




Green Spaces, Better Places



*Final report of
The Urban Green Spaces
Taskforce*

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PREFACE

This is the final report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce. It shows that although urban parks and green spaces in England remain enormously popular, too many have suffered severe decline over the last twenty years. Action is needed by all sectors of society, working together at all levels from the national to the local, to achieve better planning, design, management and maintenance, as well as extra resources.

This report is presented to Government as the basis for developing a new national strategy for urban parks and green spaces. Our aim is to reverse the present decline and to ensure that these precious spaces play their full role in creating a better quality of life in our towns and cities, contributing to a sustainable urban renaissance.

FOREWORD BY SALLY KEEBLE MP



Parks and green spaces should be at the centre of the renaissance of our towns and cities.

This report from the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce shows how this can become a reality. It sets out how older parks can be revitalised, and how new spaces should be planned and delivered.

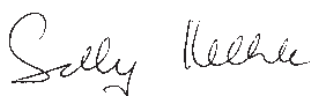
For many years we have taken our parks and green spaces for granted. As a result they have been neglected, and often lag behind many other local services. Yet for millions of people they are essential for providing quality to urban life, somewhere to relax, exercise, meet friends or work.

Changing social and economic circumstances have placed new demands on parks and green spaces. They have to serve more diverse communities, face competition from highly commercial leisure facilities, and adapt to dramatically changing urban environments. Yet these changes also create new opportunities for parks and green spaces. They can promote community cohesion, encourage community development and stimulate partnerships between private and public sector. They can provide a focus for urban regeneration, delivering on education, health and community safety.

The Taskforce has explored all of these options, and produced this comprehensive report which sets out how we should create a renaissance for parks and green spaces. They have explored every aspect of the service, and set out a whole host of suggestions for improving both the theory and practice. More importantly they have set out challenges for decision-makers at all levels, in the community, in local authorities, central government and the business community and voluntary sectors.

I would like to thank the members of the Taskforce and the officials who supported them for the enormous energy and dedication they brought to their work. All of us have reason to thank them for the vision that they have provided for the future of parks and green spaces at the heart of our towns and cities.

Sally Keeble MP, Minister for Regeneration,
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sally Keeble".

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The best of our urban parks and green spaces remain popular. Millions of people appreciate the benefits they bring to their lives, their neighbourhoods, their towns and cities and the whole nation.

Across the country there is increasing public awareness and appreciation of the value of good quality parks, play areas and green spaces in regenerating town and cities, improving the health and wellbeing of local people, and providing educational opportunities for children and communities.

Despite their popularity there has been a worrying decline in the quality of too many urban parks and green spaces for which action is needed to deliver these benefits.

This final report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce has a simple message: now is the time for an urban renaissance with parks and diverse green spaces. The report sets out a programme for national and local government to work in partnership with local communities, business, voluntary organisations and others to revitalise parks and green spaces. It summarises our consideration of the issues, and sets out our conclusions and recommendations for reversing the well documented decline of urban parks and green spaces to regenerate these priceless urban assets, and creating new and different ones which are attractive, accessible, safe and sustainable.

The report is in four parts.

Parks and green spaces and urban life

PART 1 explains why urban parks and green spaces remain popular despite the fact that many are neglected and rundown. It outlines the benefits they bring to users, neighbourhoods, towns and cities. It stresses the important contribution they make in improving the quality of life in urban areas, and in helping to deliver wider and longer-term social, economic and environmental benefits through a range of public policy priorities.

These include:

- improving the quality of urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal projects and the attractiveness of locations for business, and creating community enterprise and new jobs;
- promoting healthy living and preventing illness, by providing places for physical activities, including walking and cycling;
- fostering social inclusion and community development, citizenship and local pride by giving people the chance to participate in the design, management and care of their local spaces;
- encouraging education and lifelong learning by providing a valuable resource for learning about the natural world and local environment;
- supporting environmental sustainability by countering the pollution which can make cities unbearable and unsustainable, and helping to promote ecologically sensitive towns and cities; and
- contributing to heritage and culture by providing reservoirs for collective memory, venues for local festivals and civic celebrations, and a livelier, more varied townscape.

And the report explains why those responsible for regeneration, healthcare, education, environment, sport and recreation, and community safety, need to consider why parks and green spaces should be at the heart of their policy development and action.

Challenges and responses

PART 2 outlines current concerns about urban parks and green spaces and sets out our proposals for overcoming them.

The report explains why so many parks have declined through under-investment, loss of status and failure to meet the needs and expectations of local communities, and why, in consequence, many people have been put off using them. It explains how the particular

interests of all the communities need to be served, especially those who may be marginalised, such as children, disabled people, minorities, and people in disadvantaged areas.

It also explains why greater investment in urban parks and green spaces is worthwhile; not only in adding value to regeneration, renewal and housing development, but also in saving costs in other policy areas such as health, education and environmental management and better overall use of public resources. (Section 2).

The report also shows how the necessary strategic policy framework can be put together to help overcome problems, especially of resources, community involvement, partnership working and information systems. It recommends that to begin reversing the decline of urban parks and green spaces and to create new, good quality ones will need at least an extra £100 million in capital funding in each of the next five years.

The report makes proposals for additional sources of funding external to local authorities. It also urges new mechanisms to get the maximum value from additional spending. In particular it recommends the setting up of a new national agency similar to those operating in other areas of cultural provision, to promote the cause of urban parks and green spaces, issue advice and improve co-ordination among all those concerned. The report shows why additional capital and revenue funding needs to be supported by a range of non-financial incentives, and makes recommendations for improving training and skills for managers, staff and others (Section 3).

The report stresses the value of partnership working and reviews different types of partnerships and community involvement in urban parks and green spaces. It suggests how more could be done to attract the private sector and local businesses into

partnerships to deliver the benefits of improved urban parks and green spaces. It recommends ways of promoting greater mutual understanding between partnerships and different providers of funding (Section 4).

It points out the obstacles to good decision-making and performance measurement created by the fragmented information and data-recording systems for urban parks and green spaces and by deficiencies in the dissemination of good practice and proposes remedies (Section 5).

Creating green space networks

PART 3 shows why urban parks and green spaces need a strategic policy framework in which all decision-makers should operate. Apart from additional resources and attention, the Taskforce emphasises that the revival of urban parks and green spaces depends on creating the right policy framework and integrated strategies for all the parties concerned to work collaboratively, recognise each other's interests, and deliver creative solutions.

The report shows how urban parks and green spaces suffer from split responsibilities in national government. It shows how they need strong local champions and integrated local strategies capable of developing networks of urban green spaces. It makes recommendations in these areas, and for:

- planners and planning mechanisms to take better account of the need for and benefits of urban parks and green spaces and the interests of the communities they serve (Section 6.2);
- design reviews to enhance and revive urban parks by paying close attention to their basic design intention, and their relationship to their local neighbourhoods and communities (Section 6.3);
- management plans and service and maintenance contracts to deliver

objectives for urban parks and green spaces (Section 6.4); and

- performance indicators and review procedures for local authorities and others to incorporate appropriate quality standards for urban parks and green spaces (Section 6.5).

The report also suggests how the concerns about different nuisances that affect the quality of spaces can be met in ways that persuade local communities to re-populate currently under-used local parks and green spaces (Section 6.6).

Finally, it suggests why and how planners, designers and managers should recognise the definitions of the 'ideal' green space by local communities (Section 6.7).

An urban renaissance with green spaces

PART 4 takes forward the recommendations made in Parts 2 and 3 and shows how and why they can deliver all the benefits of better urban parks and green spaces.

In this part we present parks and green spaces at the heart of our vision of liveable sustainable modern towns and cities, and suggests how they need and inspire strong civic leadership and local pride and responsibility (Section 7.1).

The report proposes common criteria, especially good practice and conspicuous care, for urban parks and green spaces to satisfy local communities (Section 7.2). It demonstrates the need for each site to be seen as part of a continuous network of urban green spaces which serves the needs and aspirations of communities, and shows why the links between local and national government strategies are necessary to achieve such a network (Section 7.3). It suggests how to develop the necessary improvements in information, the dissemination of good practice (Section 7.4), and the need for extra resources and where these can be best used, especially

through partnerships and in promoting community involvement (Section 7.5).

Finally, the report sets out the role and responsibilities of each of the main interests involved: national and local government, business, the voluntary sector, and local interests (Section 7.6). It urges, again, the creation of a new national agency for urban parks and green spaces, to be preceded by a steering committee inside the DTLR to take forward urgently the recommendations in the report (Section 7.7).

The recommendations of the report are summarised in Section 8.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

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. Realising this ambition requires a powerful new framework of policy, funding and management to produce exciting, diverse, high-quality parks and green spaces which meet the needs and aspirations of local communities.

SECTION 1: PARKS AND GREEN SPACES AND URBAN LIFE

1.1: Popularity of urban parks and green spaces

1. The life of towns and cities is exciting, challenging, creative, full of opportunities and continues to attract people of all backgrounds. But for the 80% of people in England who live there, the urban experience can also be dirty, dangerous, crowded, noisy and lonely¹. Parks and green spaces can offer places for city dwellers to find calm or places to be active and sociable, a chance to find a personal respite from the pressures of city life.

¹ Urban White Paper (2001) - *Our towns and cities: the future*. DTLR. 80% of population live in towns and cities of over 10,000 people.

² University of Sheffield (2002) *Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces*. DTLR.

2. People value parks and green spaces. Over 30 million people in England use them, making over two billion visits in total each year. In our survey, nearly 70% of people use their parks frequently, and many go every day (and most on foot)². Even for people who visit them rarely or never, parks and green spaces give pleasure and value. People enjoy parks just by knowing they are there, noticing them as they pass and seeing that they are well looked after.
3. Parks and green spaces come in many forms as our typology at section 5.2 clearly shows – traditional parks full of activity, quiet gardens, tree-lined city squares, cemeteries, woods and grasslands, vibrant



play areas, allotments, all those green spaces around housing – each adding something to our vision of the ideal urban landscape. Taken together, they account for 14% of Britain’s urban areas. The presence of good quality parks and their architectural features, trees and flower beds, help to give towns and cities their special identity – adding colour and definition to the townscape and enhancing its attraction to residents and visitors alike.



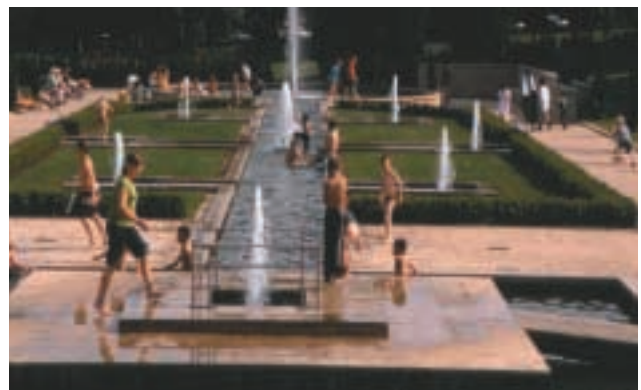
4. We benefit from good quality parks and green spaces in different ways and throughout the various stages of our lives. For older people a park might be a place to keep active or to enjoy peace and quiet, or a place to bring back memories of the bandstand, the fair or the circus setting up each year. For young people a park might be a place to be independent, to meet each other away from the adults who do not understand. For children a park might be a place of freedom and discovery, a place to be challenged and thrilled by sport, play and organised activities. For all town and city dwellers a park is a place to pause, amble, and a getaway from the daily routine.

1.2: Contributing to public policy priorities

5. As well as being popular, good-quality parks and green spaces make important contributions to improving the quality of our towns and cities and the urban renaissance by delivering wider and longer-term social, economic and environmental benefits through a range of public policy priorities.

6. Urban renaissance and regeneration.

The provision of good quality green spaces can make an important contribution to regeneration and renewal projects, and enhance the image of a neighbourhood, or whole town. Parks are an essential element in creating a sense of place, which is vital to community spirit as well as being attractive to visitors. The economic benefits go even further: they help to raise property values, create quality townscapes and, therefore, build business and community confidence. The quality of parks and green spaces provides a quick and highly visible indicator of whether an area is an attractive place for people to live and for business to locate. The potential of parks and green spaces in enhancing and contributing to the changing economies of towns and cities should therefore underpin regeneration programmes. Many towns and cities are realising the regenerative and economic benefits of good quality parks and green spaces – the proposal for a new city park at the heart of the regeneration of the City Quarter of Eastside, Birmingham, is a good example.



7. **Health and well-being.** Parks and green spaces have a vital role to play in promoting healthy living and preventing illness, by providing places for walking, cycling and other physical activities. They can also reduce stress-related illness. At their 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: ‘better than tranquillisers any day’, said one respondent to our research. A recent study for the Department of Health, for example, showed the costs to the public services of growing obesity and how regular exercise could reduce them³ – see Box 1.

Box 1: Health benefits from good quality parks and green spaces

- Obesity is now a major public health concern for which there are no easy or short-term solutions. The trend is rising rapidly - over 20 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women could be obese by 2005, with important consequences for the NHS and the economy.
- Obese children are more likely to become obese adults. Obese children become susceptible to Type 2 diabetes.
- Free access to good quality parks and green space enables people to take exercise. 30 minutes a day of gentle exercise can significantly reduce the risk of strokes, coronary heart disease – currently the leading cause of death in England – as well as reducing stress which is the biggest cause of lost days at work.

8. **Social inclusion, community development and citizenship.** Good quality parks and green spaces can provide opportunities for voluntary and community activities for many people. Giving people the chance to participate in the design, management and care of their local spaces can foster local pride. Well-managed green spaces can create welcoming environments for vulnerable groups (eg children and wheelchair users), helping them to socialise and take part in community life. Green spaces can help to build community cohesion by getting people to engage with each other in partnerships and ‘friends’ groups, and by bringing together communities in shared

spaces – especially in towns where the residential areas might be very segregated. In terms of equality for all sectors of society, free-access green spaces offer a uniquely affordable alternative to commercial leisure activities.

9. **Education and lifelong learning.** Parks and green spaces are increasingly used as an ‘outdoor classroom’ for school subjects ranging from nature study to citizenship. As a result, they can help rekindle the relationship between urban residents and the natural world, and provide an educational resource for children and adults alike. They can also provide work experience and learning opportunities in environmental management and opportunities for community activities.
10. **Environment and ecology.** Parks and green spaces help counter the pollution which can make cities unbearable and unsustainable. They promote the idea of ecologically sensitive towns and cities. They provide wildlife corridors and are havens for many birds, animals and wildflowers, and make a major contribution to stabilising the urban climate. They serve as ‘lungs’ for towns and cities, as trees counter pollution by removing particulates from the air, adding oxygen and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. They help to increase biodiversity and sustainability of urban areas, absorbing noise, reducing heavy metal levels in soil, providing sustainable urban drainage systems, and offer essential habitats for a range of species – see Box 2. And they provide a valuable resource of ‘outdoor classrooms’ for schools, and support their curriculum in areas such as nature studies.

3 Adrian Davis and Ken Fox (January 2002), National Audit Office Conference: *Preventing Obesity*. University of Bristol, Department of Exercise and Health Sciences.

11. **Heritage and culture.** Parks and green spaces are part of the heritage and culture of local people and communities. They provide venues for local festivals, civic celebrations and performances. They also provide reservoirs of collective memory, containing burial places, monuments and memorials, fountains and exotic pavilions, and act as showcases for contemporary sculptures.
12. Good quality parks and green spaces need to be at the heart of all these policy priorities, and their importance in helping to achieve each of them should not be underestimated by those responsible for regeneration, healthcare, education, environment, sport and recreation and community safety.

'Health, education, crime and the economy will continue to be people's top concerns. They will remain our top priorities. But that must go hand-in-hand with improving our local quality of life and strengthening our communities.'

Tony Blair 24 April 2001.



Box 2: Ecological benefits of urban parks and green spaces

- **Supporting biodiversity.** Biodiversity in towns and cities is dependant on the quality of parks and green spaces. They are important wildlife havens, and places where people can have contact with nature and learn to understand the natural world. Thousands of species of wild plants and animals live in urban areas, and are greatly appreciated by people for their song, colour, scent and/or behaviour.
- **Reducing surface water run-off.** Urban areas need to be drained to remove surface water, but the impermeability of many built surfaces raises the probability of flash-floods. Green spaces, being covered in vegetation and a soil system, act like sponges to soak up rain-water, reduce the volume and rate of run-off, recharge groundwater supplies, provide a level of water treatment, and play a key role in sustainable urban drainage. The rate of run-off for surfaces with trees and grass is estimated to be 10-20%, compared with 60-70% for 'hard' urban areas.
- **Pollution amelioration.** Green spaces with trees – their canopies act as a physical filter – help to reduce air pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. Trees also help in reducing the rate of ozone production, and in capturing dusts and volatile organic compounds.
- **Air cooling.** Moisture from woodlands and trees is emitted into the air, cooling it and helping to make towns and cities more comfortable places in which to live and work. Daytime temperatures have been found to be about 2-3°C lower in a large urban park than the surrounding streets.
- **Land reclamation.** Establishing green spaces with trees and woodlands on the many derelict and degraded lands in urban areas is an inexpensive option for improving the appearance, enhancing their ecological value and making them available for recreation.

13. Whether it is because parks and green spaces are important elements of safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists, making walking and cycling more attractive to people, or creating a social environment where people can meet and take leisure away from noisy and dangerous traffic, they can help deliver the Government's agenda for improving the liveability of local environments and the urban renaissance.



1.3: Our aims for this report

14. This report has a simple message: now is the time for a sustainable urban renaissance *with* parks and green spaces. But this will depend on creating networks of good quality parks and exciting and diverse green spaces which meet the needs and aspirations of local communities.
15. We believe that people have a right to excellence and quality in all forms of cultural provision, and that this principle applies as much to parks, play areas and green spaces as it does to other cultural institutions, from museums to sports.
16. We want parks and green spaces to meet people's needs today while preserving their historical and cultural importance. We stress their contribution in creating towns and cities in which people will want to live, work and bring up their families. We want to see not only celebration of parks and green spaces, but also action to improve them. Improving the quality of these most visible and valued spaces would immensely enrich the urban fabric and cultural life, combining a vision of civilised society with an equally powerful connection to the beauty of the natural world.
17. In creating places of the future, our goal must be to re-establish the value of parks and green spaces within a modern society, and rekindle the relationship between people and the spaces and places where they live.
18. This report establishes principles for delivering a new and sustainable future for urban parks and green spaces. It sets out a framework for long-term action. It offers a range of ideas based on contemporary experience of parks and green spaces – both successes and failures. It summarises our consideration of the issues, and sets out our conclusions and recommendations for:
 - Regenerating existing urban parks and green spaces, arresting and reversing the serious and well-documented decline of a priceless urban asset, and creating new and different ones which are attractive, accessible, safe and sustainable.
 - Ensuring that provision of local parks, play areas and green spaces is more responsive to the diverse needs of local people, particularly children and young people (Section 2).
 - Making best use of available and new resources (Section 3).
 - Developing new partnerships to assist in creating and managing urban green spaces, particularly by involving local business and resident communities (Section 4).





- Improving information and good practice (Section 5).
- Promoting more strategic approaches to planning, designing, managing and maintaining urban green spaces (Section 6).
- Providing leadership to inspire the drive and commitment for change and stimulating action by all sectors of the community working together: government, public, private and voluntary (Section 7).

1.4: Scope of this report

19. The Urban White Paper's objectives for the Taskforce focus on developing proposals for improving urban parks, play areas and green spaces⁴. We strongly support the pressing case for giving special attention to parks and play areas in town and cities. In the course of our work, however, we have also concluded that these spaces should be recognised as part of the general need of people in urban areas for a diverse range of types and sizes of green spaces, as part of a coherent urban landscape of integrated public and private spaces. So although the focus of our work has been urban parks and play areas, we believe that our approach and proposals

offer transferable lessons for the management and care of all green space and local environments more generally.

20. This report draws on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of a number of projects and initiatives that have supported the work of the Taskforce, in particular, the reports of our six working groups (which are published in a set as companions to this report):
- One: Reviewing current information
 - Two: Good practice for improving urban green spaces.
 - Three: People and places
 - Four: Improving planning, design, management and maintenance
 - Five: Partnerships for improving urban green spaces
 - Six: Resources
21. It also draws on research commissioned to support our work and carried out by the University of Sheffield (2002): *Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces, and the Public Park Assessment* carried out by the Urban Parks Forum⁵.

⁴ See chapter 4.6 of Urban White Paper (2000): *Our towns and cities – the future*. DTLR.

⁵ Heritage Lottery Fund, DTLR, English Heritage and Countryside Agency (2001): *Public Park Assessment: A survey of local authority owned parks*. HLF

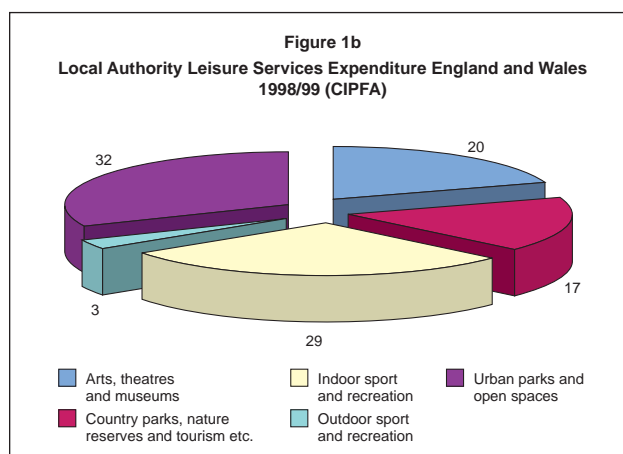
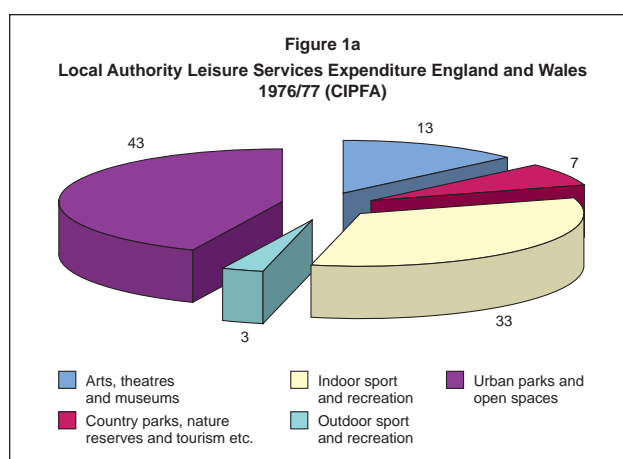
PART TWO – CHALLENGES AND RESPONSE

SECTION 2: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

2.1: Too many poor parks and green spaces

22. People have different perceptions of the current state of urban parks and green spaces. It depends on where they live, what kind of people they are in terms of age, income and other indicators, and on the questions they are asked.
23. In spite of the great potential of parks and green spaces to revitalise towns and cities, a great many – in fact a majority – have suffered neglect and decline. This is confirmed by the *Public Park Assessment (2001)* based on 405 responding authorities and nearly 3000 urban parks, which accounted for one-third of all urban green space. Only 18% of these parks were described as being in ‘good’ condition, compared to 69% in ‘fair’ condition and 13% in ‘poor’ condition. Their assessment of trends in condition is particularly worrying, with 39% of authorities reporting the quality of their parks stock as ‘poor’ and ‘declining’. The survey also reveals a growing polarisation of the quality of stock, with the best parks improving most and the worst declining fastest.

benefited from these changing local authority priorities. Local authorities are also realising that the quality of their parks and green spaces can be a key factor in developing their tourism potential.



2.2: Causes of decline

24. The analysis of changes in the patterns of local authority leisure spending shown in Figure 1 while not definitive, reveals just how big the reduction of spending on ‘Urban Parks and Open Spaces’ has been over the past 20 years proportionately: down from 44% to 31%. While spending on ‘Indoor Sport and Recreation’ has dropped slightly – partly as a result of indoor facilities moving towards ‘market’ pricing policies – a greater share of spending has gone to ‘Arts, Theatres and Museums’ and ‘Country Parks, Nature Reserves and Tourism’, with tourism being the most likely to have
25. Under-investment in parks and green spaces over the past 15 to 20 years has taken its toll, and is a major obstacle to improving the quality of many poor spaces. However, financial constraints are not the only factor affecting the decline of urban parks and green spaces. We have identified a range of factors which have combined to produce an environment where long years of decline and under-investment in our parks and green spaces have been tolerated both at a national and a local level.



Box 3: Causes of decline – Loss of priority status and resources

- Loss of political support and leadership, and ‘civic pride’ at all levels. Because parks and green spaces are not statutory functions they are often low priorities for local authorities. Because access to them is free, they often become invisible to residents and policy makers alike, taken for granted and ultimately neglected.
- Loss of status of parks services compared with other council services, particularly formal recreation and leisure services, and a lack of a national champion to fight the case for parks. All other cultural services have a specific national agency to help to do this.
- Weak policy frameworks for green space provision. Policy frameworks have not evolved enough to respond to the major backlogs and problems of maintenance and up-keep of existing parks and green spaces.
- Ineffective use of planning policies have added to problems by encouraging increases in the total amount of green spaces at a time when local authorities have struggled to manage and maintain existing stocks.
- The skills base in green space management has wasted away resulting in low skilled and poorly motivated staff, and difficulties in recruiting. This has been accompanied by a loss of confidence, vision and focus from professions and a culture of blame.
- Lack of reliable data about urban parks and green space, to inform and help to respond to all the above.

26. The needs and expectations of people and their communities for green spaces today are affected by changes in society. Many parks’ managers and designers have failed to respond adequately to changing demands for parks and green spaces from increasingly diverse urban populations, and to embrace new cultural trends and changes in society.

Box 4: Causes of decline – Slow response to changing demands

- Changes in the nature and diversity of urban communities, which have become more complex and increasingly multicultural.
- Changes in the geography of deprivation and social need and exclusion, and its concentration in urban neighbourhoods.
- Changes in patterns of use of parks and green spaces as a result of wider concerns over crime and safety. The deepening perceptions that public spaces should be avoided at certain times of day and night.
- Increased focus of public policy on re-using previously developed land and for higher building densities in urban areas, resulting in development pressures and the incremental erosion of urban green spaces.
- Demands for diverse green spaces including those which encourage natural planting and wildlife and serve to improve the urban ecology, and which cater for the social, educational and physical needs of children and young people.
- Demands and expectations of children and young people for a wider variety of play and leisure facilities.
- Changes in patterns of recreation and leisure activities and facilities, notably with the rise of indoor leisure and entertainment and its focus on car-accessed facilities - see Box 5.
- Lack of commitment and resources to fully involve and engage local people in planning, designing and caring for their local parks and green spaces. There have been many attempts, with some successes, but there have been many failures because of lack of investment in effective support.

Box 5: Two leisure cultures

It could be said that in many localities, two 'leisure cultures' now co-exist. One is represented by the *recreational culture* of regular park users such as dog-owners, parents with young children, teenagers hanging out, joggers and Sunday footballers. The other is the *fitness culture* based on fitness centres, aerobics, swimming pools, etc. While the majority of people walk to parks, the majority of users of indoor leisure facilities drive to them. Fewer and fewer adults and children are walking and cycling, even for short journeys, and over time this has contributed to the climate of empty streets and 'stranger danger'.

Box 6: A poor public image

Common factors which influence people's perceptions and deter them from using parks and green spaces.

- Lack, or poor condition of facilities, especially seats, toilets and play opportunities for children.
- The incidence of anti-social behaviour. The potential for conflict between children and adults is often cited, but there are increasing concerns over the presence of drug and alcohol users, undesirable characters and 'stranger danger'.
- Concerns about dogs and dog mess.
- Safety and other 'psychological' issues including feelings of fear and vulnerability based on real experiences and perceived concerns. This applies not only to people's own personal fears, but also especially fears for their children.
- Environmental quality issues such as litter, graffiti and vandalism.
- Loss of variety, and too much 'old hat' especially for young people for whom Victorian parks do not always represent an exciting or attractive environment.

2.3: A poor public image

27. Public perceptions and expectations of the quality of urban parks and green spaces are low. Whilst other forms of recreation, from indoor sports and leisure to computer games, are aggressively marketed to urban populations, a visit to the local parks can seem a less exciting option. Some of the common perceptions are listed in Box 6.

28. At their worst, poor quality parks and green spaces can appear depressing, dirty, dangerous places. They can become neglected, with bedraggled shrubs and dead flowers, broken-down seats and shelters covered in graffiti, and strewn with litter. Spaces like these drag neighbourhoods down, reminding everyone of the failures rather than celebrating the many good things of life in the 21st century.

29. At present these factors are major obstacles to the use and enjoyment of parks and green spaces, and to their role in improving the quality of life in towns and neighbourhoods. They conspire to reduce the value of green space assets at a time when urban land is under greater development pressure, and the value of parks and play spaces should be rising.



2.4: Serving needs

30. Although parks and green spaces are popular with most people, we are concerned that some groups are missing out on their benefits.
31. Some people never use green spaces. Older people may feel threatened by young people; young people may feel censured by older people. Parents worry about the safety of their children, and that there is nobody 'on duty' to keep an eye on things and stop undesirable activities which frighten others. Poor access may keep people away from their local parks because they do not feel safe enough to journey to them by foot. Or it may simply be that there is no decent green space anywhere near that offers even the basic facilities and standards that people want.
32. Some sectors of society are using green spaces less than others: especially people over 65, people with disabilities, people from black and minority ethnic communities, women, and 12 to 19 year olds. Particular deterrents for these groups include dog mess (all groups, especially women and older people); poor access, toilets, seating and other facilities, and safety (people with disabilities); nothing to do (teenagers); vandalism and graffiti (all groups, especially older people and people with disabilities)⁶. Concerns expressed by children and young people in our focus groups are summarised in Box 7⁷.
33. Policy makers and service providers need to interpret categories of users and usage carefully, particularly when assessing local needs, and target provision to particular areas and groups. For example, dog owners may also be disabled people, as well as parents of young children; older people may be members of ethnic minorities as well as keen horticulturalists.

Box 7: The things children and young people say put them off

Children and young people's use of the outdoors has become increasingly restricted and consequently has declined in the last twenty to thirty years. There appear to be two main reasons:

- Many children and young people now have better access to commercial and household entertainment. They are often encouraged to use these facilities because of parental fear and restriction.
- Lack of good quality, accessible spaces, especially equipment and facilities. They are 'put off' by:
 - **Poor quality and badly maintained spaces.** Although young people are often seen as the problem in terms of vandalism or neglect, they care strongly about maintenance issues. Broken or vandalised equipment, loose dogs and dog mess, litter, graffiti and dirty toilets are big problems. Grassy areas are often too muddy for play. *'We can't play football on the top field because it is badly drained and the grass doesn't get cut'.*
 - **Inadequate provision of facilities** which do not meet the needs of all age groups. Young people think there is a lack of sports provision and facilities for teenagers.
 - **Unsafe and unwelcoming.** Parental fears keep children away from outdoor play, particularly the fear of stranger danger, even if this represents a minor risk. High on the list of children's fears are bullying from older children, people taking drugs and drinking alcohol, poor lighting and no park keepers. *'Older children block the gate into the park with their bikes, and bigger children stop us from using the equipment'.* *'There are no park rangers to tell bullies off or to complain about the dog mess.'*
 - **Inaccessible.** Traffic and badly located green spaces mean they are often too far or difficult to reach safely. As a result parents often do not let children go on their own.

See also Box 18 in section 6.2.1 of Part 3

⁶ University of Sheffield (2002)

⁷ The Taskforce commissioned a survey and focus group discussion with about 1000 children and young people to find out more about what they felt about their local spaces and the type of spaces they wanted most. Groundwork UK carried out the project between January and March 2002.

34. People in disadvantaged areas are also most likely to be losing out on the benefits of good quality parks and green spaces. The *Public Park Assessment* (2001) showed that, in the 100 most deprived authorities, 40% of all parks are declining, and that figure rises to 88% for the parks already judged poor. These areas are suffering greater levels of decline from an already low base, which adds to both the reality and perception that these neighbourhoods are getting worse.
35. Public policy should not be allowed to reinforce inequalities in urban areas. Local authorities and national government should make it a priority to provide high-quality parks and green spaces to people in disadvantaged areas through the many regeneration and renewal programmes which target such areas. They can do this by working with local people to develop better assessment of the needs of people for green spaces, carrying out audits of the ‘fitness for purpose’ of existing provision and better targeting of new provision – see Section 6.2.
36. Changing social needs, such as the presence of a wide diversity of cultures within communities (including within black and minority ethnic and other communities), demand special efforts to reach groups which might otherwise be excluded. Policy makers and service providers should also appreciate that needs, demands and expectations will differ in different places, and should ‘listen for’ different expressions of needs. These can include demands from children and young people for small neighbourhood spaces to ‘chill out’; from extended families for space to hold picnics because their gardens are too small, and from people with disabilities for accessible space. Professionally defined and categorised needs will only provide part of the picture. Engaging with local people to find out what they want is the only way to complete it.

We recommend:

- (R1) The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should make it a priority to provide high quality parks and green spaces to serve the needs of people in disadvantaged areas. This objective should be at the heart of regeneration and neighbourhood renewal programmes which target such areas.*
37. Communities are not always defined by residential location. There are some parks – for example, in city centres – where the community is the 9-5 business/employees group. This leads to different, but equally important, issues for consultation, involvement and partnerships (see Section 6).
 38. All the people of a city should have access to good quality parks and green spaces close to where they live, work, and play. This is particularly true of the poorest in society who are disproportionately dependant on quality local public and green spaces.



2.5: Responding to the challenges

39. Responding to the changing needs of people, addressing the visible symptoms of decline, and managing real and perceived security issues must be a priority for policy makers, providers, designers and managers of urban parks and green spaces. It will demand collective vision and leadership, and an effective policy framework for delivering high quality parks and exciting diverse green spaces.

40. Across the country there are signs of increasing public awareness and appreciation of the value of good quality parks, green spaces and play areas and of their role in regenerating areas, improving the health and well-being of local people, and providing opportunities for education for children and communities. More and more communities are showing that, when given the opportunity and support, they will enthusiastically engage in caring for their local spaces.



41. Much more remains to be done, but there is growing belief – expressed by local authorities, professionals, local people and national and voluntary bodies alike – that action can now be taken to make a radical improvement in the quality of urban parks and green spaces. It needs political will, the right structures and processes, and more resources. Greater investment in urban parks and green spaces is certainly worthwhile; not only does it add value to regeneration, renewal and housing development, it also contributes to saving costs in other policy areas (eg healthcare, education and environmental management), and contributes to better overall use of public resources. The next section explores these resource issues in more detail.



SECTION 3: RESOURCES

3.1: Background

42. The large majority of urban parks and green spaces are owned and maintained by local authorities, although they have no statutory duty to provide or maintain them. Over the past 15 to 20 years, cuts in local authority budgets for parks and green spaces have contributed directly to a general and well-documented decline in their quality. Resource constraints continue to be major obstacles to improvements users and non-users alike wish to see. The *Public Park Assessment* (2001), and the University of Sheffield's survey of local authorities for the Taskforce, have confirmed this picture.

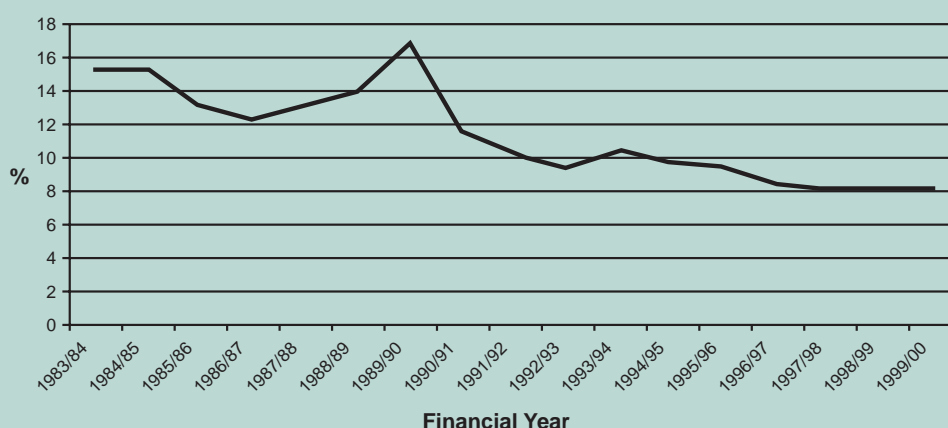
3.2: Capital funding

43. Local authorities' total capital spend has declined from 25% of overall budget in the mid-1970s to 8.3% in 2000/2001 – see Figure 2. It is within this overall context of decline in investment that parks and green spaces have particularly suffered.
44. Under-investment has resulted in a serious decline in the infrastructure and condition of parks and green spaces in many areas. The *Public Park Assessment* (2001) shows that only 18% of parks are considered to

be in good condition, and that the condition of 37% of all parks is declining. To meet the accumulated decline and degradation, a substantial and co-ordinated injection of additional capital investment will be required to complement the funding that is currently available. It is not easy to arrive at a figure, but based on the *Public Park Assessment's* estimates that there is a cumulative under spend over the last 20 years of around £1.3bn, we consider that around £100m extra is likely to be needed in each of the next five years to begin to make a real impact.

45. Increasing demands from other public service areas, such as education and social service provision, suggest that local authorities will find it impossible, in the foreseeable future, to find the capital investment required to reverse decline from their existing budgets. Moreover, in view of the low priority currently afforded to parks, coupled with a general move to competitive 'single capital pots' and away from ringfenced budgets, we see little prospect, at least in the short term, that additional capital funds directed to local authorities could be secured for parks and green space services. In the short term, therefore, we believe that extra capital funding is likely to have greater impact if delivered externally to local authority budgets and targeted (via effective

Figure 2: Local Authority Capital expenditure in Relation to Total Gross Expenditure



partnership working) to areas of most need to improve the quality of existing parks and green spaces and create new ones.

46. Capital funding from other funding sources, outside local authority budgets for parks and green spaces, will continue to make a valuable contribution.
47. Lottery funding has already made an important contribution to urban parks and green spaces, and could provide some of the additional capital resources required. Money from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), through its £250m Urban Parks Programme, has already been committed to provide a fast track for restoring and refurbishing many historic parks and gardens. More recently, the New Opportunities Fund has launched schemes worth about £80m to support improvements to urban green spaces in England – see Annex 3. There is potential for this to develop into a major new programme for the New Opportunities Fund, aimed at the restoration and improvement of urban parks and green spaces. However, to be effective such a programme would need to be coherent with the wider strategic and co-ordinated policy framework proposed in this report.
48. Within the new overall strategic policy framework for urban green spaces, there may be potential for access to funds generated through planning obligations (Section 106 agreements – or their replacement). However, the Government should recognise that these types of arrangements may further reinforce inequalities between ‘buoyant’ and ‘disadvantaged’ neighbourhoods and regions, by providing disproportionate amount of resources to areas of high development activity and high land values compared with areas of low levels of demand and activity.

49. Greater recognition of the benefits of green space to improving local environments as part of regeneration programmes (such as Single Regeneration Budget, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and New Deal for Communities) could provide access to another source of funding to improve local green spaces as part of improving rundown neighbourhoods.



50. The Landfill Tax Credit scheme has generated around £350m (largely capital) for projects involving environmental improvements and management. Around 55% of this is spent on parks, green spaces and the restoration of buildings. New indicative guidelines suggest there may be a reduction in the proportion of funding from this scheme, or its successor, which is allocated to environmental improvements⁸. This would create a serious funding ‘gap’ unless replacement resources could be found elsewhere.
51. There are currently few examples of substantial private sector capital funding for major public urban park improvement schemes. Private funding has been more common in the case of smaller, community-based projects involving green

⁸ *Waste and Recycling: Possible Changes to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme* (April 2002), DEFRA

spaces, and in supporting commercial activities in parks, such as concerts and fairs. Attracting funding from businesses requires considerable energy and expertise at the local level. Businesses are likely to invest only where success, or potential success, has already been demonstrated and where they can identify real benefits for themselves. The Government's proposals for Business Improvement Districts, involving an addition to the non – domestic rate in the area covered, may provide an opportunity for encouraging the private sector to invest in the improvement of public space, green or otherwise.

52. The new Private Finance Initiative being pioneered by the London Borough of Lewisham may offer an alternative approach. Here, the combined parks management and grounds maintenance service for most of the borough's parks, including responsibility for increasing community involvement, has been contracted to Glendale for ten years. Early lessons suggest that local authorities would need to be prepared to commit additional revenue funds in order to attract the additional capital investment PFI can bring.
53. Many local authorities are engaged in imaginative schemes and partnerships either for finding additional resources for green spaces or for making better use of existing ones. Most often, these are partnerships with grant-making organisations, local and national voluntary groups, local business and community groups, and some use of S106 funding. However, not all local authorities are taking these opportunities, nor are they making the best use of available funds.
54. Given the competing demands on local authority resources, external sources of funding will be vital to improving local green spaces, and should be increased

wherever possible. However, given the substantial backlog of repair and restoration, such external sources of funding will not be sufficient to provide the whole answer.

We recommend:

(R2) Additional capital funding of £100m per annum, initially for five years, for the restoration and improvement of urban parks and green spaces. Lottery funding is an appropriate source that could provide some of this additional funding, through a major new, New Opportunities Fund programme for urban parks and green spaces.

(R3) The Government should take steps to ensure that there is a net increase in funding available for parks and green spaces in developing proposals to amend or replace the Landfill Tax Credit scheme.

(R4) The Government should allow local authorities to use developers' contributions from S106 agreements, or development tariffs, to provide additional resources for green spaces.

(R5) The Government should promote its proposal for Business Improvement Districts as a mechanism for improving the quality of local green spaces as well as for increasing private sector investment in enhancing local environments.

3.3: Revenue funding

55. The *Public Park Assessment* (2001) estimates that there is an annual funding deficit of around £126m, based on comparisons to figures from 1979/80. Although reliable figures are not available before 1987/88, it seems likely that the major decline in revenue funding took place between 1979/80 and the mid-80s, and has continued steadily since. This area of expenditure is still too often seen as a 'fringe' service and treated poorly in the local government financial planning process.

56. Local authorities' revenue funding for the management and maintenance of parks and green spaces is part of the Environment, Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS) block. The majority of the services covered are statutory, but 'recreation' services, which includes spend on parks and green spaces, are not mandatory – there is no duty to provide them even though there are powers. As a result, and in a context of diminishing resources overall, spending on parks and green spaces has continued to lose out within the EPCS block.
57. However, spend on other forms of recreation (museums and leisure centres) has generally held up rather better. We concluded that revenue for parks and green spaces has suffered because there are no national and local champions to put the case.
58. Although ringfencing or substantial fragmentation of the EPCS block is unlikely to be favoured, either by Government or by local authorities, a substantial overall increase in the total resources allocated to the EPCS block could raise the levels of revenue spend on parks and green spaces. However, there is a strong danger that 'recreation' would remain at a disadvantage in the competition for resources within the block.

We recommend:

(R6) In reviewing SSA provision for local authorities, as part of the Spending Review 2002, the Government should provide a substantial increase in the total for the EPCS block. It should also examine the case for breaking down the block into groups of related services to create a 'public spaces' sub-block.

59. Many of the alternative sources of capital funding could also make some contribution to revenue costs – for example, SRB, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the HLF's Urban Parks Programme. A funding programme similar to the Countryside Stewardship scheme, run by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), might usefully be developed for urban parks and green spaces and delivered either through a new national agency or an existing agency. The Government's proposal for Business Improvement Districts also offers potential for securing additional funding for green spaces particularly in town and district centres: BIDs could provide funding over a five year period.

We recommend:

(R7) The Government should introduce a funding and management scheme for urban parks and green spaces, similar to the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

- 60 The Government's recent White Paper 'Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services' (2001) contains several proposals which may provide local authorities with more flexibility to give priority to capital and revenue spending on parks and green spaces. Most important in relation to parks and green spaces are the proposals to allow local authorities to use revenue from fines for dog fouling, littering and, in some circumstances, parking, to provide additional spending on local environmental improvement.



61. However, although the White Paper's proposals should give local authorities increased flexibility to determine spending priorities, the amount of capital that an authority can afford to borrow will continue to depend on the amount of revenue income available to service debt, and many local authorities wish to be debt-free.
62. The Government's national priorities for public services do not currently include parks and green spaces (or public space more generally). The Local Government Association's (LGA) six priorities for service delivery do, however, include transforming the local environment. The Government has agreed to work with the LGA to define a list of national priorities for local government, which will inform national Public Service Agreements for local government to be developed in the 2002 Spending Review. This would provide an opportunity to ensure that improvement to the environment, including parks and green spaces, is written into the national PSA, as well as being part of locally determined priorities.

We recommend:

(R8) The Government should implement proposals in the recent White Paper: 'Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services' to restrict ringfencing of grants, and relax the regime which controls the scope for targeting spending of revenue generated by fines.

(R9) The proposed single list of national priorities for local government should include improvement to the environment and public space, and that local authorities are encouraged to reflect the needs of parks and green spaces as priorities in their local Public Service Agreements (PSAs).

3.4: Better use of funding

63. Although it is essential to stabilise local authority budgets in relation to the amount of parks and green space they manage and maintain, and to provide them with more resources to reverse the downward spiral, we recognise that additional capital and revenue funding is not a *panacea for improvements*. Even when full account has been taken of the financial constraints, some local authorities should acknowledge that they have not delivered their responsibilities towards urban parks and green spaces with the fullest commitment or efficiency. Moreover, there are wide variations in the amount and use of resources by local authorities.
64. Current funding could achieve much more. Funding providers and local authorities should target current and new resources more accurately on areas and spaces that need them most. Equally, funding providers should ensure that resources are available in a more strategic way and over longer periods, and are tailored to encourage local authorities to use their own funds more imaginatively. If local authorities have to rely on preparing funding bids to a multitude of agencies for different elements of green space strategies, they may also find it difficult to allocate the necessary 'match funding', achieve joined-up policies and, even more important, produce action on the ground.
65. If investment from the range of potential sources is to reverse the spiral of decline, it is essential that central Government, local authorities and their partners develop a more joined-up and strategic approach to parks and green spaces, linked to clear national policy framework for achieving higher quality standards. An effective central mechanism is needed to join up the various sources of funding, to provide catch-up funding, to act as a 'one-stop-shop', to encourage local partnerships,

and to encourage innovation and promote best practice. These are important functions which should be undertaken by a new national agency for urban green spaces.

We recommend:

(R10) A new national agency for urban green spaces should be established in order to make best use of existing and additional resources, by providing a central mechanism for co-ordinating and delivering new capital funding with existing sources, and by providing a focal point for advice and guidance on standards and 'joining up' funding sources. It should also champion and seek to influence funding decisions in favour of parks and green spaces at national, regional and local levels.

3.5: Training and skills

66. Employer-led apprenticeship schemes aimed at producing skilled craftspeople were largely phased out following the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) – the emphasis on economy rather than quality squeezed budgets for in-house training. Companies brought in to manage landscape contracts failed to maintain support for employer- or college-based training and apprenticeship schemes, which had served the industry so well in the past. In the last 20 years Vocational qualification courses have also moved away from offering mid-course industrial placements. There are now fewer qualified individuals with direct experience in the industry than there were 20 years ago.
67. These trends have been magnified by local authorities reducing the horticultural detail in their parks and green spaces and removing high-maintenance elements such as herbaceous borders and bedding. This reduced the opportunities for staff to gain practical experience and skills in horticulture.
68. It used to be a common assumption that people took jobs maintaining or managing green spaces out of a sense of vocation, and were therefore willing to accept poor pay and few training and development opportunities. This assumption has been proved wrong by the current shortage of staff.
69. Many local authorities do have good training structures and invest in training as part of their corporate strategy. Best Value, Beacon Council and Public Service Agreements should also provide more opportunities for raising general standards through training schemes. It will also be essential to ensure that additional resources are also available to non-statutory providers of green spaces, who face similar challenges in providing training.
70. As part of a Best Value review, consideration should be given to the inclusion of contractors and their staff in joint training schemes, and to incorporating training costs into their bids to support investment in employees. As well as offering new skills and experience through professional or work-based training, this can prove to be a relatively inexpensive way of improving quality, and motivating and retaining staff.
71. Although Best Value should increase opportunities for local authorities to adopt innovative approaches to service contracting and provision, there is concern that authorities may not have the skilled staff and resources to gain maximum benefits from service contracts. Performance management will therefore be important and will need to reflect Best Value indicators, Public Service Agreements and similar existing incentives for local authorities to review their service provision. Improvements are likely to be incremental, since the benefits of recruiting and retaining quality staff will be long term.

We recommend:

(R11) Additional resources for training should be made available to complement Best Value, Public Service Agreements, Beacon schemes and other local public service innovations.

(R12) The Government should identify a Best Value indicator to monitor training provision in local authority green space management and maintenance, applicable both to directly employed staff and contractors.

72. Local authorities and contractors could improve the motivation and skills of staff in both the management and maintenance of parks and green spaces. They should do this by providing training opportunities to benefit staff and their career prospects as well as helping to raise the quality of the services they provide. Investment in staff could be through release time for training or the purchase of relevant training packages.
73. We found strong support for encouraging young people to become the parks managers of the future, and strong belief in the value of apprenticeship schemes to achieve this. Tenders could include a commitment to employ apprentices/trainees as part of the contractual agreement between client and contractor – eg taking on a minimum percentage of school leavers or young people seeking work experience – and providing them with practical experience in a range of basic tasks with the aim of achieving minimum horticultural proficiency.

We recommend:

(R13) The reintroduction of employer apprenticeship schemes to develop a new generation of craft workers and meet the growing need to replace the ageing workforce.



74. Managing a diverse network of urban green spaces in a way which brings together their ecological, recreational and other roles, calls for a high level of professional skill. It will be a most challenging task to reverse the present decline and optimise the economic, social and environmental value of such a large and varied green estate – one that will need vision and leadership. Graduate entry should be encouraged and remuneration commensurate with the level of responsibility needed to oversee the regeneration of urban park systems. Local authorities will also need top-level advice in service procurement, recreational programming, nature conservation and community involvement. This will require a ready supply of qualified, well-educated and motivated young people entering the profession with a high level of professional knowledge and understanding. Management traineeships and good career progression, together with support for continuing professional development schemes, are needed to raise standards of management at the top level.

Box 8: Royal Parks ‘Modern Apprenticeship’ Scheme

The Royal Parks have a ‘Modern Apprenticeship’ scheme which links with the National Trust. This is co-ordinated by a horticultural college and aimed at school leavers and 18 year olds with GCSE and ‘A’ Levels. Each apprentice attends a series of two-week blocks at the college and aims to achieve NVQ at Level 3 and the RHS General Certificate. They are supervised and assessed ‘on the job’, and keep a detailed diary of all tasks undertaken. This is the ‘Rolls Royce’ of training schemes, probably beyond the budgets of most clients at present.

National Trust Careership Scheme

The Royal Parks Agency, English Heritage and the National Trust have set up a modern apprenticeship scheme, known as the National Trust Careership scheme. The scheme, which is being co-ordinated by the National Trust, seeks to train gardeners and rangers over a 3-year block release. It is a non-indenture scheme where training is provided without the obligation of employing students. The scheme is aimed at school leavers and 18 year olds with GCSE and ‘A’ Levels. Each apprentice attends a series of two-week blocks at the college, towards achievement of NVQ at Level 3 and the RHS General Certificate.

Green Heart Horticultural Academy Scheme for Greater London

The Green Heart Scheme is currently being piloted in London. It is intended to operate as a cohesive programme delivered regionally at strategic locations to offer additional recognition and accreditation for staff, students and volunteers and to provide a quality framework for employers. In essence, this is an apprenticeship scheme combining the best of work-based and ‘on the job’ training, in a lifelong learning and continuing development setting.

We recommend:

(R14) The Government should promote graduate courses such as those in Landscape Planning and Management. Appropriate degree courses should be encouraged to place greater emphasis on managing recreational landscapes for public benefit in the urban context, and be supported by more research and sponsorship opportunities. Employing organisations such as local authorities should make better provision for graduate entry and support for obtaining professional qualifications.

75. As employers have moved away from their responsibilities to train their staff, colleges have also cut industrial placements and reduced the more expensive practical elements of courses. Although full-time college courses are an ideal way to deliver a technical overview and understanding of artistic, scientific and management principles, achieving the right balance between experience and training will be crucial. It is important therefore that such courses are backed up by extensive practical experience in order to develop the efficiency and dexterity required by skilled craft workers. Management traineeships or graduate apprenticeships are a way of achieving this.



We recommend:

(R15) The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority should encourage Awarding Bodies, Colleges and Universities to reinstate a requirement for pre-college work experience and 12-month work placements for sandwich courses.

76. Existing entry-level qualifications such as Modern Apprenticeships offered to 18-25 year olds are accompanied by Government funding in England. An increasing number of over-25s are interested in re-training but cannot access support for these programmes. To support on-the-job retraining for those wishing to return to work or change career, the Government should review its policy, in order to expand equivalent funded provision beyond the 18-25 age group.
77. The Government supports returners to work and long-term unemployed people between 18-24 under the environment option of New Deal – see Annex 2. However, there seems to have been little assessment of the effectiveness and further potential of the option in supporting the many charitable and statutory organisations which offer opportunities for individuals seeking employment to develop technical and general competencies, often via an intermediate labour market project.

We recommend:

(R16) The Government should extend the age band of funded Modern Apprenticeships for the landscape industry, continue to fund the Environment Task Force option of the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds and provide a level of funding for these trainees equivalent to what would be available to them if they were funded through the Learning and Skills Council.

78. The industry has more vocational and work-based training available to it than most sectors. Although there is a variety of courses and qualifications on offer, it is not always clear how they align with the national qualifications framework and how those wishing to progress their careers can progress through these qualifications to achieve their full potential. This can inhibit the ability of education/training providers to respond to the needs of professionals throughout their individual careers. We are encouraged that the Government has charged National Training Organisations to report on current skills needs and forecast future demand. The recent DfES proposal to develop education and training Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) is also welcome as a positive move to create a framework of education and training providers.

We recommend:

(R17) The Government should encourage the Learning and Skills Council and the national training organisations to work with industry to promote a recognised training framework which will improve the links between appropriate training packages, encourage career progression and act as an incentive for employers to take on apprentices.



SECTION 4: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

4.1: Benefits of partnership working

79. Partnership has become a familiar concept in national policy, with increasing Government encouragement for partnership working in a variety of areas such as housing, crime, health, and generally strengthening and engaging with local communities. Many local authorities are now developing Community Strategies through local strategic partnerships. The recent White Paper '*Leading and Empowering Communities*' also seeks to strengthen the role of councillors in engaging with local communities, while reinforcing the message of partnership working. To complement this, a number of related funding programmes have been set up, such as the Community Empowerment Fund and Community Chest.
80. Partnership working, with local residents, businesses and other interests, must be at the heart of future action for improving urban parks and green spaces. It can achieve far more, both for their users and for the wider community, than local authorities working alone.
81. Partnership working for improving urban green spaces also gives all the partners a greater sense that they 'own' them. It helps them co-ordinate their activities and reduces conflicts between users. It leads to better management and more appropriate facilities. For the surrounding community it can build cohesion and confidence and generate direct benefits, such as jobs, in the new initiatives which result. It helps some partners, such as businesses, schools and clubs, achieve their particular objectives. It links the local authority more strongly with the local community and gives greater access to understanding of grassroots needs.
82. There are many possible partners. The final selection of partners for any project or programme will depend on the objectives of the partnership, the size and character of the site itself, its current use and future plans.
83. It is important to understand why different partners get involved. Although partners may unite around agreed objectives, they will also have their own particular interests. All partners will have limits to the priority they can give to the work of any one partnership. Some will have more power than others, for instance in relation to funding or ownership of the site, or they may control the flow of information to the partnership, or have more time, resources or skills to devote to it. These differences can create tensions. One important test of partnership working arrangements is the extent to which they resolve conflict, produce creative solutions to problems, and generate enthusiasm and energy for all the partners in achieving common goals.



84. The broad aim of most partnerships we examined was to protect or restore or enhance a particular open space and its facilities, and to produce wider community benefits. Individual objectives ranged from the protection of wildlife, to the construction of a new play area, to the creation of employment. Often the purpose had changed from the start of the project. *‘What started as the defence of the loss of amenity land with no public access, changed to creating a community park’ – The Hermitage, Gosport.* Some partnerships saw themselves as having a fixed life. Others intended to continue indefinitely, possibly changing their objectives and their organisation. Partnerships, particularly those involving community groups, often evolve over time as their projects are planned and implemented.
85. Partnership structures should therefore be flexible. Partners also need good co-ordination in what are sometimes complex working arrangements. In this respect project officers or facilitators can be very helpful and, if externally appointed, they can provide an independent face to the partnership.
86. Many partnerships have found it useful to have long-term (5-10 year) strategies underpinned by feasibility studies (or a set of processes for developing the site), together with shorter-term management plans. This helps to give projects better direction and permanence. But every partnership was worried by the prospect of constraints from other factors, especially finance. *‘We have two plans for the future, because one relies on a lottery grant.’ Hill Close Gardens Project, Warwick.*
87. Partnerships should seek ways to keep the wider community in touch with what is happening and let them contribute their views when they wish. Common ways of doing this include newsletters, the web, open days, guided walks and talks, radio and local press, and by attending meetings of other residents and community groups.
88. Partners should make every effort to engage potential users of the open space – on the users’ terms if necessary. At a national level, the Government might do more by increasing publicity to complement its capacity-building programmes.
- We recommend:**
- (R18) The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should promote and support partnership working for improving local parks and green spaces, through its strategies and programmes which impact on such spaces.*
- ## 4.2: Partnerships for improving urban green space
89. There is no single authority which owns and manages all the green spaces in its area. While local authorities are clearly the ‘key players’ there is a need to bring other local owners and managers of green space into effective and mutually beneficial partnerships, based on jointly agreed principles, values, objectives and priorities.
90. There are advantages for everybody in including local authorities in partnerships about green space. They have statutory responsibilities over any land even when they do not own it, and can explain its planning and financial context. They also have a wealth of information about green spaces and the surrounding area. More importantly, they are democratically elected and charged with taking all local views into consideration. Finally, of course, local authorities may have the essential finance or land for a project.

91. All but two of the 50 local authorities we surveyed were involved in some form of partnership relating to urban green space. Many parks services took a 'cocktail' approach, mixing and matching partners with different things to offer to achieve their goals.
92. In the most common form of partnership, a parks department is assisted in delivering services, in managing education, programming and volunteers, and with investment. Frequent partners include environmental organisations, educational establishments, friends groups, local business, local trusts, sports clubs and national funding providers, in particular, the Heritage Lottery Fund.
93. Securing resources in one form or another, through finance, grants or donations, is by far the main reason for partnerships. Our evidence supports the view that successful partnerships have not only helped to increase the financial resources available, but also encouraged local authorities and project sponsors to make better or more efficient use of existing resources when they design schemes or implement them.
94. Some authorities have developed a network of partnerships. Walsall MBC, for example, set up the Local Improvement Programme (LIP) in Walsall to provide community-led regeneration of parks and open spaces across the borough. In other areas LA21 and green space groups have taken on the role of lobbying for the retention and improvement of open space. Some sites have more than one partnership working on them.
95. For many local authorities, partnerships in the delivery of parks services have become necessary elements of their mainstream activities. Often partnerships are required for regeneration initiatives and by funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. They may also involve cross-departmental working within a local authority or within the public sector.
96. There is also a significant increase in partnerships where organisations such as BTCV, Wildlife Trusts and Groundwork Trusts act as catalysts. They work with a range of public agencies and others to initiate and co-manage projects with parks departments, and provide financial support for improving or creating new parks and green spaces. Voluntary and community sector organisations, whether national or local, often have a key role to play in brokering schemes with communities, local authorities and other agencies and in supporting community capacity building.

Box 9: Local partnerships for improving green spaces

Local authorities are involved in a range of partnerships with a selection of public, private, voluntary and community partners.

Halton Borough Council has developed a strong matrix of partnerships and partners:

- Public – Mersey Forest project and Mersey Valley Partnership.
- Private – JARVIS Training, ICI and RECORD (Local Records Centre for Cheshire).
- Voluntary – Cheshire Landscape Trust, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Natural Environment Roundtable.
- Community – Community and special interest groups and schools.

The **London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham** has a well established Local Strategic Partnership, as well as a number of specific partnerships:

- Public – Hammersmith & Fulham Regeneration Partnership (Regenasis), Improving Local Amenities (ILA) programme run with Groundwork West London, and The North Fulham New Deal partnership.
- Community – range of local groups, schools and professional sports clubs such as Fulham, Chelsea and Queens Park Rangers football clubs, Gardens Associations, bowls clubs and allotment associations.
- Private – range of involvement in development schemes.

We recommend:

(R19) The Government and local authorities working through Local Strategic Partnerships where appropriate should promote and support voluntary and community sector organisations as catalysts for working with communities, local businesses and other agencies, and for supporting community capacity building in brokering schemes for creating and managing urban green spaces.

97. Self-management and trust status is becoming an important means for creating and managing mainstream urban parks. There are also many more partnerships where parks and green spaces are managed and maintained independently with limited involvement of the parks department. Our research found many of these existed in the form of open space trusts, such as Glass Park, Doncaster and Bankside in London – see Box 10. The majority of trust-managed public parks and green spaces appear to be new entities, involved either in creating a new park, or in changing the status of an urban green space from a recreation ground or playing field to a community park. The Bankside example is unusual in so far as the Trust is responsible for managing a network of small local parks and green spaces.
98. There are also examples of non-profit distributing organisations (NPDOs) taking ownership of urban parks and green spaces through a long lease. The main advantages are those associated with a high degree of community involvement. Access to additional funding, the energy of those involved, and the increased sense of ownership can result in a more dynamic park than one which remains under local authority control. The local authority can obtain long-term financial and administrative benefits from the transfer of a park to such organisations.

Box 10: Parks and green spaces managed by an open space trust

Glass Park, Doncaster

This park, created since 1999 on a ‘post-industrial’ site, demonstrates a significant achievement for a local community, but also entails a very creative approach to securing significant funding for a new park alongside other objectives. Trust status was the only way that a park could be created to meet a significant shortfall in green space provision in the area. The park has been created in partnership with the local authority, and it is unlikely that this level of activity would have occurred under local authority control alone.

Hill Close Gardens, Warwick

This is a charitable trust comprised of local councillors, representatives of amenity groups, resident associations and volunteer groups have acquired a 25-year lease from the local authority. The Trust co-ordinates the strategic aims of the project while restoration/ horticultural work is co-ordinated by a technical group and volunteers. The Trust acts as intermediary between volunteers and the local authority and is working to develop a cross-generation educational programme.

99. The option of transfer to a NPDO should be carefully considered. A variety of options for shared management exist. For example, large multi-use parks may best be managed by local authorities in association with a formal ‘friends’ or user group; city farms and adventure playgrounds may be co-managed by voluntary organisations, local authorities and local community groups; and small community gardens may be initiated and managed by community groups with advice and support from the local authority, voluntary organisations and others.

100. There are also many cross-cutting partnerships which link parks and green spaces with initiatives on crime, health improvement, and childhood and youth development.

Box 11: Local cross-cutting partnerships

- The London Borough of Barnet and the Health Authority run a *Fitness for Life* programme providing a GP referral service. Local people in need of healthy exercise are supervised in physical activities in local parks to help address their ailments.
- Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council works with the Young Offenders Team and Youth Justice Team to provide opportunities in green space for young offenders to make reparation for their offences to society.
- Trunkwell Park Garden Project, Berkshire. Thrive, a national organisation concentrating on horticultural therapy and training for the disabled, runs this project with volunteers. The project combines horticultural therapy and skill training to build the confidence of and contribute to the social inclusion of disabled people.
- Lowerhouses and Chickenley Regeneration Project, Kirklees, Yorkshire. This partnership between Kirklees Metropolitan Council Housing Services and BTCV Enterprises aims to regenerate an urban scrub area on the edge of a housing estate as well as provide employment opportunities for young unemployed people. The project was set up as a part of a waged option on the New Deal Environmental Task Force in order to provide wages, training, job search, and personal development.

101. There are many examples of sports and leisure clubs in partnerships to maintain green spaces. Where they operate on a piece of land also occupied by a wider partnership, they often have a separate agreement with the council or other owner and attend meetings of the main partnership when necessary. The partnerships interviewed for our research told us that even if separate arrangements were in place it was of mutual benefit for the partnerships to work together.

We recommend:

(R20) Local authorities should promote and support partnership work for improving local green spaces. This should be reflected in other local strategies which impact on green spaces (including community, regeneration, planning and housing development strategies), Best Value reviews and performance indicators. Local authorities should also provide appropriate training for members and officers.

(R21) Local authorities should explore the potential for making greater use of local 'open space trusts' as an effective option for delivering improvements to green spaces and their management and maintenance.

4.3: Practical Community Involvement

102. Community involvement is at the heart of planning and achieving better urban parks and green spaces. But it needs to be complemented and supported by technical knowledge, detailed research and an agreed programme of implementation.

103. Community involvement can operate at three basic levels. The first is providing information about what is being done, by others, on behalf of the community. The second is actually working with the community to develop policies and plans, and this can happen at many levels, from a basic survey or consultation, through to a partnership which directly involves community representatives in decisions about priorities and resources. The third is supporting community-led initiatives, for example by funding, advice or training.

104. All three approaches may be necessary at different times, sometimes within the same site. Different communities will also need to be involved at different times, including communities of interest (eg concerned with wildlife or play), communities of identity (eg religion or ethnic communities), and geographical communities (eg from specific neighbourhoods).

105. There is already considerable good practice in creating arenas for communities to engage in policy discussions and practical work in urban parks and green spaces. Some of these are outlined below.

- **Friends and user groups.** Many local authorities have developed these groups, and their roles and functions vary enormously. They may be well-established user groups, groups set up in response to funding or development initiatives, or groups formed as part of an outreach and community development approach. The start of these groups, and their success, are often due to a few able and committed individuals.



- **Volunteers.** As well as those involved in committees and formal community groups, there are many individual volunteers, and voluntary organisations which co-ordinate volunteers (eg British Trust for Conservation Volunteers - BTCV). These volunteers help with practical work such as maintenance tasks (eg planting, litter picks), and with helping with arts and other events.
- **Schools.** School children often get involved in parks when teachers use them as an outdoor classroom. Others may get involved in direct action such as bulb planting, or through after-school or Saturday clubs.
- **Partnership schemes.** Local authorities and communities can work together in a variety of formal and informal partnerships, set up to develop and meet shared objectives through more co-ordinated decision-making, planning and management.
- **Community-led initiatives.** Some community-led initiatives originate from local people forming a small action group. Other groups are started by the local authority and then become self-managed. Their activities may range from establishing completely new community gardens, managing allotments, setting up community-run trusts to manage larger green spaces, improving incidental green spaces such as roadside verges (eg Newcastle City Council's 'Adopt A Plot' scheme), and running facilities or events on their own green spaces or on local authority-run parks (eg cafes, festivals and sports facilities).
- **Community development.** A more developmental approach is needed in areas where no existing groups have shown an interest in green spaces. Specially trained parks staff may do this, by linking to existing community development workers in the area, or by

linking to an existing voluntary organisation which uses community development methods. It would be beneficial if training in community development could be offered as a module in university and college courses to students intending to work in local authority parks and recreation departments.

- **Networks and forums.** Networking promotes good practice, improves communications and co-ordination, and can provide opportunities for local individuals and groups to contribute to improving the overall green space framework across a town or city. Some such forums already exist, such as Stockport's Green Space Forum and Sheffield's Park Users' Forum. Wider networks (eg across the UK) could spread good practice further.



We recommend:

(R22) The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should ensure that community involvement is at the heart of programmes and projects which create and improve local parks and green spaces, including those in regeneration areas. This should be complemented and supported by providing advice and funding to enable local community groups, 'friends' and user groups, volunteers and local people to actively engage in practical work in these spaces.

106. Getting people engaged successfully as stakeholders in their parks and green spaces can be a difficult process. It means establishing certain principles of involvement and sticking to them. However, even the most careful preparation will not avoid disagreement as different needs and interests conflict. These conflicts need to be managed to minimise long-term damage and ensure the overall process is not derailed. Some useful principles of involvement are set out in Box 12.

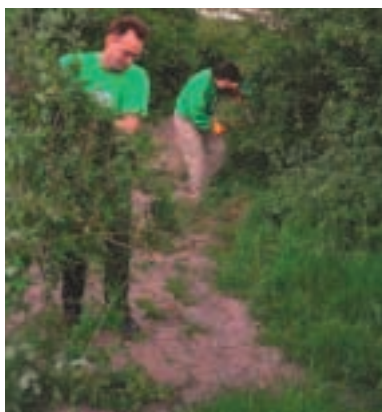
107. All these approaches bring major advantages to urban parks and green spaces as a result of access to local expertise, commitment, enthusiasm and resources, including measurable 'in-kind' contributions such as volunteer time and skills. Effectively involving communities can also provide opportunities for training and development and for building community capacity for further action.

Box 12: Principles of involvement

- **Commitment to change.** Participatory processes should not be started unless there is a commitment from all parties to the possibility of positive change. Participation that does not lead to action causes cynicism and mistrust.
- **Organisational culture change.** Organisations responsible for programmes of community involvement will probably need to increase the resources available for this work, raise awareness, develop skills, devote staff time, create new job descriptions and establish new organisational priorities. These are all necessary to move away from current non-participatory ways of working.
- **Continuous processes.** Involvement should begin at the earliest possible stage in any decision-making process, and then continue in the long term. One-off consultations will not be adequate. It takes time for relationships and trust to develop and create a solid basis for effective participation in the long term. Procedures will be required to ensure regular feedback on progress, especially feedback on how participants' views have influenced policy and programmes.
- **Links to democratic structures.** Participatory processes should be linked to formal democratic structures and support and strengthen them. There should also be links to other local agencies and partnerships to embed new initiatives into existing activities.
- **Openness, honesty and transparency.** Clear information will be needed about the boundaries of the potential for participation (what can and cannot be changed), the rules of engagement, the attitudes of the parties involved, funding, timescales and plans for long term involvement of the public and other stakeholders.
- **Exclusion and representation.** Social inclusion and social justice require special efforts to reach groups which may otherwise be excluded - such as people with physical and mental disabilities, children and young people, and black and minority ethnic communities. The aim should be to ensure that voices from all sectors of the community are heard. This work is costly in money and time. Investment will be needed for outreach staff (to take services to communities), and for providing developmental support and access to resources for traditionally excluded groups.
- **Appropriate processes.** No single process or technique is right for all circumstances, so appropriate ways to engage the public and interest groups need to be chosen to fit each specific locality, programme or initiative. Involving other stakeholders will require substantial changes to traditional ways of managing green spaces so that external views and information can be taken into account throughout service planning and delivery.
- **Beyond consultation.** People's expectations may be limited by past experiences. In many cases it will be possible for providers to develop innovative ideas for green spaces, in dialogue with local people and others, by engaging in more creative planning exercises as well as experimenting with new provision in partnership with local people.
- **Clear measures of success.** It can be very helpful to have a clear concept of success in participatory working from the start - both for the planning process and the implementation.
- **Adequate resources** are essential, both for the participation processes and implementing the outcome. Community involvement is not a cheap option. It will demand extra investment in staff training and information to the public.

108. Effective community involvement and partnership will almost certainly require substantial new investment and organisational culture change. Often this will require tough decisions to reduce current expenditure on other activities. However, the results will be reduced vandalism and other damage, avoiding expensive investment mistakes, and facilities suited to local needs and aspirations, which are better used and more rewarding for users.

109. Building local capacity is essential for success. Often it will need paid staff to kick-start and co-ordinate activities and to help maintain their momentum over what can often be a long process. It may also be necessary to maintain a 'menu' of grant schemes, including capital, to cater for small-scale projects and support community engagement.



110. We have debated the extent to which local communities can take more responsibility for green spaces, and taken into account feedback on our Interim Report: *'Green Spaces; Better Spaces'*. In the main, large traditional green spaces (such as multi-use parks) are best managed by local authorities, provided that there is greater involvement by local people in decisions on planning, design and management. Other types of green spaces, in particular, small and incidental spaces around housing, and functional green spaces such as allotments, may be co-managed by

local authorities, voluntary and community organisations, or may be initiated and run by local communities themselves.

We recommend:

(R23) Local authorities should involve and support communities in green space service planning and delivery. This should be underpinned by local Community Strategies, Best Value reviews and performance indicators, and improved information about local parks and green spaces for users.

4.4: Involving the private sector

111. Although there is evidence that high-quality green space can help to attract economic investment in the surrounding areas, it can be difficult to involve businesses in partnerships. Some partners may not want a particular business to join them because they dislike its activities or because it demands too much advertising space or other mentions of its name. From the point of view of local businesses, parks and green spaces, especially in suburban areas, may seem too distant to produce any business benefits.

112. Our research found that businesses which had been involved identified benefits for their employees who used parks and green spaces at lunchtime, obtained the value of building better links with the community and made their own gains from the regeneration of the area. Many partnerships found that once one business became involved, others often followed. They felt that many businesses are now looking to establish 'community' and 'green' credentials and that this would give them more motive to get involved in parks and open spaces. To promote this greater involvement of the private sector, further research should be undertaken into the wider economic benefits of high-quality well-managed green spaces.

113. There are many ways in which private sector companies get involved in partnerships for improving urban parks and green spaces – see Box 13. The Lewisham Private Finance Initiative involved a full-scale transfer of management and maintenance responsibilities, but this scheme is unusual. A far more common form of partnership is for locally based businesses to support improvements to green spaces in their vicinity by providing business expertise, office space, help with printing newsletters, equipment and, of course, money.
114. The recent Government proposal to introduce Business Improvement Districts, funded through an agreed additional levy on the rates, should offer further opportunities for business to contribute towards improving open spaces. There are also lessons to be learnt from the American experience, where a tradition of corporate philanthropy encourages the commercial sector to develop jointly funded activity with local government.

We recommend:

(R24) The Government should promote greater private sector involvement in partnerships for improving urban parks and green spaces, by providing guidance on ways in which businesses can engage and benefit from working with local communities, voluntary organisations and local authorities to create green spaces as part of new development, as well as improving existing local spaces. Guidance should be provided on the role of Private Finance Initiatives, town centre management and proposals for Business Improvement Districts, and support given to local initiatives and volunteering.

(R25) Further research should be undertaken to assess the transferability of overseas good practice in partnership working in parks and green spaces management, especially experience from the USA.

Box 13: Partnerships involving private sector and local business

Large scale private sector

- The London Borough of Lewisham has entered into a contract with Glendale to provide a combined parks management and grounds maintenance service, including community involvement, for most of the borough's parks.
- Other smaller projects have tapped into national sources such as the Shell Better Britain Campaign.

Local private sector

- At Mudchute City Farm on the Isle of Dogs teams of volunteers from businesses in Canary Wharf are involved in environmental work as part of their training programmes. 'They make a huge difference: and the farm couldn't function without this input' said one partner. The nearby allotment association has received contributions from developers.



- The East London Business Alliance (an association of private sector employers) is one of the founding partners of the Mile End Park Project very much on the lines of many American models.
- The development of derelict land near Brent Cross Shopping Centre in Barnet into Clarefield Park was achieved with the help of funding from Tesco and Gladdings.

4.5: Partnership funding

115. Nearly every partnership we examined relied on a financial contribution from the local authority. This partly reflects its ownership and management responsibilities for the land. Most schemes had also made good use of other locally available funds from charitable bodies. Most of the partnerships used a variety of sources of capital and revenue funding, although a few relied solely on the local authority. There was general agreement that a partnership helped the site to obtain national, and even European funds, particularly if the site was in a deprived area or contained heritage features.
116. Many partnerships involving local groups had secured support from local business as well as less usual sources such as health organisations, and subscriptions. Local businesses have contributed through a variety of means, especially by sponsoring events, features and facilities in parks, work parties and websites for local groups, and by seconding skilled staff and making contributions in kind to local initiatives.
117. Despite success in funding applications from a range of providers, almost every partnership was worried about funding. Their problem was not only inadequate funding, but also the complication of co-ordinating many different sources, sometimes for very small amounts of short-term funding. The time taken to submit bids and the wait to see if they had been successful often caused local people to lose interest in the project.
118. The scarcity and short-term nature of funds particularly applies to revenue funding. Although the Lottery and other Government schemes have increased the level of capital funding there is still insufficient recognition of the revenue costs needed to make best use of capital funding and bring projects into effect.
119. Most outside funding has specific conditions. While some partnerships found that this was an advantage – ‘it keeps us on course, we have to deliver’, other groups saw these as being over-prescriptive, particularly when small amounts were being sought. There was also a danger of compromising the aims of the project to suit funding bodies, and partnerships found it important to build up a dialogue with funders to allow both to reach a better understanding of each other’s objectives.
120. For all these reasons, successful partnerships had found it useful to have a dedicated funding officer. They often relied on experts to help with bidding, planning and managing funds, and to talk to funding providers. There is a special need to consider the needs of voluntary organisations and local groups in this regard.
- We recommend:**
- (R26) The Government should establish dialogue with existing and potential funding providers to promote:*
- (i) Strategic objectives for urban parks and green spaces, and the role of local projects, delivered through partnership, in achieving them.*
 - (ii) Sustainable funding arrangements that recognise the need for longer term funding beyond three years to ensure that the spaces created and improved will be maintained, and for greater local flexibility in their use by simplifying applications and terms of conditions attached to funding.*
 - (iii) The importance of providing adequate complementary revenue funding, for consultation and training as well as project management, and for maximising the benefits of capital funding in improving the quality of projects.*
- (R27) Local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships should provide information and advice on available funding streams and opportunities for supporting local partnerships involving local resident, voluntary and business groups for improving urban green spaces.*

SECTION 5: SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION AND GOOD PRACTICE

5.1: Context

121. We have been greatly concerned by the lack of adequate information, both nationally and locally, about urban parks and green spaces. Even basic data is missing: how many there are, their total area, the uses they receive. This information deficit has been a major factor in the parks' decline. It prevents policy makers and managers setting targets or monitoring change. It perpetuates the low status of parks in local and national priorities and leads to poorly informed policies. Without sound evidence-based proposals, political leaders and policy makers will never understand, still less promote, the case for improving the quality of urban green spaces.
122. Action at all levels is needed to create a workable and accessible database of urban parks and green spaces. The current sharing of responsibilities across Government departments and agencies does certainly not help this. It means quite simply that there is no single national source of reliable figures about urban parks and green spaces and their use. Worse still, it is impossible to aggregate what information is available.
123. Developing a supportive information base will therefore require a clear national lead and joint working across all national and voluntary agencies involved in planning and managing urban parks and green spaces.

5.2: An urban open space typology

124. A supportive information base will require, as a first step, agreement on types of urban green spaces, and how those can best be categorised – a shared typology. It should be capable of providing for the practical needs of local authorities and for collecting more consistent information about the amount and quality of green spaces. It should also allow different approaches either to be aggregated at a higher level or to be broken down further in a consistent way, depending on how they are used and the level of detail required.
125. We have consulted widely on proposals for such a typology of urban green spaces. The outcome of this process is at Table 1.
126. Our proposed typology is intended primarily for strategy development and planning purposes and is based on land use. Individual parcels of land may also be subject to various national or local policy designations, and local green space hierarchies. Each land use in the typology can also be sub-divided or classified in other ways, for example by owner (eg local authority, commercial, private or voluntary); by type of management (eg intensive or extensive); by type of recreational use (eg formal or informal); or by access (public, restricted, private). In this way the typology will be able to serve the needs of a range of organisations and data providers.
127. Our typology should also provide a more consistent basis for local authorities to construct local assessments of need and audits of existing provision, which will improve the comparability of information on quantity and quality of local green spaces.

We recommend:

(R28) The Government adopts the typology at Table 1, and promotes its use by local authorities and national bodies and agencies as a basis for planning and managing, and collecting more consistent information about the amount and quality of urban green spaces.

Table 1: Urban Open and Green Space Typology

	Sub-sets of 'open space'	Typology suitable for planning purposes and open space strategies	More detailed classification for open space audits and academic research
Urban Open Spaces	Green spaces	Parks and gardens	Urban parks Country Parks Formal gardens (including designed landscapes)
		Provision for children and teenagers	Play Areas (including LAPs, LEAPs and NEAPs) Skateboard parks Outdoor basketball goals 'Hanging out' areas (including teenage shelters)
		Amenity greenspace (most commonly, but not necessarily, in housing areas)	Informal recreation spaces Housing green spaces Domestic gardens Village greens Other incidental space
		Outdoor sports facilities (with natural or artificial surfaces)	Tennis courts Bowling greens Sports pitches (including artificial surfaces) Golf courses Athletics tracks School playing fields Other institutional playing fields Other outdoor sports areas
		Allotments, community gardens and urban farms	Allotments Community gardens City (urban) farms
		Cemeteries and churchyards	Churchyards Cemeteries
		Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces, including woodland or urban forestry	Woodland (coniferous, deciduous, mixed) and scrub. Grassland (eg downland, meadow) Heath or moor Wetlands (eg marsh, fen) Open and running water Wastelands (including disturbed ground) Bare rock habitats (eg cliffs, quarries, pits)
		Green corridors	River and canal banks Road and rail corridors Cycling routes within towns and cities Pedestrian paths within towns and cities Rights of way and permissive paths
	Civic spaces	Civic spaces	Sea fronts (including promenade) Civic squares (including plazas) Market squares Pedestrian streets Other hard surfaced pedestrian areas

5.3: A supportive information base

128. Given the current problems in developing a supportive information base we believe that it is urgent to improve information in certain key areas.
129. The first is a national framework for recording information on parks and green spaces at the national, regional and local levels. Such a framework should guide local authorities on the type of information to collect, where it will be stored, and how it can be accessed and used. Care should be taken to identify and assess information already being collected by national agencies, local authorities and others. Developing and broadening the scope of the *Public Park Assessment* to take account of the wider range of types of urban green spaces, would be a good starting point. The National Land Use Database (NLUD) offers the best, long-term prospect for building a robust database of the amount and types of urban green spaces. The *Public Park Assessment* could also provide a good basis for developing a national database of urban green spaces as a layer of NLUD.

We recommend:

(R29) The Government should build on the start made by the Public Park Assessment by developing a national database of urban parks and green spaces.

130. Response rates and the accuracy of figures supplied by local authorities to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) annual publication of all local authority Leisure and Recreation Statistics are generally patchy and a cause for concern. The CIPFA figures are the best available for local authorities' recreational land and expenditure: their methodology should be reviewed together with the data they collect, especially those supplied by local authorities. The DTLR, CIPFA, the Audit Commission and the Local Government Association (LGA) need to improve the collection and publication of comparable data, locally and centrally, and to increase the value of the resulting information.

We recommend:

(R30) DTLR, CIPFA, LGA and the Audit Commission should find ways of improving the response rates and consistency of local authorities to the CIPFA annual survey of all local authority Leisure and Recreation Statistics.



131. If everyone is to benefit from improved urban green spaces this needs to start with a useful assessment of their current economic, social and environmental value. The quality, costs and benefits associated with urban green spaces may be determined by annual comparisons of people's use of their green spaces and their satisfaction with them. It is particularly important to measure benefits arising from recent investment in green spaces from the Lottery. The Taskforce welcomes the Heritage Lottery Fund's decision to undertake an evaluation of the Urban Parks Programme. Sound information on the wider benefits of high-quality parks and green spaces will also be vital evidence to support any case for greater investment. There is also a need for research on the types of facilities provided in parks and green spaces, and on rights of way and accessibility for green space networks within urban areas.

We recommend:

(R31) The Government should commission a programme of research for elaborating and quantifying:

- social, economic and environmental benefits of good quality parks and green spaces;*
- types and condition of facilities provided in parks and green spaces;*
- use of green spaces by types of users and activities;*
- rights of way and accessibility for green space networks within urban areas; and*
- links between local authority expenditure on green spaces services (spending per head or hectare) and the quality of individual green spaces.*

132. Standards of provision and proximity of green space should take into account the need for improving accessibility and quality and diversity within green space networks. There should be published guidance on how to achieve this. It should include methodology for developing, promoting and monitoring quality standards linked to Best Value and other recognised benchmarks. The standards used to define the quality of green space should signal the levels of investment required to achieve and maintain them.

133. Central guidance on the nature and formats of local user surveys is also needed to establish more accurate and comparable information about users and non-users of parks and green spaces, and their patterns of use. This work should particularly focus on under-represented groups or groups that raise specific issues – children and young people, parents, people with disabilities, the elderly, black and minority ethnic communities. User surveys can find out whether people actually use play facilities and green spaces, and whether they are satisfied with them. They thereby provide important measures of service performance in managing and maintaining green spaces.



5.4: Developing good practice networks

134. There is clear evidence of good practice in almost every field of park services and management across the country. Lessons from positive achievements, innovations in management practice and highly successful projects need to be shared, to stimulate others.
135. The LGA has recently published examples of good practice in parks and green spaces management. So too has the professional body, the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management. However, such commendable examples are a small part of the whole and good practice needs more help to become the norm. This means developing a network to enable a deeper analysis of good practice and a more rigorous approach to ensure that it is adopted more widely.
136. The Urban Parks Forum is a national, voluntary sector organisation designed to undertake this networking. It was initially created to improve the skills of managers in charge of the major new investments from the Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks Programme. Now the Forum is dedicated to spreading good practice over the entire spectrum of urban parks and green spaces. It replaces a fragmented and haphazard series of individual initiatives.
137. The Forum is now developing a network of support groups, to help underpin the active engagement of the local community which we believe offers the best long-term protection for the nation's heritage of parks and green spaces. Over time, the Forum will produce an accessible library of good practice for parks managers and community groups, a source of information and advice, and a national network for the exchange of views and experiences in parks management, locally, nationally and internationally.

138. The Urban White Paper recognised the value of the Urban Parks Forum in developing networks for the collection and dissemination of good practice specifically in the area of parks and green spaces. The Forum now receives grant support from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Countryside Agency and the Esmée Fairbairn Trust. Its emerging pivotal role as an independent national organisation dedicated to better management of parks and green spaces requires longer-term national support.

We recommend:

(R32) The Government should take a lead in developing means for effective dissemination of proven good practice via regional seminars, CD-Rom or an interactive website/learning network for both professionals and community groups.

(R33) The Government should consider the need for a best practice series to guide local authorities on the use of community strategies, Beacon Councils, Best Value and Planning Policy Guidance and neighbourhood plans in improving local green spaces.

PART THREE – CREATING GREEN SPACE NETWORKS

SECTION 6: CREATING GREEN SPACE NETWORKS

139. Social and demographic changes have altered our expectations and demands of urban parks and green spaces. We therefore need to rethink the types of green spaces we create and the ways we manage and develop them, to make them more responsive to the lives of people today. We need to carry this new thinking into developing an effective policy framework for service planning and delivery, and for creating networks of urban green spaces.

6.1: TAKE A STRATEGIC ROUTE

6.1.1: National leadership

140. Urban parks and green spaces, whether they are royal, municipal or incidental spaces around buildings, are national assets. Providing good quality parks and green spaces should, therefore, be a national priority in delivering the objectives of the Urban White Paper and the urban renaissance. This will require leadership and a more integrated national strategy and guidance.

141. Responsibility for urban parks and green spaces is currently 'shared' across Government by a number of departments: Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Department for Environment, Foods and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) DTLR, and the Home Office, either directly or via their relevant agencies and sponsored bodies – see Annex 2.

142. However, there are no discernable mechanisms for co-ordinating the activities of the various departments and agencies that relate to urban parks and green spaces. Through its local government and planning functions, DTLR appears to have 'lead' responsibility for developing the Government's policies on urban park and green spaces. However, DTLR has no obvious mechanism or forum for agreeing strategic aims for parks and green spaces across Government; it has no formal co-ordination with the important responsibilities of DCMS and English Heritage for historic parks and gardens. And it has no sponsored body for co-ordinating the delivery of programmes and activities across Government which affect parks and green spaces, unlike DEFRA and DCMS.

143. Similarly the strategies of the Regional Development Agencies largely ignore local environmental quality, and Regional Planning Guidance is at best vague in its coverage of provision and management of networks of green spaces. Whilst the Local Government Association (LGA) has shown renewed interest in parks and green spaces through the setting up of its Parks and Open Spaces Panel, it needs to do more to advocate the value and benefits of parks and green spaces to wider social well-being objectives of both central and local government⁹. London Boroughs appear to have benefited from the valuable work that was done by the London Planning Advisory Committee, and now by the Greater London Authority (GLA) with its report *Scrutiny of Green Spaces in London*¹⁰.

9 See Local Government Association (LGA) (2001) *The Value of Parks and Open Spaces*.

10 GLA Green Spaces Investigative Committee (2001): *Scrutiny of Green Spaces in London*.

We recommend:

(R34) The Government should provide clear leadership and a national policy framework for supporting improvements to urban parks and green space by:

- (i) promoting and co-ordinating the inclusion of parks and green space provision across its public policy priorities, strategies and programmes, in particular, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, regional development, planning and housing development, and culture, play and sport; and*
- (ii) providing guidance for national and regional programme providers, local authorities and other local providers, including partnerships involving the voluntary and private sectors on creating, improving and maintaining urban parks and green spaces.*

6.1.2: Local Leadership

144. In most areas, a renaissance of urban parks and green spaces will depend on the ability of local authorities to provide civic leadership and foster local pride.
145. The improvement of local green spaces requires committed local councillors and the commitment of the council itself. Parks services need the right organisational structures, but it is even more important for them to have local leaders as champions, who appreciate what green spaces can do to promote health, regeneration and other policy priorities.
146. However, all too often, parks and green spaces have been identified as an easy target for cost-cutting and development. Worst of all, instead of being treated as key cultural resources, they are treated as an extension of the natural environment which can 'get by' with minimal management and maintenance.

147. Local leaders need to champion the values and benefits of parks and green spaces and foster neighbourhood pride. Where local government has taken up the new 'Cabinet' style of local government, a cabinet member can take responsibility for enhancing the quality of local green spaces. Scrutiny committees can also ensure that local government remembers the role of local green spaces in improving the quality of life of local people. Council officers can, with local groups and local people raise the profile of green spaces, demonstrate their value and pre-empt local budget cuts, and help to protect and enhance them.

We recommend:

(R35) Local authorities should provide effective leadership for local parks and green spaces at the highest level within the council, by clearly designating a senior cabinet member to champion and promote local parks and green spaces.

(R36) Local authority scrutiny committees should give greater weight to the contribution of local green spaces in improving the quality of local environments and people's lives.

6.1.3: Local green space strategies

148. In addition to strong local leadership, improving local green spaces will require service planning and delivery focused on greater involvement of local people and serving their needs. An integrated green space strategy can provide vision and clear objectives for developing local green space networks – see Boxes 14 and 15 – but only 44% of the 405 local authorities who responded to the *Public Park Assessment* said they had a parks and green space strategy.

Box 14: Strategic objectives

Strategic priorities for planning, designing, managing and maintaining sustainable networks of urban green spaces should include ensuring provision is:

- (a) High in quality:
 - building the diversity and sustainability of the green space network and mix of types and sizes of spaces it provides; and
 - improving the presentation and appearance of the space – its design and layout, facilities and their condition and standard of care.
- (b) Accessible – to all those who may wish to use or visit them.
- (c) Quantity – there should be an adequate number of green spaces, and individual sites should be large enough to accommodate their full potential use.

In many densely-developed urban areas the priorities should normally be accessibility and quality.

Box 15: Networks of urban green spaces

Urban green space networks can include the obvious spaces – the parks and formal gardens, the ‘rec’, sports fields, commons and heaths, allotments, copses and woods, churchyards and cemeteries, playgrounds. And the less obvious – disused railway lines, land alongside canals and river banks, around reservoirs, back courts on housing estates, community gardens and city farms. Green spaces can be small spaces with a few flowers, or places where you can see for miles. A classification of the full extent of types of green spaces that can be found in urban areas is proposed at section 5.2.

149. 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. All of these strategies should be mutually reinforcing. Integrating strategies in this way will enable authorities to combine planning with innovative design, management and delivery and the active involvement of the community at all stages. It can also help to find opportunities for partnerships with other agencies, local business and voluntary organisations and communities for developing the green space network. Core ingredients of parks and green space strategies are set out in Box 16.



Box 16: Core ingredients of successful parks and green space strategies

- Vision and strategy for future action.
- Community and local stakeholder involvement and partnerships.
- Clear aims and measurable objectives, based on core principles and values agreed with local stakeholders. Achievable action plans for delivering sustainable green space networks.
- Audits of what green spaces exist, where, their fitness for purpose, quality and condition, how they are used and their value to the community.
- Locally-determined provision standards, coupled with guidelines for new green space design, management and maintenance.
- Proposals for monitoring, evaluation and review which seek actively to involve local communities and other stakeholders.

Successful strategies are supported by:

- Community consultation and involvement, events and activities and other policy initiatives.
- Good local facts and figures - results of surveys of users, and levels and patterns of use.
- Realistic assessment of the resources needed to implement the strategy.

150. A strategy should be understood and supported by officials within the authority and outside by the general public, key agencies and local groups. That requires a collaborative approach, led by the parks/recreation services in partnership with the planning, housing, cultural, education, regeneration and tourism, and transport services.

151. The green space strategy should be a document of vision, guiding improvements to the quality of local parks and green spaces. But its success will depend on local political backing and an individual champion, preferably a cabinet member or a committee chair.

152. Strategies should be written after consultation with local people, local business and community groups, including 'friends' groups. They should also be involved in action to deliver the strategy, at all stages of its implementation.

153. Enabling local people to participate more effectively in policy and strategy development and continuing management, is more likely to lead to better parks and green spaces which meet their needs. It will also strengthen feelings of ownership and responsibility among local people for their local green spaces and strengthen a sense of citizenship and community spirit. Local people can also make a very visible contribution through collective practical activities such as organising arts and cultural events, tree planting or footpath improvement.

We recommend:

(R37) Local authorities should develop (or update) and implement a green space strategy, which integrates with neighbourhood renewal, regeneration, planning and housing development, community development, local health improvement, and culture, children's play and sports strategies.

(R38) The Government should stress the importance of 'joined-up thinking' between national and regional providers, local authority planners and managers, and other stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of local green space strategies and programmes.

6.2. BETTER PLANNING

6.2.1: Local planning and green space strategies

154. For historical reasons some areas have an abundance of green spaces, whilst other areas do not have enough. Developing urban green space networks can be an effective strategy for targeting areas with poor spaces and serving the needs of people who do not have access to good quality provision.
155. Creating green space networks that serve the needs of local people requires sound assessments of the mix and types of spaces they need, and audits of the spaces they can access. Locally derived provision standards can then be applied to match provision of new green spaces with local needs – see Box 17.
156. Clearly establishing needs, and the quality of existing provision will effectively identify the spaces that need to be improved, and the types and sizes of new provision that is most urgently needed, where and for whom.
157. Where there is a deficiency of green space additional provision will be needed to complement and enhance the local green space network. These new green spaces may be created as part of land reclamation, improving derelict brownfield land or in association with new development and regeneration and renewal programmes. They should be an integral part of area masterplans (or their equivalent) where these are developed.

Box 17: Assessing needs, provision and targeting local imbalances

Assessments and audits will enable local authorities to identify specific needs of their communities that are not currently being met, and provide a basis for establishing locally derived standards and effective strategies for green spaces at the local level. They should also inform the development of appropriate policies in unitary development and local plans (or the proposed local development frameworks). This will require:

- rigorous assessments to clarify population mix within communities and that of people who may not live, but work in them, and identify their current and future needs for a mix of types of green spaces and recreational facilities;
- audits to establish both the amount and quality of existing provision of green space and recreation facilities, including their accessibility and the opportunities for new provision; and
- locally-derived standards that form the basis for identifying areas that are deficient in provision, and green space strategies and local plans/local planning frameworks to develop policies for targeting action to redress imbalances. Locally determined standards should also be more defensible than inappropriately applied national standards.

158. New green spaces should be convenient and safe, with unrestricted access routes to encourage people to use them. They should contribute to the overall network of green spaces and be fully integrated with the public realm of streets, footpaths and rights of way, providing convenient and safe access routes for people, especially for walkers and cyclists.

Box 18: Better use of local green spaces as educational resources

Increasingly schools are:

- making greater use of local parks and green spaces as outdoor classrooms, integrating them into their curriculum in areas such as nature studies and science. This helps children learn to value them;
- adopting local green spaces and developing 'ownership' amongst children and young people to care for them. Children may be involved in planning, designing, and maintaining green space to be used by the school and wider community;
- participating in schemes such as Learning Through Landscapes, The Forest School concept, citizenship programmes, and other initiatives such as 'homezones' encourage local schools to interact with local parks and green spaces as well as organised visits;
- promoting the use of parks and green space networks as alternative unobstructed, clean, safe routes to schools; and
- exploring the potential for making their outdoor facilities available for wider community use. This can secure a greater role for playing fields and other school grounds as part of local green space networks.

However, the resource implications and service level agreements for both schools and communities, in increased sharing of provision in this way should be carefully considered.



Enhancing and protecting existing green spaces

159. Green space strategies should prioritise spaces that are no longer fit for purpose, and aim to improve the quality and accessibility of these spaces before providing new ones. Design reviews should be used to identify opportunities for creating more appropriate solutions – see section 6.3. There are a number of ways in which existing stocks could be transformed or used better, especially by making more imaginative use of small and incidental community spaces, and those around housing estates. Green spaces are potentially a valuable resource for schools in urban areas where their own grounds may be cramped and covered over in tarmac. Box 18 suggests how local green spaces can be put to better use in education.



160. To date, the planning system has done little to halt the decline in quality of parks and green spaces. It may even have contributed to the problem by requiring housing developers to provide additional green spaces without maintenance agreements. The result is that static local authority budgets are spread more and more thinly as they inherit greater amounts of green space. This paradox can be overcome by avoiding formulaic approaches to the use of s106 agreements, ensuring that local planning policies integrate with green space strategies, carrying out thorough assessment of needs and audit of existing spaces, and giving priority to using planning obligations to improve and enhance the quality of existing green spaces before considering new provision.
161. Better use could be made of s106 resources to extend and enhance the quality of local green space networks. However, it is unrealistic to expect every new development to provide or even contribute to new on-site green space, and many sites will be too small to include worthwhile green spaces. Delivering higher densities will mean accommodating more 'development' onto each available site, and most likely allow less land to be used for worthwhile new green spaces. The Government's consultation: *Reforming Planning Obligations: a consultation paper (2001)*, sets out proposals for reviewing planning obligations. There is considerable scope for making better use of commuted payments (or the proposed development tariff) to promote sustainable maintenance of green spaces. In these ways, planning measures to enhance the quality of existing green spaces may be more effective than securing new provision.

Protecting existing green spaces

162. The Government's emphasis on making best use of previously developed land in urban areas and consequent higher densities will lead to increased pressures on existing green spaces. They become both more necessary and more vulnerable to development. It is all the more important then, for local planning authorities to put in place policies that will ensure that urban green spaces are protected from development. There is an urgent need for a clear-cut statement in revised national guidance about the degree of protection to be given to existing green spaces. Developing local green space hierarchies is one way of setting out how different spaces will be protected and enhanced. Another is to maintain their quality – people are more likely to get involved to protect a good quality space, than a poor run down one.

6.2.2: National planning policy guidance

163. The Planning Green Paper proposed that the role of the planning system should be a delivery mechanism for Community Strategies and other policy initiatives; this is an important national policy shift¹¹. If these proposals are carried through, the planning system should play a key role in delivering elements of green-space strategies. There are also opportunities to improve provision through the proposed new tariffs and s106 agreements. It should also mean that provision, protection and enhancement of urban parks and green spaces should be key objectives which should underpin the development of the proposed new series of planning policy statements (PPSs).

¹¹ *Green Paper: Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change*. DTLR (2001)

164. The Government's revision of Planning Policy Guidance note 17: *Sports, Recreation and Open Space (PPG17)*, provides a timely opportunity to support and advance local green space strategies, and promote networks of high-quality and sustainable green spaces¹².

165. We have been active in advising the DTLR on the green space aspects of the revision of PPG17. We have been most concerned that it should demonstrate the role and value of parks and green spaces in delivering an urban renaissance and the Urban White Paper's objectives for improving the quality of local environments.

We recommend

(R39) The Government should promote the strategic importance of parks and green spaces in improving the quality of urban life and urban environments by ensuring that their provision, protection and enhancement are key objectives in planning policy guidance (or the proposed series of planning policy statements (PPSs)).

(R40) That the Government should ensure that revised Planning Policy Guidance note 17: Sports, Recreation and Open Space (or new PPS) provides clear guidance on:

- (i) the importance of strategic green space planning in developing and enhancing networks of urban green spaces;*
- (ii) protecting urban green spaces from development, especially incremental development in areas where local schools, people and communities, need them;*
- (iii) carrying out local assessments of the diverse requirements of people in urban areas, and audits of local green spaces;*

(iv) using planning mechanisms, in particular s106 planning agreements, to deliver a better mix of green spaces, especially by maintaining and enhancing existing spaces.

(v) encouraging and assisting local authorities to develop local standards of provision, and to target new provision to areas where people do not have access to high-quality parks and green spaces; and

(vi) encouraging different kinds of local provision, exploring how to make better use of smaller spaces and those around housing estates.

6.3: BETTER QUALITY DESIGN

6.3.1: Places from spaces

166. Design should make places from spaces.

A good park or green space will lift the spirits of visitors and create a sense of well-being in the community. Designing a park or a green space must begin by recognising what makes it a special place and what people want of it.

167. That in turn means engaging the local community throughout the design process, and understanding and meeting their aspirations. Methods such as planning for real or the Urban Design Alliance's *Placecheck Toolkit* provide practical tools which can be used to involve people from the start of a project, and help to make them feel that they own it. Landscape architects should help to raise expectations and broaden horizons by stimulating and challenging the common place off-the-shelf solutions. Inspiration should complement consultation.

¹² Consultation draft revised Planning Policy Guidance note 17: Sports, Recreation and Open Space. DTLR (2000)

168. A well-designed space will attract local people only if it is integrated into its urban context. Each space should be part of a system of open spaces providing different environments and experiences for the community and a setting for the built form. Ideally, each park and green space should link into an integrated civic and green space network which offers different ways for people to move through towns away from major traffic arteries – they are part of the connected city.

169. There are no universal prescriptions for producing well-designed parks and green spaces, although there are general principles that may be considered as guidelines – see section 6.7.1. Good design solutions should vary to suit the individual circumstances of each place while being guided by strategic objectives for high-quality and accessible green space networks. Designers need to work with local people to determine the unique quality of each space and its fitness for purpose in developing the appropriate response.

6.3.2: Giving poor spaces a future

170. Changes in the local community – such as a changing age profile or ethnic background, or the degradation of existing spaces will provide the context for considering how these spaces function and whether they are still fit for purpose. Many poorly performing spaces can be given a new lease of life, and made to serve today's needs, by creative design. Some places may have sufficient historical merit to justify restoring part or all of the existing layout. But in others the original design – if there was one – may no longer be relevant because of physical and social changes to its context. Imaginative design, in close consultation with local people, can take a poor space and transform it to provide an attractive place serving contemporary needs.

171. A design review of existing spaces can help to consider whether to restore and consolidate a tired space or whether to transform it. It can also help to tackle the things that put off users and to reduce future maintenance requirements and costs. Ways in which design reviews can achieve these aims are considered in Box 19.

Box 19: Design reviews

Design reviews can help to diversify local green spaces and achieve more appropriate provision tailored to need. They can also help to tackle the difficulties that deter local people from using their local spaces by providing opportunities to:

- Rationalise the layout to remove small isolated pockets of high maintenance.
- Concentrate areas of intensive use – such as kick-about areas and provide appropriate surfacing.
- Improve access, signs and information, for example, showing details of wildlife or local history or explaining who manages the space. This will encourage people to understand and appreciate it.
- Concentrate areas of intensive horticultural maintenance in key areas where they make the most impact such as entrances and around cafés.
- Introduce an extensive management regime where appropriate. For example, large areas of mown grass could be converted to meadows.
- Provide a programme of public information with interpretation panels indicating the positive aspects of conservation and biodiversity to assist with public acceptance. Some details, such as mown path edges, can reinforce the sense that a place is cared for. Reviews should consider whole life costing and therefore long-life materials.

6.3.3: Design and management

172. Landscape design should meet the need for efficient maintenance without compromising variety. Likewise, the management of spaces must be informed by the design intent: for example, it is very wasteful to mow an area frequently if it is sown as a wild flower meadow. In new projects there is an ‘establishment period’ of about five years which is critical in developing the project from a callow beginning to a recognisable park. This establishment period is shaped by the management and maintenance of the landscape and the operations to be followed should be clearly set out in a management plan.
173. Management decisions also shape established open spaces. Over time green spaces are subject to the dual dynamics of removal and accretion. Elements like litter bins and benches often get removed from parks and green spaces – and then replaced, a few at a time, in different styles. Invariably, the space loses its coherence and becomes disorganised and unattractive. Specific management plans informed by an understanding of the design intentions are needed for each space.

We recommend:

(R41) Design reviews should be carried out by local authorities for failing or unsatisfactory spaces as part of urban green space strategies.



6.4: BETTER MANAGEMENT AND CARE

6.4.1: Management

174. In recent years many local authorities have broken up their unified parks service into a series of units under different management regimes serving wider needs and demands. Parks services have also frequently been absorbed into local authority ‘leisure’ departments, where they have lost priority and status compared to indoor leisure and organised sport. Fragmented responsibility for parks and green spaces can harm innovation, hinder co-ordinated action and confuse and annoy the public.
175. It is essential to plan how to achieve management and maintenance objectives and to set the terms of maintenance contracts accordingly. The benefit of a management plan often lies in creating a forum for local authorities, contractors and local and ‘friends’ groups to discuss the future management of local parks and green spaces. Many local authorities are moving away from established client/contractor models, and are placing greater emphasis on the quality of services. Management plans are a good way to reflect this trend in contract specifications to establish wider purposes for maintaining grounds, and to prepare and monitor service level agreements.

We recommend:

(R42) Local authorities should prepare, in consultation with local and ‘friends’ groups and users, a management plan for every major park, groups of smaller green spaces, and types of spaces (such as cemeteries, allotments, nature reserves and woodlands).

6.4.2: Maintenance specifications and contracts

176. The procurement of grounds maintenance services varies greatly across the country, but it is generally tailored to local needs and market conditions. The recent publication of the Byatt report: *Delivering Better Services for Citizens* has highlighted local government procurement strategies. The Government is currently studying the recommendations of this report, and the results may have a bearing on the future procurement of grounds maintenance services. But there is already a clear expectation that all local authorities will adopt a procurement strategy.
177. Whatever the method of procurement, well-designed grounds maintenance specifications should clearly define standards for maintaining parks and green spaces, and be written in a way that is understood by the contractor or internal DSO, the client, the public and other stakeholders. Specifications that set standards of quality to be achieved (performance or output type) need to be realistic and reflect the expectation of users.
178. It is generally agreed that contracts should be of longer duration than at present. With the advent of Best Value, local authorities should consider scope for adding value to existing contracts, by reviewing and, if necessary, renegotiating them. Mutual trust and a clear understanding by the contractor of the client's needs are essential ingredients for adding value – see Box 20.

Box 20: Added value

Clients and contractors can review and renegotiate contracts into something longer term that will add value and provide more certainty. Added value has been secured by local authorities at no extra cost, where contractors have agreed to:

- assist and give advice to park users;
- provide first aid emergency backup;
- monitor and report any abuse of facilities;
- help with graffiti removal from park signs and play equipment;
- provide expert horticultural knowledge to the public upon request;
- hand out 'pooper scoops' (contractor funded) to park users;
- participate in public surveys and consultation processes that form part of the Council's accountability under 'Best Value'; and
- participate in the Council's recycling of green waste policy.

179. Local authorities should also explore opportunities to develop contracts which serve the objectives of the green space strategy and management plans, and encourage community engagement and continuous review. Many benefits can accrue to both client and contractor from using performance-based contracts, which place the onus on the contractor to maintain the quality of spaces rather than waiting for specific instructions from the client – see Box 21. Contractors, whether in-house or private firms, should also be encouraged to engage with local people in maintaining green spaces.

Box 21: some benefits of performance based contracts

- Savings. Initial fears that they would be more expensive to operate are proving unfounded.
- Grounds maintenance contractors have accepted responsibility for achieving quality standards, with minimum supervision from the client.
- Better and more open working relationships between client and contractor.
- Higher job satisfaction for operatives as they can use some initiative and enjoy the better results.
- Establishing benchmarks for assessing factors other than price alone when analysing tenders.

6.5: BETTER STANDARDS AND CONTINUOUS REVIEW

180. The *Public Park Assessment* shows a marked deterioration in the condition of public parks over the last twenty years. Although the majority of parks described as 'good' are believed to be getting better, we are most concerned with the condition of the 39% of the 3000 parks which were reported as 'declining' and 'poor'. This suggests a widening gap between good and poor parks; a situation almost certainly mirrored in other types of urban green spaces. Such trends need to be monitored locally as well as nationally if they are to be addressed. This cannot be done without setting appropriate targets and measurable standards of quality.

6.5.1: Setting standards

181. Since urban green spaces include nature reserves and play areas as well as public parks and playing fields, their quality standards will cover a wide range. But for all places the qualities chosen should be recognised and accepted by local people, and related to their needs. Regular surveys of park users can then be used to confirm that the standards used are actually matching their expectations of quality.

182. One way of defining standards is by reference to a published list of consumer entitlements. Local authorities should set out the standards of care that local people should expect, including the frequency of inspection of play equipment and toilets and the speed at which graffiti is removed and benches repaired. This approach can assure visitors of a local authority's commitment to the care of their green spaces, as do well-maintained signs at main entrances and a staff presence at larger sites.

183. Where work is specified for contractors, this can make reference to British Standard specifications such as for tree and shrub pruning, and for grass care. Such specifications help to define the skill levels needed to achieve them. To achieve high standards of maintenance, the local authority must be able to afford them. A lower specification, especially one with



less frequent maintenance operations, may be cheaper but it will almost certainly diminish the value of the park in terms of public use and satisfaction.

184. Where green spaces have more specific purposes and uses, the setting of standards must be appropriate. There are well-defined standards of 'playability' for grass pitches for team games. However, these are dependent on quality of construction as well as maintenance. Too many public playing fields are too badly constructed to get the best use out of them. Green spaces whose primary purpose is to provide habitats for wildlife should set standards for the diversity of species, to be confirmed by a Phase I Habitat Survey.

6.5.2: Best Value

185. The introduction of Best Value, which requires all local authorities to make arrangements to secure 'continuous improvement' in the way in which they carry out their functions, offers an excellent opportunity to develop standards of care and meaningful measures of performance in their achievement.
186. The implementation of Best Value should also involve a review of the parks and green spaces service using the 'four Cs' of Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete to guide the review process and establish a framework for improvement. Best Value reviews and inspections are beginning to influence the ways in which local authorities manage and deliver parks and green space services. Reports by the Audit Commission's Best Value Inspectorate are helping to inform and influence local authority practice.

We recommend:

(R43) Local authorities should conduct a Best Value review of their parks and green space services, taking note of the guidance and inspection reports by the Audit Commission as they are published.



6.5.3: Performance indicators

187. There are already indicators in the national suite of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) which are relevant to parks and green spaces (BV 114, 116 and 119), although they deal more widely with cultural and recreational facilities and activities. A specific national BVPI for parks and green spaces – based on quality – would offer users, local authorities and other service providers a clear yardstick for gauging the performance of local parks services across authorities. Such a national BVPI would also help establish the importance of this service within the spectrum of services provided by local authorities.



188. In the absence of a specific national BVPI for local authority parks services the Best Value General User Satisfaction Surveys should be strengthened in respect of parks and green spaces. Through indicator BV119, information can be collected on the use of local green spaces and public perceptions about their quality. The survey has potential for providing valuable information in a consistent format, allowing comparison with other cultural and recreational services. However, there is surprisingly little information about the surveys and the methods used, and it is not clear whether all local authorities are required to carry them out.
189. There is also a need at a national level for readily available basic comparative information on local authorities – especially the cost per head and cost per hectare of maintaining parks and green spaces. This information could be abstracted from the data supplied annually to the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), and published to aid comparison in standards of provision and expenditure. Production of these statistics was discontinued by the Audit Commission and should be reinstated. Further work should also be carried out to establish links between how much an authority spends (per head or hectare) and the quality of individual green spaces.
190. Guidance should also be given to all local authorities on the development and operation of local performance indicators for parks and green spaces. For services of this kind, local indicators may be as effective as national indicators. The work of the Audit Commission and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in compiling a ‘library’ of local performance indicators could be used to identify a basket of key local indicators for parks and green spaces, helping to promote a more consistent use of BVPIs by local authorities. Such Performance Indicators are best described as ‘voluntary’ rather than ‘local’ in that they can be shared by many local authorities in order to compare performance. Many local authority groupings such as the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities’ (AGMA) Parks Group are developing Performance Indicators for this purpose.
191. BVPIs should concentrate on outputs and outcomes rather than inputs. Because of the wide-ranging nature of the benefits to be derived from better parks and green spaces, some outcomes such as personal fitness will be difficult to quantify and attribute to park use alone. They will come close to more general ‘quality of life’ and ‘community development’ indicators.
- We recommend:**
- (R44) The Government should provide central guidance for local authorities on the development and operation of local (voluntary) Best Value Performance Indicators in relation to parks and green spaces. It should provide advice on how those can be integrated with targets for regeneration and housing development, health, education, environmental quality, community safety, social inclusion and provision for youth and older people, where appropriate through the Local Strategic Partnership.*
- 6.5.4: Beacon Councils**
192. Improving Urban Green Spaces is one of eleven themes chosen for Beacon Councils for the year 2001-2002 and this mechanism has enabled us to identify the innovative local authority initiatives for improving urban green spaces, which have been referred to throughout this report. To be selected as a Beacon, councils must be able to show excellence in a Beacon theme, good general

performance, and plans for effective dissemination. To show excellence in the theme, councils must demonstrate vision and strategy, consultation with public and stakeholders, partnerships, actions, quality outcomes, and user and customer satisfaction.

Box 22: Beacon Councils

The following guiding principles underpin the green space strategies identified in Round 3 theme of the Beacon Councils scheme: Improving Urban Green Spaces:

- Identifying and delivering improvements to local green spaces. These are linked to corporate objectives and broader strategies and priorities including community and cultural strategies, sustainable development, housing and regeneration and planning.
- Commitment to address the needs of all sections of the community including the young, the elderly, the disabled and other disadvantaged groups, and targeting areas of deficiency and social exclusion.
- A consultative approach, working in close partnership with local people, local business and national partners in developing and implementing their strategies for improving urban green spaces.
- Imaginative approaches to planning, designing, managing and funding urban green spaces. A focus on tackling issues such as crime and safety, dog fouling, litter, vandalism and graffiti.
- Sustainable management techniques and materials, for example, in creating play areas, tree planting and soil management.



We recommend:

(R45) The Government should ensure that the lessons from the Round 3 Beacon Council theme: Improving Urban Green Spaces are widely promoted, and encourage local authorities to adopt transferable good practice.

6.5.5: Green Flag Awards

193. There is a great deal of support for the Green Flag Awards scheme in promoting quality standards. The scheme is the most advanced national model for assessing the qualities that attract people to parks and green spaces, and which also demonstrate good management. More and more urban parks are being awarded a 'Green Flag', an indicator of excellence: 81 parks in 2002 compared to 7 parks in 1998. The display of a Green Flag gives the public confidence in parks and green spaces. There are plans to extend the Green Flag Award scheme to other types of urban green spaces.
194. The Green Flag Award scheme is not looking for the perfect park/green space but actively seeks to recognise and reward all those that interpret and meet the criteria for the award in the eyes of independent adjudicators – see Box 23. A comprehensive guidance manual, *Raising the Standard (1999)* is available as a management tool along with detailed feedback reports following the judging process. An awards brochure of winners is published every year detailing the progress of a park/green space over time.

Box 23: The Green Flag Award

The Green Flag Award scheme recognises the diversity and distinctive qualities of parks and green spaces, and their value to users, and commends management approaches that have effectively involved local people. The criteria used to assess applications reflect the wide scope and possibilities of good quality public parks and green spaces, and represent what people expect to find in them. They aim to set the foundations for long-term sustainability of parks and green spaces.

Taken together, the criteria amount to a comprehensive definition of what a good park/green space should be. They define:

- How to create a sense that people are positively welcomed in the park/green space.
- How best to ensure that the park/green space is a safe and healthy environment for all users.
- What people can expect in terms of cleanliness, facilities and maintenance.
- How a park or green space can be managed in environmentally sensitive ways.
- The value of conservation and care of historical heritage.
- Ways of encouraging community participation and acknowledging the community's role in a park/green space's success.
- Methods of promoting a park/green space successfully.
- How to reflect all of the above in a coherent and accessible management plan or strategy and ensure it is implemented.



We recommend:

(R46) The Government should establish nationally acceptable quality standards for managing and maintaining parks and green spaces, based on those promoted by the Green Flag Awards scheme.

6.5.6: Monitoring and Review

195. A strategic approach to urban green spaces provision and management should also provide mechanisms for continuous monitoring and reviewing of service delivery. This is also a requirement of Best Value, in that continuous improvement cannot be assured without targets being set and monitored on an annual basis. An important part of such monitoring is the feedback from users. Whilst user surveys are especially useful, other tools such as questions to Citizens' Panels and consultation with special interest groups should form part of the matrix.

196. Information gathered from user surveys and from the measuring of targets for Best Value, should inform service reviews. Some local authorities are developing models for continually reviewing the performance of their green space services, based on Best Value and Beacon Council principles and good practice. Interesting new models are being used and developed, such as those promoted by the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM) and that being piloted by the IDeA. Both establish clear quality standards based on Best Value and/or the Beacon Council theme, and rely on peer review of service performance¹³. In this way locally determined quality standards, such as voluntary BVPI and Green Flag Award criteria, are used within a framework for regularly reviewing performance by external reviews backed up with user feedback.

¹³ The IDeA has developed an Improving Services Model (ISM) based on its experience of the Beacon Council scheme, Local Government Improvement Programme and Best Value. ILAM and consultants KMC have developed a national like-for-like database on the standard of all parks in the country, which assesses the quality of provision, the value of open space to the community, resource allocation and customer satisfaction. A Best Value Group involving Lincoln, Oxford and Cambridge city councils are developing a model for measuring standards by comparing how each authority performed in terms of quality.

197. Monitoring and Review is also important in tracking long-term changes. The *Public Park Assessment* shows how the value of parks is being eroded through the loss of features and facilities. Many of these have been lost through cost savings based on inadequate data about their use and value. Good asset management practice requires periodic stock-taking of condition and usability. This applies as much to public parks and green spaces as it does to the many indoor premises providing cultural and recreational services to local people.

We recommend:

(R47) The Government should make use of the Best Value system to promote continuous improvements to the management and maintenance of council-owned parks and green spaces.

6.6: TACKLING DAILY NUISANCES

6.6.1: Daily Nuisances

198. Some of the most frequently cited complaints about the conditions of parks and green spaces centre on anti-social behaviour, vandalism and petty damage. Anti-social behaviour is a difficult issue for park managers because they have to pass judgment on other people, something outside the scope of their training or experience.

199. Fear of crime, and the safety and security of green spaces are the biggest concerns of some users. Although evidence suggests that parks and green spaces are no more dangerous than the surrounding streets, the perception of danger worries many users and keeps potential visitors away.

200. Dog fouling, litter and graffiti also have a particularly high public profile. They are major issues for users and are amongst the most evident signs of the decline in

standards of our parks and green spaces. Litter and fly tipping problems have not been helped by the divisions of labour and responsibilities for managing public spaces within central government and local authorities. Graffiti has also increased significantly in recent years and it can be extremely costly to remove.

6.6.2: Tackling them

201. Many nuisances are 'physical' and can be tackled directly. Others can be 'social', involving interaction between different users, with potential conflict, prejudice and misunderstanding. The noise of children playing may be a pleasure to some people, especially parents, but it can be a torment for others, particularly the elderly. Likewise cycling and dog walking may be natural park activities for many, but unpleasant or even frightening to others.



202. There are many ways to tackle these issues, including approaches to improving security and fear of crime, but one thing is clear: prevention is better than cure. Greater use of parks and green spaces can help address safety fears, and other daily nuisances, just by increasing the number of people around. Clean and well-maintained spaces offering a variety of activities are more likely to be well populated and therefore safer. So are green space improvement schemes which are planned and developed to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

203. Green spaces should also be designed to help to reduce situations which are perceived as threatening. Lines of sight and visibility of one space with another need careful consideration. Exits should be visible and long corridor spaces with no alternative ways out should be avoided. Passive surveillance from surrounding areas should be exploited in the design. Many opportunities for vandalism can be reduced by better design of spaces and facilities and by use of robust equipment.

Box 24: Targeted initiatives

- Stockport MBC's *Defensible Space (Crowding out Crime)* initiative seeks to increase the involvement of legitimate users in green space via park buildings, events and 'friends of' groups.
- The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham has introduced dog exercise areas and dog free areas within parks. In Cathnor Park local residents and schoolchildren were fully involved in developing the design of the park including the designation of a dog-free area.
- *Keep Cheltenham Tidy* aims to reduce litter problems across the town through education, promotional events and the annual spring clean event. KCT try to involve local schools and children in events and the Youth Council 'MAD' often take part.
- The Kamala Arts Project in Brent is an urban art initiative and involves young people in combating graffiti by painting murals.
- Bexley's Graffiti Taskforce provides an immediate response in the borough.
- In Thames Valley, Police promote the use of youth shelters as meeting points for teenagers. These shelters are designed with the input of the young people themselves and have proved popular in cutting vandalism in nearby play areas.



Box 25: Improving safety

The London Borough of Brent has produced a Parks Crime Reduction Strategy which aims to tackle crime and fear of crime by highlighting the issues to be considered in the design of a space including isolation; layout; visibility and sightlines; access and circulation; lighting; diversity; and signs. This was in response to research analysing the effectiveness of crime prevention mechanisms in the borough and as part of its Best Value Review.

204. People like to see park keepers and responsible staff in parks and open spaces. It makes them much more likely to use them. Park keepers, rangers, wardens, gardeners and other security staff not only provide points of contact and advice but also deter crime and anti-social behaviour. They also make people more familiar with their local space and this leads to better standards of care. Several local authorities are re-establishing a presence in their parks in one form or another. However, this can be most effective when staff have flexible roles and combine people skills with management and gardening skills.

205. The Neighbourhood and Street Wardens scheme is a more recent initiative through which uniformed staff are being provided in residential areas. Wardens promote community safety, contribute to community development and assist with environmental improvements. They can help deliver reductions in crime and the fear of crime, deter anti-social behaviour, and care for the physical appearance and management of their areas and foster social inclusion.

206. The potential synergies between responsibilities and training for the various forms of 'uniformed presence' for both green and civic space should be explored and encouraged.

Box 26: Ranger service

Bexley's Community Safety Partnership provides a strategic framework for community safety schemes. Within this framework the Ranger Service has forged a strong partnership with the Probation and Youth Offending Service. Community service and reparation orders are now carried out by offenders working on major environmental projects to improve urban green open spaces. The council also partners youth service outreach workers who use parks to make contact with potential young offenders providing alternatives to crime and drugs.



Box 27: Wardens and keepers

The neighbourhood management service, Neighbourhood Wardens and park keepers in Barnet work together to provide an effective service to keep the borough's green spaces accessible, clean and safe. They work closely with the police and community on safety, crime prevention and reporting, community development and environmental improvements, including tackling dog fouling and litter. Opening the parks overnight has also helped the police to patrol more effectively.

207. An important way of tackling daily nuisances is by raising awareness of the problems they create, and by fostering a better sense of neighbourhood pride. Local authorities could achieve this, for example by improving city centres and other civic areas and green spaces, and by entering competitions like the 'Britain in Bloom' and the Green Flag Award scheme. Local authorities or housing associations could also encourage residents to enhance their own gardens and look after the small green bits outside their door.

Box 28: Fines - the legislation

- As part of the cross cutting review on public space, the statutory basis for tackling nuisances is being reviewed. The review is due to report in the summer.
- Fines for litter and dog fouling are also about to be increased and some local authorities are piloting schemes to use this money more freely.
- This work has been undertaken for DEFRA by the environmental charity organization, Environmental Campaigns. The Local Environmental Quality Survey will be available to local authorities in the future to run at a local level.



6.7: QUALITY SPACES

6.7.1: Principles for quality spaces

208. Greater sharing of good practice, innovation and experience of what works well has a key role to play in improving the quality of poor performing spaces. Across the country there are many examples of good practice in almost every area of park services and management. The positive achievements from these highly successful projects need to be articulated and shared more widely in order to stimulate further good practice.

Box 29: The ideal park

The University of Sheffield's research posed the question 'what makes the ideal park?'

Points raised in the focus groups included:

- Variety. 'Its good to have many different experiences - meadows, formal areas, water.'
- Vegetation. Trees, greenery and flowers.
- Water in all its forms. Fountains, lakes, ponds, streams and waterfalls.
- Sensory stimulation, scent and colour.
- Opportunities for play.
- Provision for young people.
- Comforts such as seating, shelters and toilets.



209. Perceptions of ideal spaces will vary. The results of our focus groups reveal some interesting responses, which are captured in Boxes 29 and 30. They show that while people are concerned about nuisances –

dog mess, poor toilets, poor maintenance and fear of crime – these are not the things they think about for their ideal spaces; they visit parks for a variety of positive reasons and experiences.

So although it is important for the parks service to aim to resolve user concerns, it should not forget the overriding need to provide the types and quality of green spaces people actually want.

Box 30: What children and young people expect

The Taskforce conducted focus groups involving around 1000 children and young people to find out what they want from local spaces. Their responses show that their expectations are surprisingly simple:

- **Better facilities** – somewhere to sit or shelter, play facilities, grassy areas which do not get too muddy and more formal and clearly designated sports facilities.
- **Cleaner and safer spaces** – better upkeep of areas, more litter bins and more/improved toilets, better lighting and more plants. Younger children supported a greater adult presence in the form of park keepers.
- **Range of different types of spaces** – younger children want to play where they can be seen while older ones and teenagers prefer to be further away from home. Age-appropriate areas to solve problems of anti-social behaviour.
- **Involvement** – being consulted, designing spaces, talking to those in charge and helping to take care of green spaces.



210. Each park or green space is unique and requires a specific solution which marries a good understanding of the space with the aspirations of local people. It needs to match people's ideas of the 'ideal space' with the processes which can achieve them.

211. Drawing together our assessment of good practice and understanding of what people want, we have identified key principles which underpin the processes that have led to good-quality outcomes, active local involvement and partnership, and wider benefits for the local community. We propose our 10 good practice principles for achieving good quality urban green spaces below.

(1) Understand the green space:

To create a good quality green space it is necessary to understand the site's background, including its geology, history, ecology and its social, cultural, environmental and economic context.

(2) Understand the values, needs and aspirations of local people:

Consulting and engaging the community in developing their local green spaces is critical to the success of these spaces. A considered and innovative approach to consultation and involvement will mean the space can better match the needs, interests and aspirations of the community. This has been shown to increase use and reduce misuse of the space.

(3) Form a collaborative and enabling partnership: Local political leadership and community and business support are vital to the success of partnerships and of green space improvement schemes.

(4) Develop a clear and shared vision for the green space: A co-ordinated approach by all relevant local authorities and associated organisations, plus active consultation at the earliest possible stage are essential for a shared vision of new and/or revitalised green spaces.

(5) Prepare a design masterplan:

Design masterplans are essential to the delivery of quality green spaces that meet local needs, enhance and extend the green space network and improve accessibility, diversity and a sense of place. Initial sketch proposals give the opportunity for everyone to understand, participate and modify the proposals that lead on to worked up drawings and implementation.

(6) Secure political and organisational support and establish a clear relationship to local, regional and national strategies:

Linking the development of a green space to wider local, regional and national strategies can help to generate support. It also ensures that outcomes are in line with broader objectives and do not conflict with other initiatives.

(7) Ensure long term viability and sustainability by preparing management and maintenance plans:

Long-term management and maintenance must be suitably planned and budgeted. If they are not, improvements will be subsequently undermined or left to fall into disrepair. Sustainable techniques and practices should be used to develop green spaces. This will enhance their ecological value and local distinctiveness while preventing environmental damage. Long-term viability also requires financial and stakeholder support.

(8) Recognise and promote heritage and cultural values:

Green space provision should show how heritage, historical and multi-cultural values have been embraced in developing green spaces, while reflecting and providing for current and changing needs over time.

(9) Encourage innovation and learning:

Innovative practice used to overcome challenging issues can often be adapted and built upon by others.

(10) Encourage imaginative provision, addressing the needs of different user groups along with management, maintenance and funding issues:

Play areas, whether supervised or unsupervised, or part of the wider green space and/or designated provision, require special consideration.

6.7.2: Demonstration Sites

212. Two demonstration projects have been commissioned to show how our principles of good practice can be applied to transform poor green spaces, especially small spaces, and provide guidelines that can be adopted by others – see Box 31. We propose six more in this report – see Box 32. They have been selected for their diversity, opportunity to engage disadvantaged sections of the community and geographic spread. Projects will be monitored as they are set up and implemented, and for two years following completion.



Box 31: Demonstration projects

Deep Pits/Manor Fields Park, Sheffield

Work began on this project, which forms a key part of the regeneration of the Manor and Castle wards of Sheffield, in the summer of 1999. The demonstration project focuses on a part of the site at the interface of new housing. To date a number of consultation activities have been carried out including the production of a touring proposals model. Numerous stone-carving events have been held mainly working with local youth groups. This has produced works that are now being incorporated into the boundary wall, which is under construction. The next steps are to complete the boundary wall and railing including community metal-working workshops. This will be followed by major landscaping, access creation, play features, art in landscape and planting.

Mint Street Park – Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST)

The project, commissioned in February 2002, aims to deliver phase two of the planned improvements to the park. Work up until now has focussed on landscaping improvements and a gardening club for residents and homeless people. Building on this, BOST will oversee the upgrading of the sports pitch, lighting, more community flower beds and play equipment. In addition, BOST will commission a community art project, a feasibility study into a building and the re-drawing of the masterplan of the site to include adjacent disused roads. The Trust will also research the conditions under which it might take on the management of the park in the future.

Box 32: Proposed demonstration projects

The following six proposals focus on improving provision for children and young people. The proposals have emerged from discussions with young people during the youth focus groups convened for the Taskforce, and follow-up of responses to our Interim Report.

Brewery Park, Torquay, Devon

Torbay Borough Council, Groundwork Plymouth, the police (Community Service) and the local community will work together to develop plans for new facilities. The proposals are likely to include an all-weather kick-about area to replace muddy football pitches, a young people's shelter, new play equipment, a sensory garden and improved lighting. The community group, involving young people, will be an equal partner in maintaining the site.

Ramp Park, Mount Pleasant Recreation Ground, Winsford, Cheshire

Vale Royal Borough Council, Groundwork Macclesfield and a stakeholder group will work with young people to develop a BMX track/ramp park and establish a bike club run by volunteers. Teen shelters will also be installed, a particular request of young women.

Delph Development, The Delph, Burnley

Community consultation has highlighted new facilities for young people as the number one priority. Burnley Borough Council, Groundwork East Lancashire, a residents' association and Youthworks Burnley will develop phase two of the project including a youth shelter and skateboarding facilities.

Falsgrave Park Community Project, Scarborough

The Borough Council and Friends' Group aim to work together to deliver a three-point action plan: 1) involving the community; 2) capital improvements works; and 3) future management and improvement. Continuing consultation will include events aimed at children and young people. Developments are likely to include a new play area, a kick about area, young people's shelter and the creation of a junior branch of the Friends' Group.

Bredbury Recreation Ground, Stockport

A consultation by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council and 'Friends of Bredbury Rec' and a 'young people in greenspace' project have identified key areas for improvement. This project will provide facilities for young people and children in order to address the problem of anti-social behaviour, including vandalism.

Lodge Farm Community Recreation Ground, Tipton, West Midlands

The 'Building Bridges' partnership involving Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Groundwork Black Country, tenants' associations and local people, has produced a masterplan for the recreation ground. Over 500 young people living on nearby housing estates will benefit from the developments which will include a multi-sports pitch, separate play areas for children and teenagers, and mechanisms for involving young women and men.

We recommend:

(R48) The Government should promote the principles of good practice for achieving good quality urban green spaces set out in this report, including their links with community strategies. It should also commission the six demonstration projects proposed in this report.

PART FOUR: MAKING IT HAPPEN

SECTION 7: MAKING IT HAPPEN

213. This section summarises the key issues and makes proposals for progress on them.

7.1 Vision and local pride

214. Our vision is of towns and cities which more fully meet human social, cultural, economic and physical needs, and which do so by involving and serving all sectors of society. It is also a vision of town and cities with the essential parks and green spaces, and trees and plants which support biodiversity, ecology and climate management, air and water quality. We see parks and green spaces as integral elements in achieving liveable, sustainable cities.

215. We want to see sad, rundown parks and green spaces revitalised, and exciting new ones created. We want to see them protected and enhanced, more welcoming and providing better facilities and access for those who are less physically or mentally able or are anxious about the safety of public places. We need to offer a wider range of activities to appeal across our multicultural society. We must encourage new opportunities for local people to get involved, acting as stewards of their landscapes – not only gardeners but guardians of these places, taking action

to improve them in ways which they know are right for their neighbourhood or town.

216. To make this vision happen, there must be immediate action to devise and implement a national policy framework to guide the development of local strategies and green space networks. Achieving such a framework requires leadership which inspires everyone to participate in shaping liveable cities and neighbourhoods.

217. We need constructive dialogue between civic leaders and local communities, where all the parties meet as equals, even though they recognise the differences between them in power and resources. We also need to develop a much greater sense of civic responsibility – as citizens, government, business and other interests – balancing civic leadership with full involvement of local people. Both are needed to foster a greater sense of ownership of local green assets, wider citizenship and increased community pride. More extensive corporate citizenship (and active corporate social responsibility) will be needed alongside public services, supportive professionals, and active voluntary and community sector.





7.2: Serving the needs of people

218. We know much more than in the past about needs for mainstream provision and about the special needs of specific groups. In practice, the needs of the majority of users are not so different from those of minority groups, although the priorities may differ. Poor maintenance puts all people off visiting and using parks and green spaces. The key is the overwhelming need for higher standards of conspicuous care, which means investment in better management and maintenance.

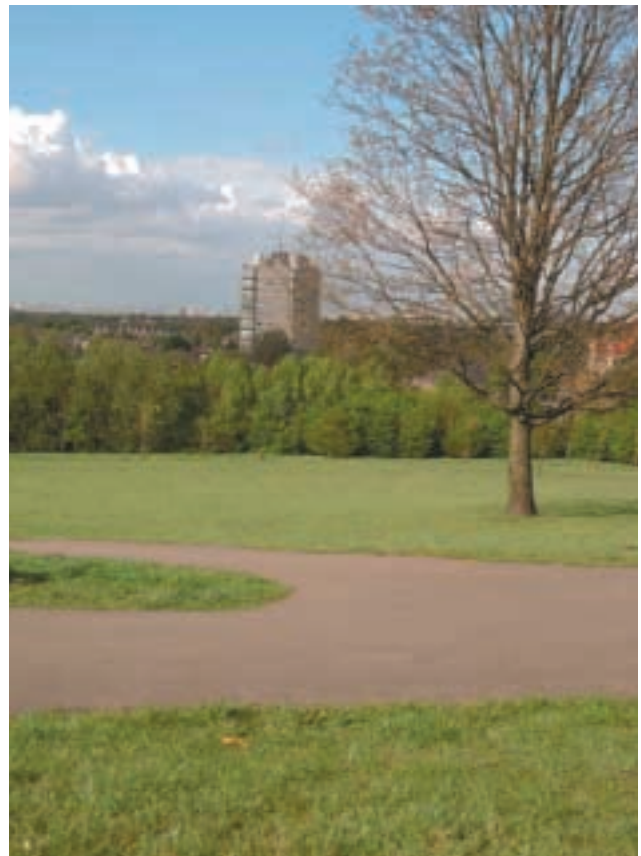
219. We believe that the right approach for serving the needs of people is to develop a diverse mix of types and sizes of spaces designed for and accessible to different social groups, within a general green space network for the wider area.

220. Local government will need to take a lead in addressing needs and combating nuisances by establishing a positive strategy for community engagement that will help to deliver improvements on the ground. There is already much positive action, but in some places the parks and green spaces have deteriorated badly, and local communities have low expectations. Local people will not take pride in poor-quality spaces and will therefore have less enthusiasm for getting involved in caring

for them. In such circumstances, local authority leadership will need to offer extra commitment and resources, alongside effective working with those communities.

221. Change is often being led by voluntary and community groups, and when this happens local authorities gain much by being flexible, responsive and supportive. They are then likely to find that working with communities on parks and green spaces can be rewarding, and one of the best channels for mobilising community action and active citizenship more widely.

222. Once voluntary and community organisations are engaged, they can achieve an enormous amount in articulating local needs, creating or renovating community green spaces, and getting involved in managing traditional parks. To achieve their full potential they need an infrastructure to support their work and improve their contribution to policy development and practical action.





7.3: Integrating policy and action

223. High quality parks and green spaces are essential to improving results, and reducing costs, in many related national and local policy priority areas. It is partly the visibility of parks and green spaces, and the importance accorded to them by local residents, which makes them essential to achieving other objectives, as they are obvious barometers of the state of the areas in or near which they are located. The condition of parks and green spaces can make or break wider plans to regenerate neighbourhoods and improve townscapes, create a sense of place and build community.
224. At national level this requires a strategy for integrating green space policies and programmes with other policy areas, primarily health and community safety, regeneration and renewal, social inclusion, education and culture, and across the responsibilities of Government departments and agencies responsible (DoH, Home Office, DTLR, DfES and DCMS). Integration with the priorities of various national agencies (public and voluntary) and funding bodies (including the Lottery) will also be required.
225. At regional level, green space strategies will be relevant to economic development and sustainable development strategies, and to regional spatial strategies.
226. At local level, the key linkages are likely to be with Community Strategies and the Local Strategic Partnerships that create them, and with the regeneration, tourism and economic development, environment, liveability and sustainable development strategies managed by local authorities. Health improvement, crime and safety, and transport strategies will also have vital connections.
227. Local authorities need to interpret and incorporate the wishes of their communities as expressed in consultation on community plans and determine the role that parks and green spaces can best play in meeting locally expressed needs. The aim should be to identify how green spaces can be part of the solution to wider community concerns as well as how complementary strategies and programmes can assist in achieving green space objectives.
228. There is also a need to improve co-ordination of existing efforts at the local level, including comparisons between local authorities (eg on performance indicators, quality standards and benchmarking), co-ordination between local authorities and their partners (eg health authorities, police, private and voluntary sectors), and co-ordination within the authority (eg with planning departments, central policy and client services).
229. Clear national guidance which allows for local flexibility is essential to the creation of local parks and green space strategies, to enable more appropriate as well as more cost-effective delivery on a wide range of related policy priorities.

7.4 Improving Information

230. A new strategic approach to parks and green spaces will be needed for each locality to blend existing and new provision to form coherent green space networks. Preparing parks and green space strategies will have certain technical requirements, which call for a more supportive information base at national and local levels, as outlined below.

- **A strong information base on which to draw for proposing change.**

At present there is insufficient data, and that which exists is fragmented across various Government departments, different professional bodies and various agencies. Developing a good information base will require a national lead and joint working across all public and voluntary agencies concerned, including those for local government (eg DTLR, CIPFA, AC and LGA). Any data collection should build on the typology of green spaces we propose in this report.

- **New research to fill gaps in data.**

At local level, user and community surveys can be useful in gathering information on views on needs and aspirations, although they can be expensive. Ideally, user surveys should be used in association with other consultation methods including linking to existing networks and forums, and ensuring input from other stakeholders (including non-users and park staff). National guidance is needed so that a consistent methodology can be developed for user surveys and other involvement methods, building on the principles outlined in this report.

- **National guidance on the preparation of quality standards** for the provision of parks and green space, especially in relation to accessibility, quality and diversity.
- **Good practice networks.** There is already much good practice across the country in most fields of park services and programmes of activities, and in public involvement. New networks are needed to ensure the lessons from the existing good practice are captured and disseminated, and feed into the development of new green space frameworks. There is a role here for the Urban Parks Forum.
- **Better use of existing methods of data collection and audit, and other research.** At the national level major research is needed to establish and quantify the use of green spaces by types of users and activities, and, in particular, the social, economic and environmental benefits of good quality parks and green spaces. At local level, better use can be made of the Best Value process for both gathering intelligence about current circumstances, and finding out what local people want from specific services. In addition, the challenge and inspection elements of Best Value are a useful spur to action. At national level, there needs to be access to other research, including building on the *Public Park Assessment*, and the Heritage Lottery Funds evaluation of the Urban Parks Programme.



7.5 Improving access to and use of resources

231. Creating a framework of parks and green spaces will require a good balance of capital and revenue funding, but will also contribute to saving costs in other policy areas (including health, crime and safety, education, regeneration). Any consideration of extra resources for parks and green spaces therefore needs to be seen in the wider context of contributing to the better use of public resources.

232. Reductions in capital and revenue spend on parks and green spaces has contributed directly to a decline in the quality of local authority managed green spaces, and continuing resource constraints are a major obstacle to improvements. We have concluded that additional investment of £100 million per year, over five years, is required to make any real impact in reversing the decline and delivering the mix and types of green spaces people need.

233. Funding from other sources external to local authority budgets will be vital. The Lottery (HLF and NOF) is making substantial contributions, and resources from Government regeneration programmes (eg SRB, NRF and NDC), and the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, could provide more resources than are currently available. However, all these schemes

have their own criteria and priorities, and any such funding bids have to be carefully managed to ensure they fit within a co-ordinated green space strategy.

234. Opportunities for private sector funding will also need to be examined in more detail. Again there is good practice in private sector investment, especially in civic spaces such as Brindley Place in Birmingham, and Broadgate in London. Funding through PFI and planning obligations (or tariffs) may also be potential long term sources.

235. Partnerships between local government and the voluntary and community sectors can bring additional resources into parks and green space programmes, by providing access both to a wider range of non-public sector funding sources, and to community skills and expertise.

236. Parks and green spaces suffer from a lack of staff with environmental management and community development skills. The status and attraction of work in this field has declined. A major focus is needed on training and support programmes ranging from capacity building (for public sector staff and community members) to professional training for planners, park rangers, landscape architects and other professionals in methods of consultation that will be effective in engaging local people.

237. We identified a particular gap in resources for work with communities prior to the establishment of a specific project, up to and including feasibility studies. Such facilitation and developmental work is essential to successful community engagement in many areas, as well as in stimulating community-led initiatives. Once established, community involvement can result in major gains in resources. Engaging these groups will have resource implications – primarily for staff (training as well as new appointments) to run involvement programmes, to reach out to marginalised groups and to support community action.
238. It is essential that resource issues are dealt with in a coherent and co-ordinated way, at all levels, to reduce fragmentation and to ensure resource streams continue and grow. It is also important for resource management at national and local levels to give greater priority to parks and green spaces in overall local authority expenditure. We consider that this can best be achieved through the establishment of a central mechanism, a new national agency which can champion the case for increased resources strategically and locally. This would bring parks and green spaces in line with other national cultural agencies for art, sport, museums and galleries, and libraries.
240. Different responses will be needed at different levels. The major and long term resource implications of managing large multi-use parks are likely to remain the responsibility of local authorities, with active wider engagement of other sectors. The voluntary and community sectors can be successful in managing and caring for smaller local spaces. They can also be especially strong in innovation, in understanding (and helping to meet) the needs of marginalised groups, and in planning and running activities.
241. Local government is the main focus of action at local level, as the organisation with the major current responsibilities. Local government needs to lead the revival of parks and green spaces in most areas with national support and guidance. A national policy framework will also be needed to support local action, providing an information base and access to good practice. This will require better co-ordination and integration across Government and its agencies at national, regional and local levels.
242. Businesses share in the benefits and should, therefore, share the responsibilities for protecting and enhancing parks and green spaces. In some places, the exercise of corporate social and environmental responsibility has extended to the creation of new parks linked to housing development. This positive engagement of businesses in the communities in which they are based can be greatly extended, alongside safeguards to ensure public access, and to prevent any new facilities from becoming a drain on the public purse in the long term. There are examples of successful partnerships (eg Groundwork and Barclays on the SiteSavers programme), and new research will be needed to examine the lessons from such initiatives so that new mechanisms for engaging the private sector can be developed.

7.6 A role for the main interests

239. The regeneration of existing urban parks and green spaces, and the creation of new and different ones, depend on action by all sectors of the community working together: government, public, private and voluntary, working together with a common vision and to a common purpose.

243. The essential contribution of the community and voluntary sectors has been highlighted throughout this document. Their practical contribution may range from simply being responsible users (eg not dropping litter), to groups which run cultural events, or groups may develop entirely new facilities on otherwise derelict land. There are also many ways in which groups and individuals can contribute to policy and planning activities from watching over local places and reporting any problems, representing specific interest groups (eg children or people with disabilities), to articulating local and wider public concerns both about specific sites and the wider green space network in their localities.



244. The more experienced voluntary organisations, including trusts, contribute enormously, and this too needs to be formally recognised in the provision of resources (for organisation, projects, training etc), and the conferring of status on these bodies as key partners.

245. In order to make progress, we propose the immediate development of a scheme of bursaries to fund 'enablers' to work with certain local authorities, local voluntary and private sector groups to spread good practice, and to develop new local strategies and partnerships for transforming green spaces (especially small spaces and play areas and spaces around housing estates). A particular focus should be to seek out new partners and to provide resources for the initial community development activities needed to enable local communities to participate

fully, and for local authorities to respond effectively. In disadvantaged areas 'enablers' could create and develop partnerships between regeneration companies, local authorities and local communities. They can also prioritise and deliver green space improvements as an integral part of new developments, where there is need.

We recommend:

(R49) The Government should develop and announce in its Policy Response to this report, a bursary scheme to fund 'enablers' to work with local authorities, local groups and businesses to promote good practice and develop local strategies and partnerships for improving and creating green spaces.

7.7 A new national framework

246. The movement to save parks and green spaces from further decline, and to maintain the momentum already generated for greater improvements in the future, is currently fragmented, under-resourced and lacking in status.

247. We have concluded that the only effective approach is to establish a new national agency. Its role will be to advocate the economic, social and environmental benefits of parks and green spaces and provide leadership on strategic policy issues. It should provide a central point in a network of resources, from various sources, to support local activity – funding, information, advice, standards, and lessons from good practice. The agency will need to be independent of Government but close to it, so that it can be an effective champion of parks and green spaces at all levels. It will need the funding and support available to public agencies, the political drive of Government, and the entrepreneurial spirit which encourages a focus on practical change and immediate action.

We recommend:

(R50) The Government should establish a new national agency for urban green spaces to:

- *champion the case for parks and green spaces both nationally and locally and advocate their values and benefits;*
- *co-ordinate and provide advice on available and new sources of funding;*
- *develop new partnerships involving the voluntary and private sectors and local groups;*
- *'kick start' initiatives that contribute to green space strategies and policies;*
- *carry out research and develop information and good practice networks; and*
- *ensure that green spaces contribute to social cohesion, responsive communities, and urban renaissance.*

(R51) The new agency should champion the recommendations of this report, and should be responsible for implementing key recommendations identified throughout this report and summarised at section 8.

248. Our recommendation is made in the belief that all other non-statutory cultural and recreational services provided by local authorities have gained much from the support of specialist national agencies. Their work on promotion and advice has encouraged budget levels to be sustained, or even expanded, in the face of financial pressures which have seen deep cuts in budgets for parks and green spaces. Their research and publications have informed both national and local government, making each more aware of the benefits of sport, the arts, museums etc, and their needs in terms of strategy development, funding and good management. Our proposal for an 'Urban Green Space Agency' is considered in more detail in Annex 4.



249. It will take time to design and establish the new agency and we do not wish to lose the momentum which has already been achieved through our work. We therefore propose the immediate establishment of an interim Steering Group to take forward research and development, begin to establish systems of support (such as the bursary scheme outlined at paragraph 245 above), and continue our work on policy advocacy (especially linking to related policy initiatives such as the Urban Summit). However, its primary task will be to advise Government on the setting up of the new agency.

250. We propose that this interim body be located within the DTLR, which has provided the secretariat to the Taskforce.

We recommend:

(R52) The Government should immediately establish, within DTLR, a Steering Group to maintain the momentum generated by the Urban White Paper's commitments for improving the quality of local environments, and develop detail proposals and advice to the Government on the setting up of a new agency. This Group should involve the relevant government departments, agencies and sponsored bodies, professional bodies, local authorities and the voluntary sector.

SECTION 8: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

251. Parks and green spaces are a popular and precious resource, which can make a valuable contribution to the attractiveness of a neighbourhood, to the health and well being of local people and expand the educational opportunities for children and adults alike. However, despite their popularity, there has been a worrying decline in the quality of far too many urban parks and green spaces and action is urgently needed, if they are to deliver their many benefits. Positive and practical responses are needed to ensure that parks and green spaces serve the whole community, especially children and young people, the elderly, those with disabilities, minorities and people in disadvantaged areas.
252. We believe now is the time to put these invaluable, but often neglected resources at the heart of wider public policy priorities such as better health. More investment is needed to match current enthusiasm and capacity of all parties for taking action. We recommend at least £100 million capital funding in each of the next five years to begin to do this and create the kind of networks of quality green spaces we want to see in urban areas.
253. To be effective, at least in the short term, new resources will need to be delivered through a range of sources external to local authority budgets – there is a good case for a major Lottery funded programme for urban green spaces. Any new funding will also need to be supported by a range of non-financial improvements, such as in training and skills, better information and data, and a greater role for partnership working involving local voluntary groups and business, volunteers and users.
254. Better provision and care of urban parks and green spaces will require an effective policy framework, one within which all decision-makers, can operate and work collaboratively. A more strategic approach is needed at the national and local level for improving co-ordination of national priorities and guiding local strategies for delivering networks of green spaces that can benefit whole communities and the nation. A better policy and good practice framework is also needed at a local level, within which policy makers, designers, managers, and users of green spaces can plan to deliver higher standards of conspicuous care.
255. Creating an effective policy and good practice framework will need strong civic leadership at a local level and greater support at national level. It will need an effective champion for urban parks and green spaces – a new, national agency.



Recommendations for Government

256. Realising our aims for this report will involve a role for a wide range of interests, and a great many organisations. Although our recommendations are made in the first instance to Government, they are also directed at the full range of national and local government, business, voluntary sector, and local interests. In order to achieve our aims, we recommend that the government should:

(R2) Additional capital funding of £100m per annum, initially for five years, for the restoration and improvement of urban parks and green spaces. Lottery funding is an appropriate source that could provide some of this additional funding, through a major new, New Opportunities Fund programme for urban parks and green spaces. [54]

(R3) Take steps to ensure that there is a net increase in funding available for parks and green spaces in developing proposals to amend or replace the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. [54]

(R4) Allow local authorities to use developers' contributions from s106 agreements or development tariffs, to provide additional resources for green spaces. [54]

(R6) In reviewing SSA provision for local authorities, as part of the Spending Review 2002, the Government should provide a substantial increase in the total for the EPCS block. It should also examine the case for breaking down the block into groups of related services to create a 'public spaces' sub-block. [58]

(R8) Implement proposals in the recent White Paper: 'Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services' to restrict ringfencing of grants, and relax the regime which controls the scope for targeting spending of revenue generated by fines. [62]

(R10) A new national agency for urban green spaces should be established in order to make best use of existing and additional resources, by providing a central mechanism for co-ordinating and delivering new capital funding with existing sources, and by providing a focal point for advice and guidance on standards and 'joining up' funding sources. It should also champion and seek to influence funding decisions in favour of parks and green spaces at national, regional and local levels. [65]

(R12) Identify a Best Value indicator to monitor training provision in local authority green space management and maintenance, applicable both to directly employed staff and contractors. [71]

(R16) Extend the age band of funded Modern Apprenticeships for the landscape industry; continues to fund the Environment Task Force option of the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds and provide a level of funding for these trainees equivalent to what would be available to them if they were funded through the Learning and Skills Council. [77]

(R17) Encourage the Learning and Skills Council and the national training organisations to work with industry to promote a recognised training framework which will improve the links between appropriate training packages, encourage career progression and act as an incentive for employers to take on apprentices. [78]

(R24) Promote greater private sector involvement in partnerships for improving urban parks and green spaces, by providing guidance on ways in which businesses can engage and benefit from working with local communities, voluntary organisations and local authorities to create green spaces as part of new development, as well as improving existing local spaces. Guidance should be provided on the role of Private Finance Initiatives, town centre management and

proposals for Business Improvement Districts, and support given to local initiatives and volunteering. [114]

(R28) The Government adopts the typology at Table 1, and promotes its use by local authorities and national bodies and agencies as a basis for planning and managing, and collecting more consistent information about the amount and quality of urban green spaces. [127]

(R34) Provide clear leadership and a national policy framework for supporting improvements to urban parks and green space by:

- (i) promoting and co-ordinating the inclusion of parks and green space provision across its public policy priorities, strategies and programmes, in particular, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, regional development, planning and housing development, and culture, play and sport; and
- (ii) providing guidance for national and regional programme providers, local authorities and other local providers, including partnerships involving the voluntary and private sectors on creating, improving and maintaining urban parks and green spaces. [143]

(R38) Stress the importance of ‘joined-up thinking’ between national and regional providers, local authority planners and managers, and other local stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of local green space strategies and programmes. [153]

(R39) Promote the strategic importance of parks and green spaces in improving the quality of urban life and urban environments by ensuring that their provision, protection and enhancement are key objectives (or in planning policy guidance the proposed series of planning policy statements (PPSs)). [165]

(R40) Ensure that revised Planning Policy Guidance note 17: Sports, Recreation Open Space (or new PPS) provides clear guidance on:

- (i) the importance of strategic green space planning in developing and enhancing networks of urban green spaces;
- (ii) protecting urban green spaces from development, especially incremental development and in areas where local schools, people and communities, need them;
- (iii) carrying out local assessments of the diverse requirements of people in urban areas, and audits of local green spaces;
- (iv) using planning mechanisms, in particular s106 planning agreements, to deliver a better mix of green spaces, especially by maintaining and enhancing existing spaces;
- (v) encouraging and assisting local authorities to develop local standards of provision, and to target new provision to areas where people do not have access to high-quality parks and green spaces; and
- (vi) encouraging different kinds of local provision, exploring especially how to make better use of smaller spaces and those around housing estates. [165]

(R49) Develop and announce in its Policy Response to this report, a bursary scheme to fund ‘enablers’ to work with local authorities, local groups and businesses to promote good practice and develop local strategies and partnerships for improving and creating green spaces. [245]

(R50) Establish a new national agency for urban green spaces to:

- champion the case for parks and green spaces both nationally and locally and advocate their values and benefits;*
- co-ordinate and provide advice on available and new sources of funding;*
- develop new partnerships involving the voluntary and private sectors and local groups;*
- 'kick start' initiatives that contribute to green space strategies and policies;*
- carry out research and develop information and good practice networks; and*
- ensure that green spaces contribute to social cohesion, responsive communities, and urban renaissance. [247]*

(R51) The new agency should champion the recommendations of this report, and should be responsible for implementing key recommendations identified throughout this report and summarised at section 8. [247]

(R52) Immediately establish, within DTLR, a Steering Committee to maintain the momentum generated by the Urban White Paper's commitments for improving the quality of local environments, and for develop detail proposals and advice to the Government on the setting up of a new agency. This Group should involve the relevant government departments and agencies and sponsored bodies, professional bodies, local authorities and the voluntary sector. [250]

Recommendations for Government which could be implemented by a new national agency

257. A new agency should play a key role in implementing the good practice in this report and the following recommendations:

(R5) Promote its proposal for Business Improvement Districts as a mechanism for improving the quality of local green spaces as well as for increasing private sector investment in enhancing local environments. [54]

(R7) Introduce a funding and management scheme for urban parks and green spaces, similar to the Countryside Stewardship scheme. [59]

(R25) Further research should be undertaken to assess the transferability of overseas good practice in partnership working in parks and green spaces management, especially experience from the USA. [114]

(R26) Establish dialogue with existing and potential funding providers to promote:

- (i) Strategic objectives for urban parks and green spaces, and the role of local projects, delivered through partnership, in achieving them.*
- (ii) Sustainable funding arrangements that recognise the need for longer term funding beyond three years to ensure that the spaces created and improved will be maintained, and for greater local flexibility in their use by simplifying applications and terms of conditions attached to funding.*
- (iii) The importance of providing adequate complementary revenue funding, for consultation and training as well as project management, and for maximising the benefits of capital funding in improving the quality of projects. [120]*

(R29) Build on the start made by the Public Parks Assessment by developing a national database of urban parks and green spaces. [129]

(R30) DTLR, CIPFA, LGA and the Audit Commission should find ways of improving the response rates and consistency of local authorities to the CIPFA annual survey of all local authority Leisure and Recreation Statistics. [130]

(R31) Commission a programme of research for elaborating and quantifying:

- social, economic and environmental benefits of good quality parks and green spaces;
- types and condition of facilities provided in parks and green spaces;
- use of green spaces by types of users and activities;
- rights of way and accessibility for green space networks within urban areas; and
- links between local authority expenditure on green spaces services (spending per head or hectare) and the quality of individual green spaces. [131]

(R32) Take a lead in developing means for effective dissemination of proven good practice via regional seminars, CD-Rom or an interactive website learning network for both professionals and community groups. [138]

(R33) Consider the need for a best practice series to guide local authorities on the use of community strategies, Beacon Councils, Best Value and planning policy guidance and neighbourhood plans in improving local green spaces. [134]

(R44) Provide central guidance for local authorities on the development and operation of local (voluntary) Best Value Performance Indicators in relation to parks and green spaces. It should provide advice on how those can be integrated with targets for regeneration and housing development, health, education,

environmental quality, community safety, social inclusion and provision for youth and older people, where appropriate through the Local Strategic Partnership. [191]

(R45) Ensure that the lessons from the Round 3 Beacon Council theme: Improving Urban Green Spaces are widely promoted, and encourage local authorities to adopt transferable good practice. [192]

(R46) Establish nationally acceptable quality standards for managing and maintaining parks and green spaces, based on those promoted by the Green Flag Award scheme. [194]

(R47) Make use of the Best Value system to promote continuous improvements to the management and maintenance of council-owned parks and green spaces. [197]

(R48) Promote the principles of good practice for achieving good quality urban green spaces set out in this report, including their links with community strategies. It should also commission the six demonstration projects proposed in this report. [212]

National and local government (and LGA)

257. The Government has agreed to work with the Local Government Association to define a list of national priorities, including for transforming the local environment. This opportunity should be taken to consider the following recommendations:

(R1) The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should make it a priority to provide high quality parks and green spaces to serve the needs of people in disadvantaged areas. This objective should be at the heart of regeneration and neighbourhood renewal programmes which target such areas. [36]

(R9) The proposed single list of national priorities for local government should include improvement to the environment and public space, and that local authorities are encouraged to reflect the needs of parks and green spaces as priorities in their local Public Service Agreements (PSAs). [62]

(R11) Additional resources for training should be made available to complement Best Value, Public Service Agreements, Beacon schemes and other local public service innovations. [71]

(R22) The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should ensure that community involvement is at the heart of programmes and projects which create and improve local parks and green spaces, including those in regeneration areas. This should be complemented and supported by providing advice and funding to enable local community groups, 'friends' and user groups, volunteers and local people to actively engage in practical work in these spaces. [105]

(R18) The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should promote and support partnership working for improving local parks and green spaces, through its strategies and programmes which impact on such spaces.[88]

(R19) The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should promote and support voluntary and community sector organisations as catalysts for working with communities, local businesses and other agencies, and for supporting community capacity building in brokering schemes for creating and managing urban green spaces. [96]

Recommendations for local government

258. Local authorities have a key role in ensuring that local strategies for green spaces are integrated with other strategies for improving local quality of life. The following recommendations are intended to help them improve planning and innovate design and management.

(R23) Local authorities should involve and support communities in green space service planning and delivery. This should be underpinned by local Community Strategies, Best Value reviews and performance indicators, and improved information about local parks and green spaces for users. [110]

(R20) Local authorities should promote and support partnership work for improving local green spaces. This should be reflected in other local strategies which impact on green spaces (including community, regeneration, planning and housing development strategies), Best Value reviews and performance indicators. Local authorities should also provide appropriate training for members and officers. [101]

(R21) Local authorities should explore the potential for making greater use of local 'open space trusts' as an effective option for delivering improvements to green spaces and their management and maintenance. [101]

(R27) Local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships should provide information and advice on available funding streams and opportunities for supporting local partnerships involving local resident, voluntary and business groups for improving urban green spaces. [120]

(R35) Local authorities should provide effective leadership for local parks and green spaces at the highest level within the council, by clearly designating a senior cabinet member to champion and promote local parks and green spaces. [147]

(R36) Local authorities scrutiny committees should give greater weight to the contribution of local green spaces in improving the quality of local environments and people's lives. [147]

(R37) Local authorities should develop (or update) and implement a green space strategy, which integrate with neighbourhood renewal, regeneration, planning and housing development, community development, local health improvement, and culture, children's play and sports strategies. [153]

(R41) Design reviews should be carried out by local authorities for failing or unsatisfactory spaces as part of urban green space strategies. [173]

(R42) Local authorities should prepare, in consultation with local and 'friends' groups and users, a management plan for every major park, groups of smaller green spaces, and types of spaces (such as cemeteries, allotments, nature reserves and woodlands). [175]

(R43) Local authorities should conduct a Best Value review of their parks and green space services, taking note of the guidance and inspection reports by the Audit Commission as they are published. [186]

Further recommendations

(R13) The reintroduction of employer apprenticeship schemes to develop a new generation of craft workers and meet the growing need to replace the ageing workforce. [73]

(R14) The Government should promote graduate courses such as those in Landscape Planning and Management. Appropriate degree courses should be encouraged to place greater emphasis on managing recreational landscapes for public benefit in the urban context, and be supported by more research and sponsorship opportunities. Employing organisations such as local authorities should make better provision for graduate entry and support for obtaining professional qualifications. [74]

(R15) The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority should encourage Awarding Bodies, Colleges and Universities to reinstate a requirement for pre-college work experience and 12-month work placements for sandwich courses. [75]

ANNEX ONE : Acknowledgements.

URBAN GREEN SPACES TASKFORCE

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Clifford Davy	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV).
Philippa Drew	Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
Gilly Drummond	Association of Gardens Trusts.
Stephen Dunmore	New Opportunities Fund.
Michael Dunton	Town Planning Team, TESCO
Tim Gale	Landscape Institute.
Jackie Hall	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
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* And for contribution to drafts of this report.

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ANNEX TWO: Responsibilities for urban green spaces at national level

DCMS is responsible for formal playing fields, sporting, and recreational and children's play spaces. It sponsors Sport England, which promotes formal sport and recreation, and the New Opportunities Fund, which has supported the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities scheme. DCMS has responsibility for the historic environment and sponsors English Heritage and the National Heritage Memorial Fund, through which the Heritage Lottery Fund - which has supported an Urban Parks Programme - operates. In addition, DCMS is responsible for the care and management of the Royal Parks, which is carried out by the Royal Parks Agency. CABI, sponsored by both DCMS and DTLR, contributes to green spaces through its Design Review and enabling programmes.

DEFRA has responsibility for informal countryside recreation and landscapes, common land, town and village greens, country parks, and rights of way. It is also concerned with the promotion of safe routes to green spaces and promotes policies for protecting urban green spaces for their wildlife interest and the wider biodiversity benefit. DEFRA is also concerned with Community Forests and various aspects of the management of green spaces, such as litter and dog fouling. It sponsors the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Environment Agency, all of which have programmes of work which have links to urban green spaces. DEFRA also has a policy interest in the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme for which the Treasury has overall responsibility.

The **Forestry Commission** is particularly concerned with the sustainable management and expansion of natural green spaces, greening of urban, vacant and derelict land and private green spaces which benefit the public. It also has expertise in techniques for the restoration of previously developed land for sustainable public use.

DfES's interests include how urban green spaces contribute to education across the National Curriculum, including science, PE and

school sport, sustainable development education, citizenship and geography, and to personal and social development and play both within and beyond school hours. DfES is also responsible for approval of any sale of school playing fields. The interdepartmental Children and Young People's Unit, based in the DfES aims to ensure that all Government policies impact positively on young people.

DTLR is responsible for developing the Government's policies on urban parks and green spaces. Through its local government and land-use planning functions it is responsible for ensuring provision of adequate land for parks, play areas and other public spaces, and for policies for the management and improvement of these spaces. It also administers a number of programmes which impact on local parks and green space provision including: Home Zones; New Deal for Communities; Special Grants Programme, millennium communities and housing and regeneration. DTLR co-sponsors CABI and sponsors Groundwork, a voluntary organisation which works in partnership with local communities and businesses to improve urban green spaces.

Home Office - the Active Community Unit provides strategic and project funding to voluntary and community organisations that support the development of strong and active communities. In addition, the Race Equality Unit has responsibility for the Race Relations Act of 1976 through the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The strengthened legislative framework will help public authorities provide their services, including green spaces, in a way that is fair and accessible to all. The Home Office also has responsibility for reducing and preventing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour which will improve the safety and preserve the attractiveness of all public space, including urban green spaces.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Environment Task Force (ETF) is one of four options available under the New Deal for Young People. It aims to help young people back to work and improve their skills base whilst improving the environment by helping to regenerate deprived, mostly urban, areas through a variety of projects.

ANNEX THREE: Useful sources for further information

The Association of Gardens Trusts, 70 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6EJ,
Tel/fax: 0207 251 2610, email: gardenstrusts@btinternet.com, web: www.gardentrusts.co.uk

Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST), 5 King James Street, London, SE1 ORU,
Tel/fax: 020 7261 1009, email: info@bost.org.uk, web: www.bost.org.uk

Barnados, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex, IG6 1QG,
Tel: 020 8550 8822, email: dorothy.howes@barnados.org.uk, web: www.barnados.org.uk

Black Environment Network (BEN), 9 Llainwen, Uchaf Llanberis Wales LL55 4LL,
Tel: 01286 870715, email: BEN@ben-network.demon.co.uk, web:
www.realworld.org.uk/ben.html

BTCV, 36 St Mary's Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 0EU, Tel: 01491 821600,
email: Information@btcv.org.uk web: www.btcv.org

CABE, The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London, SE1 7NX, Tel: 020 7960 2400,
email: enquiries@cabe.org.uk, web: www.cabe.org.uk

Children's Play Council (CPC), National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London
EC1V 7QE, Tel: 020 7843 6016, email: cpc@ncb.org.uk, web: www.ncb.org.uk/cpc.htm

Common Ground, Gold Hill House, 21 High Street, Shaftesbury, Dorset, SP7 8JE,
Tel: 01747 850 820, email: sue.clifford@commonground.org.uk,
web: www.commonground.org.uk

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Nobel House, 17 Smith Square
London, SW1P 3JR, Tel: 020 7238 6000, email: info@defra.gov.uk, web: www.defra.gov.uk

Department for Works and Pensions (DWP), Correspondence Unit, Room 540, The Adelphi,
1-11 John Adam Street, London, WC2N 6HT, Tel: 020 7712 2171, web: www.dwp.gov.uk

English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB, Tel: 020 7973 3434,
email: members@english-heritage.org.uk, web: www.english-heritage.org.uk

English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA, Tel: 01733 455 000,
email: enquiries@english-nature, web: www.english-nature.org.uk

The Environment Trust, 4 Pinchin Street, London, E1 1SA, Tel: 020 7264 4660,
email: infor@envirotrust.org, web: www.envirotrust.org

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, The GreenHouse, Hereford Street, Bristol, BS3 4NA, Tel: 0117 923 1800, email: admin@farmgarden.org.uk web: www.farmgarden.org.uk

Fieldfare Trust, 67a The Wicker, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, Tel: 0114 270 1668, email: Fieldfare@BTInternet.com, web: <http://www.fieldfare.org.uk>

Garden History Society, 70 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6EJ, Tel: 020 7608 2409, email: enquiries@gardenhistorysociety.org web: www.gardenhistorysociety.org

Green Flag Award Scheme, The Civic Trust, 6th Floor, Gostins Building, 32-36 Hanover Street, Liverpool L1 4LN, Tel: 0151 709 1969, email: northernoffice@civictrust.org.uk , web: www.civictrust.org.uk/gfpa/gfpa.shtml

Groundwork UK, 85-87 Cornwall Street, Birmingham, B3 3BY, Tel: 0121 236 8565, email: info@groundwork.org.uk, web: www.groundwork.org.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), 7 Holbein Place, London SW1W 8NR, Tel: 020 7591 604 2/3/4/5, email: enquire@hlf.org.uk, web: www.hlf.org.uk

Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM), ILAM House, Lower Basildon, Reading, RG8 9NE, Tel: 01491 874 800, web: www.ilam.co.uk

International Federation of Park and Recreation (IFPRA), Globe House, Crispin Close, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7JS, Tel/Fax: 0118 946 1680, email: ifpraworld@aol.com, web: www.ifpra.org

The Landscape Institute, 6-8 Barnard Mews, London, SW11 1QU, Tel: 020 7350 5200, email: mail@l-i.org/uk, web: www.l-i.org.uk

Learning through Landscapes (LTL), Third Floor, Southside Offices, The Law Courts, Winchester, SO23 9DL, Tel: 01962 846 258, email: schoolgrounds-uk@ltl.org.uk, web: www.ltl.org.uk

Local Government Association, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ, Tel: 020 7664 3000, email: info@lga.gov.uk, web: www.lga.gov.uk

Living Streets, 31 - 33 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ, Tel: 020 7820 1010, email: info@livingstreets.org.uk, web: www.livingstreets.org.uk

National Urban Forestry Unit (NUFU), The Science Park, Stafford Road, Wolverhampton, WV10 9RT, Tel: 01902 828 600, email: info@nufu.org.uk, web: www.nufu.org.uk

Nations in Bloom (NIB), Globe House, Crispin Close, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7JS
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New Opportunities Fund (NOF), 1 Plough Place, London, EC4A 1DE, Tel: 0845 0000 121,
email: general.enquiries@nof.org.uk, web: www.nof.org.uk

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd, O'Dell House, Hunters Road, Corby,
Northamptonshire, NN17 5JE, Tel: 01536 266 576, email: natsoc@nsalg.demon.co.uk,
web: www.nsalg.co.uk

NSPCC Child Community Safety Programme, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH,
Tel: 020 7825 1332, web: www.nspcc.org.uk/html/news/thechildinthecommunity.htm

Open Spaces Society, 25a Bell Street, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon, RG9 2BA, Tel: 01491 573535,
email: hq@oss.org.uk, web: www.oss.org.uk

PLAYLINK, The Co-op Centre, 11 Mowll Street, London SW9 6BG, Tel: 020 7820 3800,
email: info@playlink.org.uk, web: www.playlink.org.uk.

Sensory Trust, Watering Lane Nursery, Pentewan, Cornwall, PL26 6BE, Tel: 01726 222900,
email: sensory@sensorytrust.swinternet.co.uk, web: www.sensorytrust.org.uk

Shell Better Britain Campaign, King Edward House, 135a New Street, Birmingham B2 4QJ
Tel: 0121 212 922,1 email: info@sbbc.co.uk, web: www.sbbc.co.uk

Sport England, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London, WC1H 0QP, Tel: 020 7273 1500
email: info@sportengland.org, web: www.sportengland.org.gov

Thrive, The Geoffrey Udall Centre, Beech Hill, Reading, RG7 2AT, Tel: 0118 988 5688,
email: info@thrive.org.uk, web: www.thrive.org.uk

Urban Forum, 4 Dean's Court, St Paul's Churchyard, London, EC4V 5AA, Tel: 020 7248 3111,
email: info@urbanforum.org.uk, web: www.urbanforum.org.uk

Urban Parks Forum (UPF), Caversham Court, Church Road, Reading, RG4 7AD,
Tel: 0118 901 5200, email: admin@upfor.fsbusiness.co.uk, web: www.urbanparksforum.co.uk

Wildlife Trusts, The Kiln, Waterside, Mather Road, Newark, Nottinghamshire, NG24 1WT,
Tel: 0870 036 7711, email: info@wildlife-trusts.cix.co.uk, web: www.wildlifetrusts.org

Youth Sport Trust, Brockington Building Loughborough University, Loughborough,
Leicester LE11 3TU, Tel: 01509 228 293, email: YSTinfo@lboro.ac.uk, web:
www.youthsport.net

ANNEX FOUR: Urban green spaces agency

This report has shown that the problems faced by many local authority parks services, require more visible championing and focused action, at all levels, in order to overcome them. It has shown that greater promotion of their benefits and better co-ordination of policy and action at national and local levels could significantly improve service planning and delivery. It has identified, in particular, a need for:

- restoring the status of local authority parks and green space services with other cultural, leisure and sports services;
- significant and urgent improvement in the quality of information about urban green spaces to inform policy and action;
- setting and promoting standards of care and good practice at a national level; and
- strategic policy framework and better overall co-ordination of funding decisions and more effective use of available funding.

The Taskforce has considered three main options for providing greater championing for urban parks and green spaces. We considered that the option of a national co-ordinating committee for urban green spaces comprising the existing agencies and the professional and voluntary sectors, may lead to considerable debate, compromise and delayed action. We concluded that the option would lack the thrust and commitment needed, and that could be achieved by a dedicated delivery body.

We considered proposals for expanding the remit of an existing national agency or sponsored body. We invited the Countryside Agency, CABI, Sports England, English Heritage, English Nature and Groundwork to submit their views on the feasibility of this option. On balance we felt that an existing agency would, given current remits, find it

difficult to think and act in the focused and holistic way about parks and green spaces as set out in this report. We were also concerned about the potential for a 'green spaces remit' to either distort the core competencies of an existing agency or become an add-on and, therefore, peripheral to core areas of interest. We concluded that this would be a difficult option to achieve, and its outcomes are likely to be unsatisfactory.

There is considerable support for the setting up of a new agency for urban green spaces. Many of the major agencies, professional bodies, local authorities and voluntary groups favour this option. Faced with the evidence of the current condition of urban parks and green spaces, many who were sceptical have come around to this option. We too agree that a dedicated agency for parks and green spaces would be the best option for championing and realising the step changes that are needed to reverse the decline and transform the quality of urban green spaces. We very much reaffirm, therefore, the recommendation of the Environment Select Committee's report: *Town and Country Parks* (1999) for the setting up of an agency dedicated to urban parks and green spaces.

The Taskforce is mindful, however, that the Government was not persuaded that setting up a new agency would be the best or only way forward. Even taking into account improvements that can be achieved by the proposals set out in this report, whilst the setting up a new agency is not the only way forward, we judge that it is likely to be the most effective option for ensuring a sustainable future for urban parks and green spaces.

Vision and mission of the new Agency

The new agency should set its aims on transforming and sustaining the quality of urban green spaces to the benefit of all. Its vision should be to realise a true and sustainable urban renaissance by supporting an effective policy framework that delivers quality parks and exciting diverse green spaces which meet the needs and aspirations of local communities.

Scope of responsibilities

The scope of the new agency should focus on parks and green spaces that are freely accessible to the public in urban areas, taking into account the strategic classification set out in the typology proposed at section 5.2 this report.

The new agency should be independent of, but close to, Government, so that it can be an effective champion of parks and green spaces at all levels. The remit of the new agency should be similar in design and terms of reference to those of similar existing in the cultural and recreation sector. The aims of the new agency could be to:

- (i) Champion the cause and benefits of urban green spaces, recognising the key role they play in promoting healthy living, improving quality of life and the liveability of our towns and cities, and by advocating their economic, social and environmental benefits, especially through education.
- (ii) Provide leadership on strategic policy issues, helping to restore status of green space services with other cultural, leisure and sports services at national and local levels.

- (iii) Work with the major providers and funders of urban green spaces, especially Government and Lottery Boards, to co-ordinate funding decisions to ensure adequate resources for urban parks and green spaces.
- (iv) Provide a central point in a network of resources, from various sources, to support local activity - funding, information, advice, standards, and lessons from good practice.
- (v) Lead with research to improve the quality of information on urban green spaces to inform policy and action, including the development of a national database on the amount and condition of urban green spaces.
- (vi) Work with relevant existing agencies, professional and voluntary bodies and institutes to raise the profile and stimulate more innovative practice for planning, design, management and maintenance of urban parks and green spaces.
- (vii) Establish and promote national standards for the sustainable management and maintenance of urban green spaces, and ensure that there is effective collection and widespread dissemination of good practice.
- (viii) Protect and enhance the quality of urban environments through the integrated management of parks and green spaces.

Early priorities

The new agency should champion the recommendations of this report, and assist in implementing the government's policies for the future management and care of urban parks and green spaces. Early priorities for the new agency should, therefore, include a role in implementing key recommendations in this report, in particular, those set out at 8.1 of this report.



Organisation and set up

The new agency would need the funding and support available to public agencies, the political drive of Government, and the entrepreneurial spirit which encourages a focus on practical change and action. To be truly effective the new agency's advisory role would need to be backed up with capacity for grant-in-aid.

It is likely to take some time for the new agency to establish a sufficient track record to attract substantial sponsorship and partnerships with funding providers. This should also be taken into account in considering funding options for the new agency.

It will take time to fully design and establish the new agency. We are concerned that the momentum that has already been achieved through the Urban White Paper's initiatives should not be lost. We therefore propose the immediate setting up of an interim Steering Group, located within the DTLR, involving the relevant government departments and agencies and sponsored bodies, as well as the voluntary sector and local authorities. The purpose of the Group should be to promote the messages and recommendations in this report, and to advise Government on the detailed proposals for the setting up of the new agency.

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