

Leicester
City Council

**WARDS AFFECTED:
CITYWIDE**

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
CABINET**

**24th September 2009
5th October 2009**

GREENSPACE STRATEGY (2009-2015)

Report of the Director of Environmental Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet's approval and adoption of the Greenspace Strategy as a corporate document, underpinning the LDF Core Strategy.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Although not formally adopted, the Greenspace Strategy commissioned in 2005 with the first draft available late 2006, has been a working document for the Parks and Green Spaces Service for the past 2 years. Over this time, targets and actions from the Strategy have been embedded in service planning and service delivery. The Strategy replaces the Parks, Open Spaces and Countryside Strategy, which expired December 2006 and follows the commissioning of the Open Spaces, Sport and Recreation Study (OS, S&R) by the Council's Planning Policy team in developing Leicester City Council's Local Development Framework (LDF).
- 2.2 The OS, S&R was completed in line with Planning Policy Guidance note 17 (PPG17) and is part of the evidence base for Leicester's Core Strategy. A strong evidence base is essential in ensuring that the Core Strategy (a statutory document) is found sound. The Parks and Green Spaces Service used the evidence gathered in the OS, S&R study to develop the Greenspace Strategy.
- 2.3 As well as setting the framework for the management of the City's Parks and Green Spaces the Strategy also proposes standards of provision for green space. These standards of provision have been based on local needs in the City and will be used as the basis for making planning decisions and securing developer contributions towards raising the quality of existing open space and improving public access to provision.
- 2.4 It is important to ensure that the standards are formalised through the adoption of the Green Space Strategy as Council policy. This will help to add weight to the standards, securing income for the Council, reducing the risk of having planning decisions challenged and losing appeals. This would have benefits for the budgets of both services

- 2.5 The specific objectives of the Strategy are:
- To develop a hierarchy of parks and green spaces, with a framework for prioritisation and resource allocation for their management and improvement.
 - To understand and meet the needs of community attitudes and expectations in providing green space in the City.
 - To provide standards of green space provision, which are adopted within the Local Development Framework.
 - To ensure Leicester builds on its strengths in green space management, and builds on its status of delivering good practice in green space provision.
 - To improve the accessibility of Leicester's parks and green spaces.
- 2.6 The Strategy also considers the disposal of open space if it is of low quality, and a poorly functioning area of open space. This would go some way in allowing the service to better fund service delivery as resources could then be focussed to the higher priority sites. Any disposal would only take place following identification of potential areas in discussion with the Ward Councillors and in agreement with the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure. It is hoped that any income from disposals would be ring-fenced to enable investment in those parks identified as potential Green Flag Award winners.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Cabinet approve and adopt the Greenspace Strategy.

4. REPORT **Background**

- 4.1 The revised version of Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 required all local authorities to undertake robust assessments of needs and opportunities in respect of open space, sport and recreation facilities. These assessments are seen as the starting point for establishing effective strategies for open space, sport and recreation at the local level and effective planning through the development of appropriate policies in plans. The long term aim of PPG17 is for local authorities to deliver local networks of high quality, well managed, and well maintained open spaces, sports and recreational facilities that meet the needs of local residents and help to create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe.
- 4.2 The Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study for Leicester has been completed in line with requirements of PPG17 and its Companion Guide. Inspace consultants were commissioned to do this work. The study provides a detailed evidence base of the amount and variety of open spaces in the city, how well the spaces are maintained, and how easy they are to get to and use. It also suggests standards of provision for OS, S&R based on three components (quantity, quality, and accessibility). These standards will in time replace the adopted City of Leicester Local Plan 2006. The Council's Parks and Green Spaces Service have also used the base information gathered in this study to build on this work to inform their Greenspace Strategy. These two pieces of work complement each other in providing an effective strategy for the provision and management of open spaces in Leicester.

Scope of the PPG17 Study

- 4.3 The full range of public open space has been audited as part of this study. This included public parks and gardens, accessible natural green space, green corridors and recreation routes, outdoor community sports facilities, playing fields and recreation

grounds, informal / amenity green space, equipped play provision for children and young people and allotments.

Public consultation

- 4.4 Both PPG17 and the companion guide place great emphasis on consulting the local community through the assessment process. Public consultation has been an important and integral part of this study. There has been extensive consultation with stakeholders in Leicester through household surveys, focus groups, questionnaires to schools and sports clubs, and play and youth groups to identify local need. The consultation results have been used to directly inform the recommended local standards as well as possible priorities and actions for inclusion in action plans and the green space strategy.

Member involvement

- 4.5 Following development of the strategy there has been an assessment of how the Strategy would have an effect on provision at a Ward level. Two Wards were selected to conduct a trial, these being Castle Ward (Inner City) and Eyres Monsell Ward (Outer Area). The principles of the Strategy appeared to work at the local level. To ensure that all Ward Members are engaged in the process it is proposed to continue these tours across all Wards. These tours would be organised from the date of Strategy adoption.
- 4.6 The two tours identified an area for community involvement/management at Clarendon Park Road, and members of the community are now discussing this with the Area Parks Manager. At Eyres Monsell the potential to develop Sturdee Road Recreation Ground to District Park level was recognised, investment in play facilities is now underway.

How the Planning Service will use the PPG17 Study

- 4.7 The completed study has provided a good overview of existing open space, sport and recreation provision in Leicester. The Council now have a database of detailed information about the type and amount of spaces that there are, the quality of these spaces and how easy they are to get to and use. This all forms part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. Having a robust evidence base is essential to ensuring that the Local Development Framework is considered to be sound on examination. Planning policy officers have used this information to inform the direction of draft Core Strategy Policies, which will supersede the adopted City of Leicester Local Plan 2006.
- 4.8 This database will also be used as a “tool” for informing development control decisions, for example to determine the level of need for open space provision resulting from a new development and where developer contributions would be best directed in an area (enhancement of existing provision, new provision if necessary etc). In addition to using the study to guide development control decisions it should also be used to assess the need for open space in areas of expected housing growth such as Ashton Green and other regeneration areas. The information collected will also help to inform the preparation of the 6C’s Strategic Green Infrastructure Strategy. This will help to ensure that green infrastructure requirements for new growth areas are considered right at the start of the development process.
- 4.9 This has been an important study for both the Planning and Parks and Green Spaces sections in delivering different aspects of their services. The Planning service now has

a robust evidence base and a good working tool to guide planning policy and the development control process. The Parks and Green Spaces Service have used the evidence gathered in the OS, S&R study and the suggested standards to develop the Greenspace Strategy.

The Greenspace Strategy

- 4.10 The Greenspace Strategy was commissioned with the specific aims of providing Leicester City Council with an effective working document with an action plan, which provides clear priorities to help deliver its aims and objectives. In providing this the Strategy was to be sharply focussed on the key issues in Leicester, whilst learning from experience and good practice elsewhere, and providing a clear framework for practical action to protect and improve open spaces, sport and recreation spaces and facilities.
- 4.11 The specific objectives of the Strategy are:
- To develop a hierarchy of parks and green spaces, with a framework for prioritisation and resource allocation for their management and improvement.
 - To understand and meet the needs of community attitudes and expectations in providing green space in the City.
 - To provide standards of green space provision, which are adopted within the Local Development Framework.
 - To ensure Leicester builds on its strengths in green space management, and builds on its status of delivering good practice in green space provision.
 - To improve the accessibility of Leicester's parks and green spaces.
- 4.12 A hierarchy of parks has been established. This hierarchy defines parks and open spaces as either: City, District, Local, and Amenity. The definition of the hierarchy is included in appendix A. Abbey Park is the only City Park; and the District Parks are, Beaumont Park, Braunstone Park, Castle Hill Park, Evington Park, Humberstone Park, Knighton Park, Spinney Hill Park, Victoria Park, Watermead Park and Western Park.
- 4.13 Community consultation and involvement continues. The service has developed 'Friends of' groups for most of its major parks, and users of all of the significant open spaces in Leicester have access to a 'Parks User' group. There is ongoing consultation via GreenSTAT, a national questionnaire and database, which collects data via web questionnaires, post, and face-to-face interview (over 600 responses from Leicester are gathered each year). There is on-going community involvement through such schemes as the Spinney Hill Park Restoration Project, the BIG Lottery Children's Fund and the DCSF Playbuilder funding for play area developments. In addition the MORI Ipsos 2008 Leicester Residents' Survey has again demonstrated an increase in residents' satisfaction with the service.
- 4.14 Green Flag Awards, additional awards such as the CABE Space 'Parkforce' award, and the on-going commitment to staff training through programmes such as the service's Modern Apprentice scheme continue to ensure that the Authority continues to deliver good practice.
- 4.15 Leicester City Council currently holds six Green Flag Awards: Abbey Park; Aylestone Hall Gardens; Evington Park; Knighton Park; Watermead Park, Welford Road Cemetery, and has the commitment, through the Greenspace Strategy and Planning for People Not Cars, to increase this number incrementally to achieve ten awards. The

additional four sites would be: Gilroes Cemetery; Humberstone Park; Victoria Park, and Western Park. Significant investment would be required to enable this to happen and funding opportunities ranging from Lottery funds to developer contributions are currently being investigated.

- 4.16 However, future delivery of the Strategy's actions, particularly that of developing and maintaining new district parks to better serve the community, is compromised by both a lack of capital and revenue resources, and an increasing amount of land to maintain (appendix B). Resources are concentrated in areas where the public are most vocal and therefore generate the most complaints e.g. the major parks and residential areas. The result of this is that outlying areas, such as the neighbourhood parks, and 'natural' open spaces, are receiving a low standard of maintenance and have continued to decline. This is reflected in the recent OS, S&R study.

Funding Pressures

- 4.17 Since the tendering of the final grounds maintenance contracts in 1997/1998, a number of factors have combined to create a gap between the specified and agreed service delivery and what can be achieved through the service's revenue funding. It is important to note that the specified standards are nothing out of the ordinary and are comparable with other authorities nationwide and are to provide maintenance and management to all of Leicester's open spaces, ranging from parks, to housing estates, sheltered accommodation, and highways.
- 4.18 The factors that have led to the funding pressures are:
- Vehicle and transport costs have increased.
 - Tipping charges have increased dramatically.
 - An increase of 45ha in public open space (from 863 ha in 1994 to 908 n 2007) with no additional revenue (appendix B).
 - Climate change has resulted in longer growing seasons, extending the intense period of summer work of mowing.
 - Delivery of the specified grounds maintenance standards (agreed in 1997) requires 162 front-line operatives. Including agency staff the service currently employs 120.
- 4.19 It is recognised that the Strategy recommendation for increased revenue funding cannot be met, and therefore a different approach has to be adopted. To bridge the funding gap consideration is currently being given to a combination of the following three approaches:
- Formally reducing the standard of delivery at selected sites to at least that currently applied in practice.
 - Encouraging greater community management.
 - Disposing of low quality, poorly functioning open space.
- 4.20 Reducing the applied standard of delivery is essentially a paper exercise to ensure that the service standards closer align to the available revenue budget. Encouraging greater community management may be an option but is likely to be successful on small, uncomplicated sites. Disposal of land, although recommended in the Strategy as there is over provision in certain wards may, in some instances, prove contentious with local residents. However, if this can enable improvements and a higher standard of maintenance to be provided at other sites, some of which may currently be in a

relatively poor state at the present time, such an overall approach may prove more acceptable. It is anticipated that any use of capital receipts to support the other Strategy recommendations would be negotiated on a site-by-site basis.

- 4.21 Toilet provision across Leicester's Parks is poor and is one of the major criticisms from user surveys, and lack of facilities is identified within the Greenspace Strategy. The four major parks that would benefit from new toilet provision are: Braunstone Park; Evington, Park; Watermead Park, and Western Park. The cost of provision would be £130,000 per park - £520,000 in total. Another criticism is that of car parking provision, particularly at Watermead Park. To provide a suitable surface for visitors to this particular site will cost £120,000.
- 4.22 Appendix B shows the increase in the amount of public open space. In 2010 the City Council will adopt the second phase of the Hamilton District Park from the Hamilton Trustees, without the benefit of any additional finance to maintain it., which is the result of a Section 52 agreement (Town and Country Planning Act) signed and sealed in December 1987. In consultation with the Trustees the second phase has been designed to keep the maintenance cost as low as possible but even so, the additional cost to the City Council will be £78,100 per annum.

Section 106 / Developer Contributions

- 4.23 Developer contributions have previously been received as off-site contributions for the enhancement of specific sites and specific themes of improvement: children's play facilities; amenity enhancement; adult and youth provision. The use of the developer contributions is agreed with the Cabinet Lead for Culture and Leisure as well as being appropriate under the agreement with the developer. Sites that have benefited from such funding include:
- Abbey Park
 - Bede Park
 - Castle Gardens
 - Fosse Park
 - Knighton Park
 - Monks Rest Gardens
- 4.24 As the developer contributions are site-specific s106 funding cannot be used city-wide to enhance other, perhaps more in need of improvement.

Allotments

- 4.25 There is a major demand for allotment space. Consideration will be given in turning surplus open space into allotment provision.

Equality Impact Assessment

- 4.26 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed for the Greenspace Strategy in May 2008 and this will now be included within the service wide EIA as part of the annual Service Improvement Plan refresh.
- 4.27 The main findings from the Greenspace Strategy EIA are:

- Access to facilities, in relation to the recommended access standards (appendix C).
- Access to facilities, in relation to DDA. Access audits undertaken by the Breward Consultancy have highlighted a number of works to make parks and open spaces more compliant. These works focus on the replacement and location of parks' furniture (seats and bins), and signage.
- A need to encourage greater workforce representation from women and BME groups within the parks service.
- A need to encourage greater participation from BME groups in the 'Friends of groups and User forums.
- Reducing the fear of crime by introducing a greater number of staff onto parks.

Adopting the Strategy

- 4.28 As well as setting the framework for the management of the City's Parks and Green Spaces the Strategy also proposes standards of provision for green space. These standards of provision have been based on local needs in the City and will be used as the basis for making planning decisions and securing developer contributions towards raising the quality of existing open space and improving public access to provision.
- 4.29 It is important to ensure that the standards are formalised through the adoption of the Green Space Strategy as Council policy. This will help to add weight to the standards, securing income for the Council, reducing the risk of having planning decisions challenged and losing appeals. This would have benefits for the budgets of both services

5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 The Parks and Open Spaces budget has been under pressure as a result of the increase in the land area to be maintained, longer growing periods and increases in costs ahead of the standard RPI increases applied to budgets on an annual basis. It is estimated that an additional £0.5m would be required on an existing budget of £3.9m in order to maintain all open space to the same standards. This level of increase is not considered to be a realistic option.

Martin Judson, Head of Finance, Ext 29 7390

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 PPG17 requires local authorities to put in place a strategy for green space. The Council's position would not conform with PPG17 if the Green Space Strategy is not adopted. Consequently, it would be difficult to demonstrate that the Local Development Framework conforms with national planning policy.
- 5.2.2 If the Council does not adopt the Green Space Strategy it will become increasingly difficult to make decisions about developments involving green space and there may be grounds for challenge in relation to collecting and allocating financial contributions towards it.

Dina Nathwani, Solicitor, 29 6345

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph references within the report
Equal Opportunities	Yes	4.18, 4.19
Policy	Yes	4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.17
Sustainable and Environmental	Yes	4.13, 4.14, 4.15
Crime and Disorder	No	
Human Rights Act	No	
Elderly/People on Low Income	No	

7. RISK ASSESSMENT MATRIX

Risk	Likelihood L/M/H	Severity Impact L/M/H	Control Actions (if necessary/appropriate)
Non adoption of Strategy	L	H	
Lack of funding to implement Strategy	H	H	Continue to pursue external funding opportunities e.g. Growth Point

L – Low
M – Medium
H - High

L – Low
M – Medium
H - High

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None.

9. CONSULTATION

Dina Nathwani, Solicitor, Commercial and General Team, Legal Services (29 6345)
Martin Judson, Head of Finance, Regeneration and Culture (29 7390)

10. REPORT AUTHORS

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Key Decision	Yes
Reason	Is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising more than one ward
Appeared in Forward Plan	Yes
Executive or Council Decision	Executive (Cabinet)

APPENDIX A

Parks and Open Space categories - from the Association of Public Excellence's (APSE) criteria.

City Park

A City Park is a formally defined Park/Open Space/Recreation area having at least a 3 mile catchment area and at least 20 facilities from the list below (at least 10 of which must be marked with an asterisk).

District Park

A District Park is a formally defined Park/Open Space/Recreation area having at least a ¾ mile catchment area with at least 10 facilities from the list below (at least 5 of which must be marked with an asterisk).

Local Park

A Local Park is a Park/Open Space/Recreation area having at least a ½ mile catchment area with at least 6 facilities from the list below (at least 3 of which must be marked with an asterisk).

Amenity Open Space

Amenity land is a Park/Open Space/Recreation area having at least a ¼ mile catchment area with at least 1 of the facilities from the list below.

Facility list

Aquarium*	Multiple Play / Adventure Play*
Arboretum*	Museum*
Artificial Sports Pitch*	Paddling Pool
Aviary*	Site based staff (i.e. Offices/Park Officers/maintenance staff)*
Bandstand*	Petanque
Boating Lake*	Pets' Corner*
Bowling Green*	Pitch & Putt*
Car Parking*	Plant Collection (NCCPG)*
CCTV / Other Security*	Putting Green(s)
Changing Facilities / Pavilion*	Refreshment Facilities*
Defined Park Boundary*	Seating
Dog Bins	Signage
Footpath	Single Sports Pitch
Formal/Memorial Beds/Floral Displays*	Single Play Unit
Full access to all park areas for disabled users	Tennis/Netball Courts*
Glasshouses/Floral Conservatory*	Toilets*
Hard surface for play/kick about area	Visitor and/or Information Centre*
LEAP Play Area*	Visitor Facilities* (e.g. model boats/railway, bouncy castle)
LAP Play Area	War Memorials/Statues/Follies/Public Art
Litter Bins	Water Features/Fountains
Multiple Sports Pitches*	Woodland Walk*

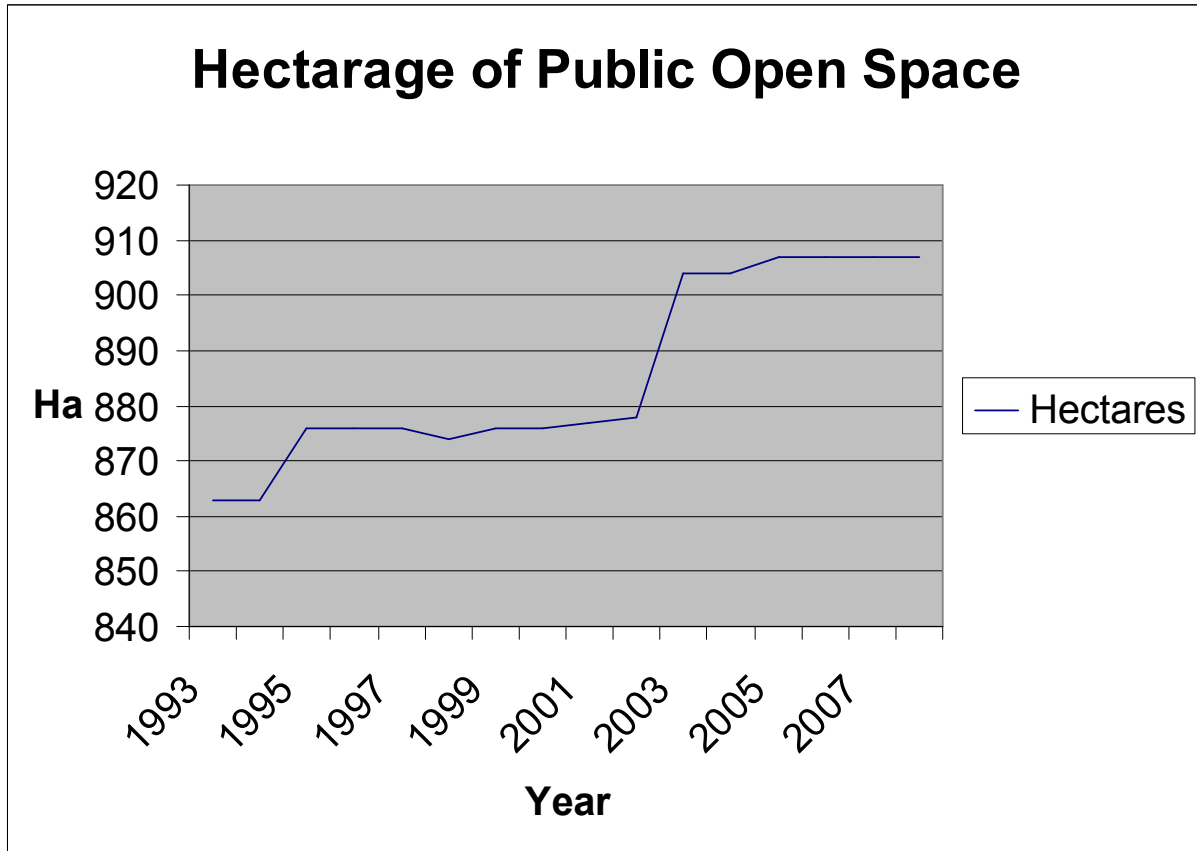


Chart showing the amount of public open space over time (Environmental Statement 2006/07).

Access to City & District Parks

