space does the strategy cover?

The two main areas that the strategy covers are:

- A set of policies for service improvement and development.
- A set of provision standards for accessible green space across the city, responding to national Planning Policy Guidance no 17 (PPG17).

The strategy considers all green spaces for which there is *legitimate public access* and which provide recreational benefit.

The strategy considers five different types of space

- children and young people's space,
- formal green space,
- informal green space,
- natural green space,
- active sports space.

3.1 Children's play space

Parks and green spaces have a vital role in helping children and young people learn a variety of skills through play and social interaction. Exploring the wider environment such as woodlands, streams, wildlife areas – provides the freedom to choose what they do and where they go, stimulating the imagination and testing boundaries.

The council believes that "children and young people should be encouraged to take acceptable risks in environments that are challenging and stimulating". Safety concerns of parents and carers, however, sometimes prevent younger children exploring, taking acceptable risks and playing outdoors. The

strategy looks at a range of initiatives to redress this including policies to provide adequate play provision for the full range of ages up to 19 years.

Creating diversity and stimulating imaginative play are essential for our children to grow and learn. We plan to introduce more natural play opportunities within a safe environment, instead of an over-reliance on equipment. Children love climbing on rocks and tree stumps, playing in water and sand, and running around trees.

Providing a network of larger and better play spaces – including up to 70 new play spaces – will offer a wider range of experiences and challenges for children. To further improve the environment for children, all play spaces will be promoted as smoke-free.

3.2 Formal green space

Bristol has a rich heritage of formal green space much of which is provided in public parks and gardens across the city. It is the aesthetic experience of these spaces that distinguishes it from other types of green space. A formal green space can be a designed landscape, an ornamental garden with planting schemes and statues, or a designed city centre square.

The strategy includes policies for enhancing and safeguarding formal green space, with a focus on the vital role of traditional, mainly Victorian multi functional parks offering a range of facilities. The main traditional parks will have a park keeper who can respond to day to day needs and provide a sense of security to park users – making improvements to entrances and boundaries and raising horticultural standards will also make a great difference .

3.3 Informal green space

Informal green space is informal in layout or character, with a low level of landscaping and few or no additional facilities. Bristol Downs is the city's largest green space used 'informally' by a wide variety of people to fly kites, do exercise, play sport, explore wildlife and have picnics. Many smaller but important informal sites soften the urban landscape and much of Bristol's informal green space provides flexible space for recreation and play, major and neighbourhood festivals and events. Some informal green space is also used as playing fields where organised games such as football take place on a regular basis.

However, Bristol has a significant amount of poor quality informal green space which is perceived as less safe and inaccessible and consequently has low levels of use, detracting from the local area. This type of space can attract anti-social behaviour, particularly fly-tipping and motorbikes. The quality of Bristol's informal green space is limited by the performance of the existing grounds maintenance contract, so focussing on improvements to this aspect of the service will make significant improvements to these spaces.

Many smaller informal spaces at ends of streets can be better used for play and kickabout by upgrading them with railings to separate children from traffic, making them dog free and adding in simple equipment such as goal posts.

In some cases such spaces which offer *low social and recreational value* (which is defined elsewhere in the strategy) may be disposed of to invest in other services including other local parks, or changed to other types of space. It is however vital that sufficient space is retained within neighbourhoods, and the green space standards are designed to ensure this happens.

3.4 Natural green space

Natural green spaces are important refuges for wildlife and places where we can experience and enjoy contact with the natural world. In Bristol, many such sites are protected in recognition of their nature conservation importance and their contribution to the attractiveness and liveability of the city. The natural green space in Bristol is immensely varied reflecting the differing scale, location and character of such sites.

Customer research suggests that natural green space is one of the most valued spaces, but also raises issues about their accessibility on a practical level. Whilst there are a number of well-managed sites in the city, many natural green spaces are neglected, damaging their value for nature conservation and making them threatening and unattractive. The strategy aims to make substantial improvements to these spaces through more active intervention including the improvement of footpaths by making them more open, free from overhanging vegetation, and clearing scrub to make sites feel more open and welcoming, at the same time as maintaining and enhancing their wildlife interest.

Establishing a network of 16 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) is priority and the creation of more community woodlands is also proposed where local people foster a sense of ownership and help sites to feel more welcoming.

3.5 Active sports space

The council has already adopted a Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) which provides the key proposal for formally organised sport across the city. These include proposals to increase the number of pitches available to the community by forming dual use agreements with schools; to upgrade pitches so that they can sustain much more use without pitch sites which can sustain a good infrastructure of changing rooms etc; and to develop a number of *hub sites* with a range of facilities including club houses, floodlit artificial turf pitches and multi use games areas, where coaching programmes can be focused.

The PPS is also the tool for determining what provision of sports pitches is needed. This includes the standards in terms of quantity and distance. The Parks and Green Space Strategy deals with the management of sports and sports facilities where they exist in parks and green spaces, a principle aim being to improve the quality of pitches and associated facilities. It also considers the need to upgrade tennis courts and bowling provision also needs to be reviewed as a number of clubs are declining in membership.

The strategy also recognises that green spaces also have an important role in providing opportunities for informal sports such as jogging, softball and kickabout and less formally organised games of cricket and football.

4 Key customer research findings

A significant level of customer research has taken place to both inform the proposed provision standards for Bristol and its service improvement and development policies. An Equalities Impact Assessment has also been carried out on the current service being offered by Bristol City Council. This has highlighted where current service provision needs to be adapted to provide a good service to all sectors of the community.

- Quality is the overriding factor affecting user satisfaction – quantity is far less important.
- People were relatively clear and consistent on how far they would travel to get to different types of space, which has directly influenced the distance standards
- Many people want a traditional multi functional park.
- The main barriers to use of parks and green spaces are issues associated with poor maintenance, dogs' mess, litter, fears for personal safety and anti-social behaviour.
- Some equalities groups – such as disabled, women, black and older people – are less frequent users and less satisfied with green spaces, finding travel distance, litter and perceived personal safety particularly problematic.

5 Further land management policies

In addition to the 5 green space types, the strategy also includes policy covering – Destination Parks and city centre spaces, Use of Park Buildings, Creating Dog Free Spaces and Controlling Dog Fouling, Backland Sites, Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change, Access and Transport Planning, Cycleways and greenways.

6 Setting the standards

There are three specific standards which comprise the Bristol Green Space Standards:

- Quality standard – a level of quality which all spaces should attain.
- Distance standard – how far should people have to travel to reach a particular type of space.
- Quantity standard – how much green space of different types there should be.

The standards apply to publicly accessible green space. The standards are designed to ensure that all people in Bristol have access to a range of good quality spaces and associated facilities. The standards will be used for planning and prioritising future work for the council in meeting this aim. It is intended that the key standards will be incorporated into the Bristol Development Framework and provide developers and the city council with clarity over the future provision of green space in planning decisions.

The standards proposed are for minimum levels of provision (ie provision should not drop below this standard and is likely to be above, in the same way that the minimum wage applies) and their application will take into account future population trends and growth areas across the city, with an estimated population growth of around 53,800 between 2006 and 2026.

6.1 Quality standard

A Bristol quality standard has been devised in consultation with national advisers and local parks users, which takes into account design, condition and maintenance, and assesses a comprehensive range of features of parks and open spaces. It takes into account a number of aspects which are of particular public concern such as entrances, safety feel, and facilities.

On a 1 to 4 scale (poor, fair, good and excellent), the quality assessment process revealed an average quality level across Bristol of 2 (fair).

Policy: To raise the quality of all parks and green spaces to a minimum quality level of good (3) within the next 20 years, with a particular focus on the most deprived areas of the city which often have the lowest quality green space.

6.2 Distance standard

The aim of distance standards is to protect and promote an accessible network of green space. The distance standards are based on research as to how far Bristol residents feel it's reasonable to walk to get to the different types of space, and on analysis of Bristol's layout to ensure the standards are credible.

Policy: Ensure that in any land review adequate access is retained by applying the distance standards (minimum standard of 400 metres to nearest green space) and associated guidance.

6.3 Quantity standard

The amount of open space per resident varies hugely between and within cities. In 2007 the current level for Bristol is 3.8 hectares per 1000 residents (38 square metres per capita) although with a predicted population growth of 53,800 by 2026 this figure would reduce to approximately 33 sq metres per capita. This varies greatly between central and Victorian districts (quite low) and the outer suburbs.

Policy: Ensure that in any land review adequate access is retained in local neighbourhoods by applying the quantity standards (ie. minimum standard of 18 sq m/capita – 1.8 hectares/1000 pop) and associated guidance.

7 Delivering the Strategy

The main ways that the strategy will be delivered are detailed below. Bringing all these mechanisms together will shape the way all the policies in the strategy are implemented over the next 20 years.

Funding: It is estimated that achieving a 'good' standard of provision across the whole parks and green space network will cost £87million in capital funding (at 2006 prices) over the 20 year life of the strategy. Funding for this will come from a number of sources including contributions from developers

in the city (est £15m), external funding sources such as the lottery (est £21m), monies raised from the sale of some green space (est £41m) and from the council's core budget for Bristol Parks services (est £10m).

The achievement of the strategy will be geared to the pace at which capital can be generated; this is why disposal of some low value, marginal land is essential if its ambitious quality improvements are to be realised. The council's usual policy is that all receipts from land disposals should go into a 'central capital pot' but in this case 70% will be ring fenced for reinvestment back into parks and green spaces. In addition to capital funding, there will need to be an increase of revenue budgets for improved standards of grounds maintenance, and for the cyclical repair of features when damaged or worn out to be delivered by the creation of a 'life cycle costs fund'.

Grounds Maintenance: The council recognises that improving grounds maintenance is a critical issue, reinforced by the response from public consultation. Effective and efficient grounds maintenance is vital to deliver the objectives of this strategy. As well as conventional ways to provide the service, such as via contracts and managing the services directly, the strategy will be looking at the option for community management of some individual spaces.

Area Green Space Plans: The strategy document is not the end of the decision making process or to community involvement in what happens at a local level. We will develop *Area Green Space Plans* in consultation with local people, applying the standards locally and making specific proposals to improve parks in the area. These will be coordinated with other council initiatives which may affect neighbourhoods and communities.

Design Guide: A design guide has been prepared to help planners, developers and parks managers.

About People: The strategy also includes policies covering – Boosting Participation and Increasing Use, Tackling key barriers to use, Consultation and involvement, Developing and supporting community groups, Working with partners, Education and outreach, Events and Festivals, Health and exercise, Good communication and information planning.

Monitoring and Review: The Parks and Green Space Strategy will be monitored and reviewed based on headline performance indicators, managed via the Bristol Parks Service Delivery Plan which is reviewed annually. PIs will focus on monitoring customer satisfaction, service quality and 'bottom line' numbers of park visits and visitors.

The strategy will be reviewed by the end of the first five years – with the current version applying from 1st April 2008 to end March 2013.

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Public involvement in planning and realisation process – Blüherpark in Dresden

The city of Dresden has experienced severe cuts over the last century. These political, cultural and economical changes left their marks in the cityscape and thus influenced its shape, uses and users. The Blüherpark's surroundings ranged from rural landscape outside the city's fortress walls to densely built part of town near the centre up to a loosely built blocks of flats from the 1950s and with spread public facilities and huge parts seemingly unplanned open space. The gap between its prominent central location, varied cultural history and at the same time its "lost" look created an area only known by people as the location of the German Hygiene Museum. This diverse identity was the motive to unveil the ground walls of the palace Secundogeniture and its historical axis.

1 Blüherpark Dresden

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The character of the Blüherpark changed from:

- a noblemen's pleasure garden 17th cent.
- the residence of the second borne prince of the Wettin Dynastie 18th/19th cent.
- into a public park with playing facilities and a herb garden

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The **gap** between its prominent central location, varied cultural history and at the same time its "lost" look created an area only known by people as the location of the German Hygiene Museum.

This diverse identity was the motive to unveil the ground walls of the palace Secundogeniture and its historical axis.

There is one habit of Dresden citizens: they don't like changes and therefore critically watched the closure of the preliminary use as a herb garden. At this point GreenKeys started an intensive communication process with citizens and local actors at Dresden's Pilot Project Blüherpark.