

Parks and Green Space Strategy: Draft Executive Summary

This Strategy sets out the key priorities to 2020 in achieving a vision where *quality, accessible parks and green spaces are at the heart of the community, designed to meet the needs of everyone who lives, works, visits or invests in Leeds, both now and in the future.*

Leeds has a rich heritage of parks and green spaces. This includes 7 major parks, 73 community parks, 91 recreation grounds and 472 hectares of local green space, which include 144 playgrounds and 500 sports facilities ranging from skateboard parks to golf courses, and which play host to 600 events annually. There are also 99 allotment sites, almost 800km of PROW, and 156 nature conservation sites, as well as 22 cemeteries and 3 crematoria.

Our parks and green space provide places to relax and escape, as well as exercise and recreation. They also help to build a sense of community. This is why they always score at the top of what people regard as important, whether they live in Leeds or are just visiting.

Parks and green space have a higher profile nationally since CABI Space was established in 2003, and their work has included gathering evidence that demonstrates how green spaces can offer lasting economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits. They have also highlighted many issues including the need for workforce development and an increase in skills profiles, the need for site based staff, attitudes to risk, how quality parks can influence behaviour and the need for evidence based performance management. These issues resonate at a local level, and fundamentally there is the need to find ways to ensure sustained investment which is ultimately the key to delivering this strategy.

The development of the Strategy has been informed by extensive consultation and a residents survey sent to adults, young people and children which over three years has reached 103,000 people. The analysis of the results has given an extensive picture of what Leeds residents think of their local parks and green spaces and has already been used as an evidence base to access funding and target improvements.

The Strategy is centred on the following themes and key aims:

- 1. Places for People:** To engage the community in promoting parks and green spaces as accessible places for everyone to experience and enjoy
- 2. Quality Places:** To provide good quality parks and green spaces that are well managed and provide a range of attractive facilities
- 3. Sustaining the Green Realm:** To plan for the development of new, and to protect existing parks and green spaces that will offer lasting social, cultural and environmental benefits for the people of Leeds
- 4. Creating a Healthier City:** To promote parks and green spaces as places to improve health and well-being and prevent disease through physical activity, play, relaxation, and contemplation
- 5. An Enabler for Regeneration:** To promote liveability and the economic benefits of quality parks and green space provision as an integral part of major regeneration projects
- 6. Delivering the Strategy:** To engage partners in supporting and delivering the Parks and Green Space Strategy

The themes set out the overriding aims of the strategy, but are not exclusive or self-contained. There are also broader strands that cut across each theme, for example biodiversity which is about the sustainable management of the living environment, which in turn enhances the physical and mental well-being of people's lives.

It is important to recognise that there is a considerable amount of work that is ongoing in sustaining and delivering improvements to parks and green space. This strategy seeks to acknowledge this, but also importantly identify key challenges and priorities in addressing them that will require specific commitments from the Council as the lead agency in this sector. This executive summary therefore focuses more specifically on the critical success factors that will lead to the improvements that are needed.

Challenges and Key Proposals

The strategy has involved many stakeholders in a number of events along with a wide reaching resident survey and assessment against the Green Flag standard. The themes themselves are suggestive of the key challenges faced and the following section sets this out in more detail.

1. Places for People

Putting people first. This is about telling people what is on offer and that in many cases it is free, and also about looking at quality facilities that enhance visitor experience, and where there is a cost, to provide value for money. Fundamentally it is about marketing parks and green spaces more effectively. The lack of staff presence in many parks also remains a problem.

Proposals

- 1 We will consult with communities to ensure our parks and green spaces have appropriate information and facilities that make them good places to visit
- 2 We will aim to increase awareness and provide information and opportunities for everyone to access services
- 3 We will work with partners in developing facilities and action to promote community safety in our parks and green spaces
- 4 We will promote parks and green space as places for education and learning
- 5 We will promote and support well managed events and activities
- 6 We will promote City and Country parks as visitor attractions, attracting people to Leeds as a place to visit, live, work and do business
- 7 We will guide and influence public agencies, private landowners and community groups to work within the parameters of the Parks and Green Space Strategy
- 8 We will engage with communities and encourage and enable people to get involved in developing our parks and green space

2. Quality Places

Improving the condition of parks and green spaces. This is particularly true of community parks, which receive a large number of visits from local people. Areas of concern relate to features that make a park or green space worthwhile to visit. The decline in horticultural skills has been identified as a national issue and this is also true in Leeds.

Proposals

- 9 We will develop an investment strategy through our asset management plan to maximise opportunity for sustained investment in our parks and green space
- 10 We will seek to prioritise our revenue funding to focus on management of quality places for recreation and conservation
- 11 We will develop a series of strategies that fulfil the aims of the Parks and Green Space Strategy
- 12 We will facilitate a workforce equipped with the skills and knowledge to lead and manage the implementation of the Parks and Green Space Strategy
- 13 We will aim to improve all our parks and green spaces as measured against the Green Flag standard for field based assessment
- 14 We will aspire to all of our community parks meeting the Green Flag standard for field based assessment by 2020

3. Sustaining the Green Realm

Access to quality green space. This is a particular issue in areas of deprivation where often there is a lack of quantity as well as quality, for which a green space audit and needs assessment will provide further information. Access to burial space is also a pressing issue.

The importance of parks and green space in adapting to climate change. With hotter summers and more frequent extreme weather events predicted, parks and green space can play an important role in adapting to climate change and reducing the effects of surface water run-off, particularly in dense urban environments.

Proposals

- 15 We will aspire to the Council's parks and green space for recreation or conservation, to be managed as a single green estate
- 16 We will conserve and improve parks, playing fields, natural green space and woodland
- 17 We will use our parks and green spaces as an important resource in adapting to climate change
- 18 We will encourage conservation and biodiversity to flourish in appropriate areas within the green realm
- 19 We will promote and develop green corridors for recreation, conservation and sustainable transport

20 We will seek ways to provide and manage burial space in a sustainable way

4. Creating a Healthier City

People need to be more healthy. Parks and green spaces provide opportunity for freely accessible physical activity, primarily walking, that have proven benefits to health. Parks and green space should be at the forefront of thinking to introduce people to physical activity of a broad nature from participation in formal sport to informal recreation.

Proposals

- 21 We will promote and publicise the health and well-being benefits of parks and green spaces
- 22 We will contribute to the West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan by providing sustainable transport routes in parks and green spaces
- 23 We will promote the health messages of walking and seek to develop health walk routes in our parks and green spaces
- 24 We will enhance opportunities for active recreation within parks and green spaces

5. An Enabler for Regeneration

Increasing the quantity of parks and green space in the City Centre. Despite the huge investment by developers in the city centre, the amount and quality of green space has not kept pace. This is a particular challenge given that many of the dwellings do not have gardens and therefore access to green space should be addressed to ensure the sustainability and attractiveness of city centre living for a diverse range of prospective residents, visitors and workers.

Increasing the quality and where necessary, quantity of parks and green space in regeneration areas. These include West Leeds Gateway (of which West Leeds Country Park and Green Gateways initiative encompasses this), EASEL, Aire Valley, Beeston Hill and Holbeck.

Proposals

- 25 We will aspire to develop a city centre park during the life of this strategy
- 26 We will aspire to increase access to green space within the core city centre area
- 27 We will consult with the community and seek ways to increase access to quality parks and green space in areas of deprivation
- 28 We will promote access to parks and green space by seeking to expand the West Leeds Country Parks and Green Gateways initiative to other areas of the city
- 29 We will promote the economic value of good quality parks and green space
- 30 We will develop the concept of parks as community hubs

Delivering the Strategy

Proposals

31 We will establish a parks and green space forum that will meet annually to consider progress made on the delivery of the strategy

Measuring Progress

The Green Flag Award Scheme represents the national standard for parks and green spaces. It has been developed around eight key criteria as follows:

- A welcoming place
- Healthy, safe & secure
- Clean & well maintained
- Sustainability
- Conservation & heritage
- Community involvement
- Marketing
- Management

The scheme is applicable to a range of sites including parks, recreation grounds, nature conservation sites, woodlands and cemeteries. The award is a measure of a well managed site, not excellence in every respect.

A local key indicator has been included in the Leeds Local Area Agreement in order to 'improve the quality and sustainability of the built and natural environment', namely *the % of Parks and Countryside sites assessed that meet the Green Flag Standard*. In 2007/08, 17% of all sites assessed met the standard. The % of community parks reaching the standard in 2007/08 is 9.8% of all community parks. Proposal 14 outlined above sets out an aspiration for 100% of community parks to reach the standard by 2020.