

# Community parks: Plan on a Page, Accessibility Audits and Safety of Women and Girls.

Date: 12 Oct 2023

Report of: Chief Officer, Climate, Energy and Green Spaces

Report to: Chair of Scrutiny

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## Brief summary

The Parks and Green Spaces strategy, published in 2022, set out 8 priorities for the Parks and Countryside (now Green Spaces) service and committed to a number of actions that would help deliver them.

This report provides an update on the following actions:

- Produce a 'plan on a page' for each community park, setting out a vision for each site in consultation with ward members and the local community.
- Develop a process for auditing the accessibility of our sites.
- Undertake an access audit of all city and community parks.
- Collaborate on research to find out how safe women and girls feel in our green spaces and how safety might best be improved.

## Recommendations

- a) For Scrutiny to consider Climate, Energy and Green Space's approach to developing community park plans, auditing parks' accessibility, and ensuring women and girls feel safe and welcome in Leeds parks as outlined below.

## What is this report about?

- 1 The Parks and Green Spaces strategy, published in 2022 set out 8 priorities for the Parks and Countryside (now Green Spaces) service and committed to a number of actions that would help deliver them.
- 2 This report provides an update on the following actions which are designed to help deliver the 'Quality' and 'Access for All' priorities in particular:
  - Produce a 'plan on a page' for each community park, setting out a vision for each site in consultation with ward members and the local community.
  - Develop a process for auditing the accessibility of our sites.
  - Undertake an access audit of all city and community parks.

- Collaborate on research to find out how safe women and girls feel in our green spaces and how safety might best be improved.

### 3 Plans on a Page

- 3.1 A commitment was made to producing the community park 'Plans on a Page' in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy (2022) because they will help the Council achieve the goal of providing the best parks and green spaces in the UK.
- 3.2 Having a *Plan on a Page* for each community park will provide the direction required to get each park to *Leeds Quality Park* (LQP) standard (the measure of a good quality park) and achieve many of the other goals set out in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.
- 3.3 An example of a *Plan on a Page* is provided in appendix 1. The consultation process for this particular plan is not yet complete so '*Where we are now*' is still in draft, but it shows the format of the plans. The idea is that they will be set out on two sides of A3 paper with one side showing the park as it is now and the other side showing a vision for the park's future. This is a much simpler and more accessible format than traditional park management plans which often run to many pages of text.
- 3.4 The plans will be based around the *Leeds Quality Park* standard and the priorities set out in the *Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy*. They will include all elements of park design including:
  - Natural habitats like woodlands, orchards, wildflower meadows, hedges and ponds.
  - Horticultural features such as flower beds and specialist gardens.
  - Infrastructure such as paths, benches, bins, entrances and fences.
  - Recreational facilities such as children's play, tennis courts, sports pitches, outdoor gyms, bowling greens, multi-use games areas and skate parks.
  - Historic features such as bandstands and war memorials.
  - Signage and interpretation.
- 3.5 To ensure the vision set out in the plan provides the kind of park that local people want and need, it will be created in partnership with ward councillors and local communities through a wide-reaching public consultation process (outlined in point 13 below).
- 3.6 The plans will contain elements that are essential to get the parks to LQP standard, for example, accessible paths. They will also contain aspirational elements that will contribute to the aim of the Council to provide the *best* parks and green spaces in the UK, for example, restoring heritage features such as band stands or installing flagship play facilities.
- 3.7 Once completed, each plan will be costed, so the costs of delivering the full plan and its component parts will be available to use when seeking or allocating funding. Some elements may be easy to deliver, such as reducing mowing to create grassland meadows. Others may be more challenging, such as a new playground or tarmac paths.
- 3.8 The commitment in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy is to produce a Plan on a Page for each park within the life of the strategy (10 years).
- 3.9 In line with the goals set out in the parks and green spaces strategy, which prioritise Quality parks, Access for all and Health and wellbeing, the plans will be produced in order of need and positive impact, whilst also ensuring a reasonable geographical spread around the city, by prioritising as follows:
  - Parks in areas with less public green space.
  - Parks in areas of deprivation where the health benefits of free, quality public green space are greater.

- Parks in densely populated areas which tend to get used by more people.
- Parks that are failing LQP.

3.10 We have also produced Plans as part of funding bids or where a public consultation is required ahead of funding being allocated.

3.11 So far, as part of the process of applying for the Towns Fund for Morley and Levelling Up funding in a number of wards, 13 plans have been produced. Because there were time limitations on these relating to the funding bids, some of the consultations weren't as thorough as described below, but since April this year, and going forward, the consultation process will be as outlined.

3.12 See appendix 2 for progress on the Plans.

3.13 Completed plans will be updated on an ongoing basis as necessary.

#### 4 Access Audits

4.1 *Access for All* is a priority in the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy that sets out an aim for parks and green spaces in Leeds to be 'accessible for everyone who wants to use them'.

4.2 When using the word 'accessible' we are referring to how welcoming the sites are for all potential visitors, and how easy they are to use for people of all backgrounds, interests and abilities.

4.3 To achieve this aim, the Council has committed to developing and undertaking an access audit of all city and community parks within the life span of the Strategy.

4.4 The audit is designed to identify what needs to be done at each site to make it as accessible as possible. Once this is clear, progress can be made towards making the required improvements which could vary from something as simple as cutting back an overgrown hedge to installing benches or putting in new footpaths.

4.5 As per the commitment in the Strategy, a process for auditing the accessibility of our sites has recently been developed. An example of an Access Audit is provided in Appendix 3.

4.6 The access audit form was developed with reference to a number of guidance documents including:

- *BS8300-1:2018* - a standard of design for *accessible and inclusive built environment*.
- *PAS 6463:2022* - a guide which advises on design for the mind – *Neurodiversity and the Built Environment*
- *The Outdoor Accessibility Guidance* - developed by Paths for All and the Sensory Trust which provides information on making outdoor places and spaces, routes and facilities more accessible, and outdoor experiences more inclusive, so they can be enjoyed by everyone.
- The Department for Transport's *Inclusive Mobility Guide* which gives advice on best practice on access to pedestrian and transport infrastructure.
- The PiPA Checklist which is an access audit for playgrounds created by Inclusive Play, KIDS (the disabled children's charity) and other experts.
- *Safer Parks Guidance* produced by University of Leeds and partners which advises on how to make parks and green spaces feel safe for women and girls.

4.7 The following colleagues and expert partners were also consulted and provided input on the audit: Leeds City Council (LCC) Access Officer, LCC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Officer, LCC Disability Champion, West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) Urban Design Manager and Dr Anna Barker, University of Leeds researcher into safety of women and girls.

- 4.8 We will be attending the Leeds Disability Hub's next meeting to get their feedback on the audit form at their next meeting on 25 October 2023.
- 4.9 The access audits cover a wide range of elements that contribute to the accessibility of parks including:
- How easy they are to find out about in the first place.
  - How easy they are to get to.
  - How welcoming they feel.
  - How safe they feel.
  - How easy they are to enter and move around.
  - Whether they provide a wide range of facilities to meet the needs and interests of the wide range of people living in Leeds (facilities might range from playgrounds and sports pitches to walking routes and benches).
- 4.10 So far, access audits have been undertaken at 20 parks (details in Appendix 2).
- 4.11 Going forward, the access audits will be undertaken ahead of the Plans on a Page so their recommendations can be included in the proposed Plans. They will also be shared with site managers so any quick wins identified can be delivered right away.
- 4.12 We are keen to engage park-users in the access audit process, particularly those with disabilities, so this is something we'll be looking into going forward with plans to recruit volunteers through Voluntary Action Leeds, Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum (indeed the Chair of the Forum is already involved) and Leeds Disability Hub.

## 5 Safety of Women and Girls

- 5.1 The Parks and Green Spaces Strategy sets out a goal for our parks and green spaces to feel safe and welcoming for girls and women, with an action for the Council to collaborate on research to find out how safe women and girls feel in public green spaces and how safety might best be improved.
- 5.2 In 2022, we supported and took part in a project coordinated by WYCA to investigate what makes a park feel safe/unsafe for women and girls and how park design and management might impact on that. The findings of this research have generated lots of interest across the country and was covered in the national media.
- 5.3 The findings revealed that 16% of women felt 'fairly' or 'very' unsafe when on their own in parks, compared to 5% of men. At night 80% of women feel unsafe in parks compared to 40% of men. This feeling of being unsafe makes parks less accessible for women and girls which can mean they miss out on the mental and physical health benefits that spending time in parks has.
- 5.4 The project team, including WYCA, University of Leeds, Keep Britain Tidy and Make Space For Girls, produced some guidelines to advise landscape architects and park managers on how they can make parks feel more safe and welcoming for girls and women ([Safer parks guidance](#)).
- 5.5 Examples include:
- Providing plenty of escape routes and limiting the use of fences and other barriers.
  - Ensuring escape routes are easy to see and access.
  - Providing directional signage.
  - Having staff visible on site

- Animating parks so there's more people around e.g. through events, sports or active travel routes.
  - Providing facilities aimed specifically at girls and women so they feel welcome and included.
  - Ensuring the park is clean and well maintained.
  - Involving women and girls in park design.
- 5.6 Several colleagues in Climate, Energy and Green Spaces involved in parks design and management have attended workshops on these guidelines and the guidelines will be shared at the Climate, Energy and Green Spaces wider management team to raise awareness internally.
- 5.7 The guidelines have been incorporated into the access audit and will also feed into the Plans on a Page. They will be taken into consideration whenever changes are being proposed in parks and green spaces across the city.
- 5.8 Consideration will also be given to other ways we can contribute to women and girls feeling safer on our sites e.g. making staff more visible by changing uniform from dark green to something brighter and providing Active Bystander training for our site-based staff.
- 5.9 In addition, the Green Spaces team continue to support externally funded work to research and improve the safety of women and girls in parks such as the following 2 schemes:
- 5.9.1 The UK Shared Prosperity Fund Women and Girls Outreach Programme, led by the LCC Safer, Stronger Communities team, includes (among several other workstreams) external funding for the co-design and delivery of safe and welcoming public spaces which are responsive to the safety needs of women and girls. This involves capital investment in 4 different public spaces over the next 2 years, with the first scheme being the development of a seating area and swings designed specifically with teenage girls in mind at Lewisham park.
- 5.9.2 External funding was recently approved for a partnership including University of Leeds, WYCA, LCC and the Cultural Institute to work with women and girls to develop a public event for Light Night 2024 at Woodhouse Moor, exploring how parks might be made safer.

### **What impact will this proposal have?**

- 6 Having a *Plan on a Page* for each community park will provide the direction required to get each park to *Leeds Quality Park* standard and help the Council achieve the goal of providing the best parks and green spaces in the UK.
- 7 It will also help move us towards achieving many of the other goals set out in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy such as:
- Planting 50 hectares of woodland each year.
  - Increasing the quantity, quality, size and connectedness of wildlife habitats.
  - To preserve, promote and provide information about features of cultural and historic interest in parks.
  - To have child-friendly parks.
  - To ensure there's suitable provision for teenagers in our parks.
  - To provide parks that are valued by Leeds residents and visitors to the city.
  - To provide a range of opportunities for people to be active in parks.
- 8 The Access Audits will clarify what needs to be done to make our sites accessible. Findings will be incorporated into the Plans on a Pages to help us deliver the following goals that were set out in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy:

- All parks to be judged as 'good' or higher in 'equal access for all' LQP criteria.
- Ensuring our parks are welcoming and accessible for older people.
- Ensuring our parks feel safe and welcoming for girls and women.
- For our parks to provide something for all Leeds residents.

### How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

- 9 The schemes outlined above contribute to Health and Wellbeing by helping us deliver more accessible, better-quality parks for everyone. Evidence shows that this tends to result in increased use of parks and the associated benefits for physical and mental health.
- 10 Plan on a Page contributes to Inclusive Growth through developing a vision for each park with local communities, that reflects and supports a positive local identity, culture, heritage and pride.
- 11 The Plans on a Page proposals will also contribute to Zero Carbon by including proposals such as tree planting and less intensive site-management like replacing annual flower beds with wildflower meadows and reducing mowing in appropriate locations.

### What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All wards

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

- 12 A comprehensive public consultation was undertaken on the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy to ensure the priorities set out in it effectively represented the opinions of local residents - over 2,000 people engaged with the consultation.
- 13 Plan on a Page consultation
- 13.1 For each park, the production of a plan on a page will involve an extensive consultation process as follows.
- 13.2 Initial proposals will be worked up by council officers including the site manager and technical officers which work regularly with ward members and local communities so have a good knowledge of the sites, how they are used and any key strengths and weaknesses.
- 13.3 Then the proposals are sent to ward members for comment.
- 13.4 Next, the first draft is finalised and published on the [Commonplace consultation website](#). It will remain open for comment for 3 months.
- 13.5 At this point, the consultation will be widely promoted through social media, posters on site, by contacting community committees, local community groups (such as Friends of, sports clubs, In Bloom groups, parish councils) and direct mailing of households nearby.
- 13.6 Contact details are provided so people who want a paper copy of the survey can get one without having to use the internet or can discuss the proposals with an officer over the phone.
- 13.7 Our lead Plan on a Page officer will also advertise times when he'll be on site, at the park, to talk to people directly about what they think about the park, he will be available on site on at least 2 occasions. If there are any events being held in the park during the timescale of the consultation (for example, Breeze), he will attend them as part of the consultation process.

- 13.8 Children and young people will be approached through local schools, youth clubs and family events.
- 13.9 Following the consultation process, a report will be produced outlining who responded to the consultation and what the findings were. This will be shared with ward members, interested community groups, key colleagues and consultees.
- 13.10 The findings of the consultation will then feed into the final version of the Plan on a Page which will be available to view online and on site.
- 13.11 The plans will be updated regularly as necessary (for example, if an issue arises with anti-social behaviour that requires a change to the plans).
- 14 The access audit was produced with reference to a number of guidance documents as described in point 4.6 above. Relevant colleagues and expert partners, as outlined in point 4.7 were also consulted and their comments reflected in the final document. The Disability Hub will be consulted at their next meeting in October.
- 15 The access audit process is currently Council-led but we are keen for local residents to be involved and are seeking volunteers to help us get a clear understanding of how accessible our sites are from a user-perspective.

### **What are the resource implications?**

- 16 Officer time is required to undertake the access audits and develop and consult on the Plans on a Page. To make it as efficient as possible, we will endeavour to ensure any other consultations planned for community parks, e.g. in relation to S106 spend or woodland planting, are included in the Plan on a Page consultations so there is no doubling up.
- 17 We believe that having an agreed plan in place for each park, that takes into consideration the priorities set out in the parks and green spaces strategy (e.g. Health and Wellbeing, Climate and Biodiversity and Culture), is the best way to deliver the goals set out in the Strategy and achieve our aim to provide the best parks in the UK.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 18 The key risk is not being able to deliver the Plans due to lack of resources. However, we believe that having agreed plans in place will facilitate park improvements by galvanising energy and resources around that plan.

### **What are the legal implications?**

- 19 None

## **Options, timescales and measuring success**

### **What other options were considered?**

- 20 The option of not developing Plans on a Page for our community parks was considered but it was decided that it is necessary to have a simple, agreed vision document for each park to enable us to deliver our agreed goal of having the best parks in the UK.
- 21 The option not to undertake access audits was considered but, it was felt that it was necessary to achieve our stated aim for our parks and green spaces to be accessible to everyone.

### **How will success be measured?**

- 22 Comprehensive access audit of all community parks complete in agreed timescale.

- 23 Plans on a Page for all community parks complete in agreed time scale following wide-reaching public consultation process.
- 24 Plans incorporate recommendations from access audit and research into the safety of women and girls as appropriate.
- 25 Improvements to parks made on the ground resulting in increased accessibility, use and enjoyment.

### **What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

- 26 The commitments in the Parks and Green Spaces strategy are as follows:
  - 26.1 Produce a plan on a page for each community park by 2032.
  - 26.2 Develop a process for auditing the accessibility of sites by 2025 (this action is complete).
  - 26.3 Collaborate on research to find out how safe women and girls feel in our green spaces and how safety might best be improved by 2025.
- 27 The Parks Technical Manager is responsible for implementation.

### **Appendices**

- 1 - *Plan on a Page* example
- 2 - Progress on Plans and Access Audits
- 3 - Access Audit template

### **Background papers**

- [Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2022 - 2032](#)
- [Commonplace online consultations for Plan on a Page.](#)
- [Findings of research: What makes our parks feel safe or unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire](#)
- [Safer parks guidance](#)