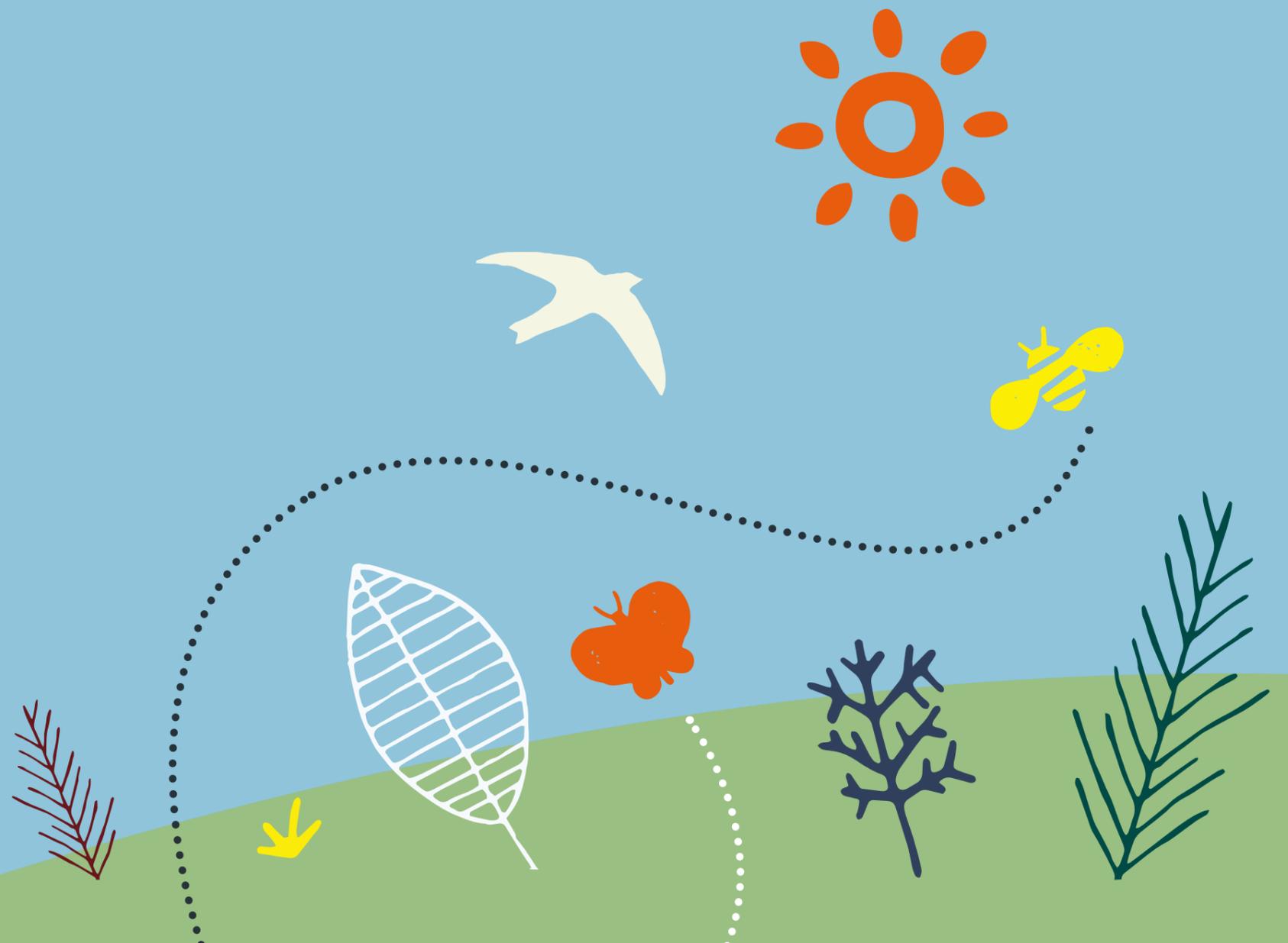


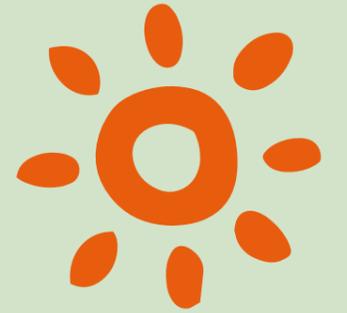
LEEDS PARKS & GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

2022 - 2032

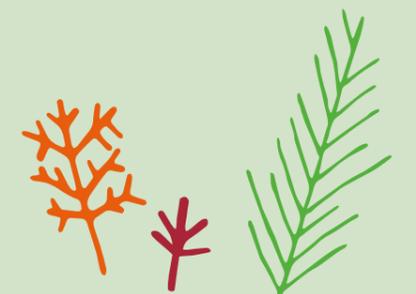
We aim to provide the Best Parks and
Green Spaces in the UK



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FOREWORD

“The measure of any great civilization is its cities, and a measure of a city's greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and squares”

John Ruskin.

This quote eloquently expresses how important public parks and green spaces are in urban areas – they are an essential component of great cities that people want to live in.

Public parks and green spaces have many benefits, particularly for health and wellbeing as I'm sure we all recognise following our recent experience of the Covid 19 pandemic. And they have also been shown to make positive contributions to climate change, social cohesion, clean air, culture, wildlife, local history and the economy.

I am proud of the fantastic parks, woodlands, nature reserves and other green spaces that we have in Leeds and would like to express my gratitude to the volunteers, partner organisations and staff for all the work they do to maintain and improve them. From the award-winning city parks like Roundhay and Temple Newsam to the local community sites like Cross Flatts park and Springhead park, they provide a wide range of facilities for people with a variety of different interests, from playing sport to bird watching, skateboarding to gentle walking- they have something for everyone.

This strategy sets out how Leeds City Council will manage our parks and green spaces over the next 10 years to build on the excellent provision we already have. I am really looking forward to seeing it implemented to provide good quality, inclusive, enjoyable and sustainable public green spaces for their many benefits for public health and happiness, climate, nature and the wider environment.

I am sure its delivery will make a significant contribution to the achievement of the council's ambition to be the 'Best City in the UK'!

**Councillor James Lewis -
Leader of Leeds City Council**



As suggested by Councillor Lewis in his comments, parks and green spaces are key to the delivery of our ambition for Leeds to be the 'Best City in the UK,' by ensuring it is a place where people want to live and enjoy visiting.

Leeds City Council, Parks and Countryside Service manages approximately 4,000 hectares of public green space including cemeteries, public rights of way, sports pitches, parks, nature reserves, woodlands and allotments. These sites are distributed across the city so everyone can enjoy their benefits, and research has shown that over 90% of Leeds residents have visited a park at least once in the last year. This is great news given the wealth of evidence highlighting the health and wellbeing benefits of spending time in green spaces.

This strategy sets out how these sites will be managed for the next 10 years to maximise their potential to benefit the people of Leeds.

The goal of getting all our 63 local community parks to a quality standard is particularly important because they are the sites used most often by Leeds residents and they are free to access and provide a wide range of facilities so there is something for everyone. Research has shown that people are more likely to use good quality green spaces and thus gain the health and wellbeing benefits of spending time in them. I welcome the approach of prioritising improving the quality of parks in the more deprived areas of the city (especially in those where many people don't have their own garden) where current health outcomes tend to be worse.

Given the council's Climate Emergency declaration, I also think the commitment to 'Climate and Biodiversity' in the strategy is very important, particularly the ambitious target of planting 200,000 trees a year across the city for the next 10 years.

Without running through the whole document in detail, I would also like to draw attention to a couple of the other initiatives in there. 'Access for All' is highlighted as a priority in the strategy to ensure everyone can easily use the sites and feels welcome when they get there. For example, it is important to ensure green spaces are as physically accessible as possible, so people with disabilities are able to enjoy them and, in light of recent events, I am very pleased that the Parks and Countryside Service will be involved in a project that aims to ensure women and girls feel safe when using green spaces so they are not excluded from them by real or perceived danger.

Again, highlighting the benefits of spending time in green spaces for physical and mental health I very much support the prioritisation of 'Child-Friendly' parks and green spaces – at a time when health problems like obesity and anxiety are reaching concerning levels in young people across the country, I can't think of a better goal for a city that aims to be 'Child-Friendly' than 'Providing green spaces that children and teenagers love to visit.'

I would like to conclude by thanking those individual volunteers and organisations that support the work of the Parks and Countryside service and those people who responded to the consultation on the strategy, we look forward to continuing to work with you to deliver our vision to provide the 'Best Parks and Green Spaces in the UK'.

**Councillor Salma Arif -
Executive Member for
Public Health and
Active Lifestyles**



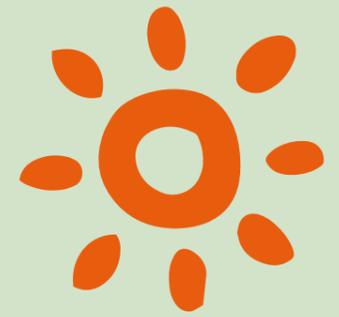
INTRODUCTION

Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Strategy

This strategy sets out a vision for Leeds City Council's Parks and Countryside Service, and the actions that we will undertake to deliver that vision over the next 10 years. It focusses on how local public green spaces such as parks, nature reserves and cemeteries, and related facilities (such as playgrounds, tennis courts, animal attractions, footpaths and cafes) will be managed going forward.

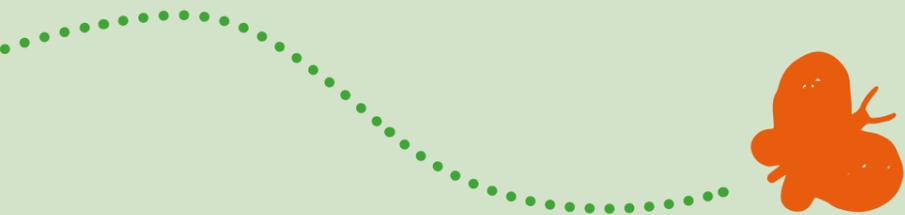
In recent times, and especially during the coronavirus pandemic, people in the UK have increasingly come to recognise the value of urban public green space, particularly its huge benefits to health and wellbeing, wildlife and the environment. A parliamentary inquiry into public parks in 2017 concluded that: 'Parks and green spaces are treasured assets and are often central to the lives of their communities. They provide opportunities for leisure, relaxation and exercise, but are also fundamental to community cohesion, physical and mental health and wellbeing, biodiversity, climate change mitigation and local economic growth'. We are keen to ensure that public green spaces in Leeds continue to deliver such benefits and this strategy will help achieve that.

The priorities set out below have emerged from a combination of public consultation, national and local research and other local plans and strategies (see References section).



“Parks are a vital part of the contemporary city that serve and enable a wide range of public benefits to the environment, health and well-being, education and social cohesion.”

**The Future Prospects of Urban Public Parks,
University of Leeds, 2017**





LEEDS CITY COUNCIL PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE



Sites and facilities:



4,000+
hectares of
green space



857km
of public
rights of way



7
major parks



24
cemeteries
and 3 crematoria



101
allotment
sites



200
grass football
pitches



156
nature
conservation sites



63
community parks



170
playgrounds



62
bowling greens



73
outdoor gyms and
multi-use games areas



90
tennis courts



24
skate parks



1
plant nursery



2
zoos



1
farm



10
cafés and shops



6 million+
trees

Natural capital*



£598m
contributed by Leeds parks
per year in mental and
physical health benefits



£21
per park visit delivered on
average by health and
wellbeing services



£831k
value of CO₂ removed
by Leeds parks each year

*Vivid Economics, 2020

Communities



45million
adult visits to
parks every year



650+
public events in
parks every year



2,000+
volunteers help to care for
green spaces each year



30,000+
children visit green spaces
on school trips every year



88%**
park users in Leeds describe spending
time in parks as either 'essential' or
'important' to their quality of life

**University of Leeds, 2018



Vision

Our vision is to provide the best parks and green spaces in the UK

As residents will know, we already have fantastic parks and green spaces in Leeds, with 77% of *Leeds Parks Survey* respondents describing their last visit to a local park as 'very pleasant'.

By focussing on the 8 priorities set out in this document, we believe we can achieve our goal of providing the best parks and green spaces in the UK within the next 10 years.

"I think the parks in Leeds are brilliant. They are beautiful and have provided many memories for me and my family. I visit the park at least every week. It is a lovely place. Thank you to everyone who works to look after the parks in Leeds."

Respondent to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy consultation 2020



Priorities

In this document we have set out 8 priorities for the Parks and Countryside service along with the actions required to deliver them. At times, the actions have benefits that make a significant contribution to more than one of the priorities (for example, supporting walking can benefit both public health and the climate) but we have not repeated them because we wanted to keep the document as succinct as possible.



Quality

Providing high quality parks and green spaces.

We aim to deliver high quality parks and green spaces as measured by the international *Green Flag* and local, *Leeds Quality Park* (LQP) standards. These measures use widely accepted criteria such as ‘welcoming’, ‘clean and well maintained’ and ‘healthy, safe and secure’ to assess the quality of green spaces.

In Leeds, we have been using this approach to assess and improve our community parks for over 10 years and, as a consequence of prioritising in this way, we have significantly increased the quality of our most popular green spaces (with 73% of community parks currently achieving LQP standard, compared to 22% in 2010).

“Our findings indicate that public parks that meet designated quality standards are associated with enriched visitor experiences, satisfaction and wellbeing.”

**Leeds Parks Survey report,
University of Leeds, 2018**

The reasons we have decided to continue to prioritise quality green spaces are as follows:

- Research by the University of Leeds showed a link between park quality and user satisfaction- residents’ favourite parks are more likely to have passed, than failed, LQP and regular users of LQP parks report higher levels of satisfaction than do regular users of parks that do not achieve the LQP standard.
- Prioritising quality will also help tackle some of the key issues highlighted by our public consultation ahead of producing this strategy, including concerns about maintenance, the quality of parks infrastructure and anti-social behaviour.
- Research (by CABE Space) has shown that, as the quality of green space increases, the incidence of anti-social behaviour tends to decrease.
- The number one priority for local green spaces identified in the survey of 6,432 local residents undertaken by University of Leeds in 2016 was ‘Keeping Parks Clean’ – this will be addressed through our focus on quality.
- Residents, volunteer groups and local ward councillors recognise the value of this approach and support it.

“We recommend that priority is given to raising the standard of parks across the city to ensure access to good quality green space for all residents and visitors.”

**Leeds Parks Survey report,
University of Leeds, 2018**

To provide the resources to get parks to the LQP standard where significant investment is required (e.g. for paths, sports facilities or playgrounds) we will continue to use S106 developers’ contributions where possible. And where such funding is not available (often for inner-city parks, that tend to benefit least from developers’ contributions because there is less space for development in inner city areas) we are keen to establish a ‘strategic investment fund’ to help raise their standards.

As part of this quality aspiration, and to support the delivery of the other priorities in this strategy, we also intend to develop a management plan ‘on a page’ for each community park in consultation with the local community. These plans, set out on two sides of A3, will establish a clear vision for each park and will be used by the council and partners to help us deliver our ‘Best Parks’ vision. The larger, more complex, city parks (like Temple Newsam and Middleton Park) will continue to have full management plans set out in the format required by the Green Flag Award.

In recognition of the fact that the strategy consultation showed that some types of anti-social behaviour (particularly in relation to dogs and litter) are an issue for green space users, we also plan to develop and implement evidence-based approaches to tackling these matters along with key partners, such as *Safer Leeds*, at sites where such problems are particularly acute.

Lastly, as part of our commitment to quality, we are planning to achieve national standards for our visitor attractions (at Tropical World, Lotherton and Temple Newsam) and for animal welfare at our registered zoos and farm.

“Local authorities should invest in the good design, staffing and maintenance of public spaces to prevent and tackle problems of anti-social behaviour.”

Preventing Anti-social Behaviour in Public spaces, CABE Space, 2004

“I feel very lucky living near Springhead Park, Temple Newsam and Lotherton Hall, and hope to continue enjoying these spaces for many years to come. It is so important that they are protected and continue to be maintained to such a high standard.”

“I would like to see... ‘Investment and commitment to create safe, maintained facilities for the people of Leeds.’”

“The parks in Leeds are excellent and in general very well maintained. For me the issue is continuing to maintain the parks well.”

Respondents to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy consultation 2020.

Quality

Providing high quality parks and green spaces.

Goals	Actions	Timescale*
For all city parks to retain the Green Flag award for the life of strategy.	Continue to use the Green Flag criteria as a best practice guide to managing Temple Newsam, Roundhay Park, Chevin Forest Park, Golden Acre Park, Kirkstall Abbey and Middleton Park.	Ongoing
For all community parks to reach Leeds Quality Park standard during the life of the strategy.	Area based operational teams to prioritise community parks.	Long
	Continue to target S106 and other suitable external funding on community parks where possible.	Ongoing
	Establish a strategic investment fund to improve parks and green spaces in areas most in need.	Medium
For all cemeteries and crematoria to reach Leeds Quality Park standard during the life of the strategy.	Bereavement services and operational teams to work together to get all sites to LQP standard.	Long
	Ensure all relevant staff and apprentices have a good understanding of the LQP standard (through training) and that the LQP judging process involves a wide range of staff from across the service.	Medium
For all community parks to have a 'plan on a page'.	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.	Long
For Parks and Countryside visitor attractions to meet the Visit England Quality Assurance Standard.	Use the Visit England Quality Assurance Standard as a good practice guide to managing our visitor attractions at Temple Newsam, Lotherton and Roundhay Park.	Short
To have excellent animal welfare standards in our zoos and at Home Farm.	Ensure our zoos meet the standards set out in the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 and that Home Farm meets standards set out in Animal Welfare Act (2006), Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 and the Animal Welfare (licencing	Ongoing
To reduce anti-social behaviour and ensure people feel safe in our public green spaces.	Develop an evidence-based approach to tackling issues with dogs to be targeted at problem sites as necessary.	Medium
	Develop an evidence-based approach to tackling litter to be targeted at problem sites as necessary.	Short
	Work with Safer Leeds to target anti-social behaviour hotspots as necessary.	Ongoing

*Timescale for delivery: Short = 1 – 3 years, Medium = 4 – 6 years, Long = 7 – 10 years.

Quality case study: Cross Flatts Park

Cross Flatts Park in Beeston is a fantastic example of a local community park that meets the LQP standard. The park contains a range of facilities for visitors including a large playground, accessible paths and benches, an outdoor gym, a community café, a multi-use games area, sports pitches, a community orchard and a bowling green.

The park hosts over 1 million visits a year, and 75% of survey respondents who described Cross Flatts Park as their 'main' park said they were satisfied with it. It also has a very active 'Friends' group who work alongside *Beeston in Bloom* and Leeds City Council, to care for the park.

Various community events take place in the park including the Beeston Festival, a Christmas lantern festival, an annual dog show and Parkrun – these, along with the range of facilities at the park, help to improve social cohesion by bringing people from the diverse local communities together.



Climate and biodiversity

Increasing wildlife and biodiversity and reducing the impact of climate change.

We aim to provide green spaces that are full of nature and wildlife and that will help reduce the likelihood and impact of climate change. We will do this by planting thousands of trees on our sites every year and by protecting, enhancing and creating other wildlife habitats such as meadows, ponds and hedgerows.

“Respondents agreed that tackling climate change (94.3%), becoming a carbon neutral city (91.6%) and protecting the diversity of wildlife (95.5%) should be a priority for the city”

Big Leeds Climate Conversation Report (based on the consultation of over 7,000 local residents) 2019

“We recognise the range of important services provided by parks, such as air quality improvement, urban cooling, carbon sequestration (and) sustainable urban drainage”

Government response to Parliamentary Inquiry into Public Parks, 2017

The main reasons we have decided to prioritise climate and biodiversity are as follows:

- Parks and green spaces in Leeds provide homes, food and connectivity for much-loved wildlife, from more common species like many native birds, butterflies and bluebells to rarer, more threatened species such as glow worms, harvest mice and bats. As green space managers, we believe we have a responsibility to manage our sites in a way that not only protects wild plants and animals but allows them to thrive.
- At a time when wildlife and biodiversity is threatened in the UK and across the globe (e.g. over 97% of all flower-rich grasslands have been lost in England since the 1930s; 57% of UK butterfly species have declined in abundance since the 1970s and several very common bird species have dramatically declined in numbers- the RSPB have reported that starlings and house sparrows have declined by 71% and 60% respectively since the 1970s), we are keen to do all we can in Leeds to protect and increase our local wildlife.
- Nature and wildlife are very important to the public – for example, in responses to the consultation on this strategy, nature and wildlife was the most popular response to the questions ‘Why are public parks and green spaces important to you?’ and ‘What do you think the best things about public parks and green spaces in Leeds are?’ And answers themed around implementing a more wildlife/environment/climate-friendly approach to management of our green spaces was the most popular response to the question ‘What positive changes would you like to see in our parks and green spaces over the next 10 years?’
- There is evidence that peoples’ mental wellbeing increases along with the species richness of their environment.
- In 2019, Leeds City Council declared a Climate Emergency and committed to make the city carbon neutral by 2030 as our contribution to achieving no more than a 1.5°C global temperature increase. The Parks and Countryside service will contribute to this goal by planting 50 hectares of woodland (around 200,000 carbon-absorbing trees) a year for the life of this strategy and beyond.

- As well as trees and other plants absorbing carbon, green spaces will increasingly be required to play a role in mitigating extreme weather events caused by climate change such as flooding and high temperatures (vegetation slows down water flow and rainwater can be captured in ponds and lakes; trees and shrubs can provide much needed shade in hot weather).

“Here in the UK, 40% of species are in decline, more than 40 million birds have been lost from our skies over the past 50 years, and a quarter of mammals are threatened with extinction including many once common species, such as the hedgehog. These ongoing declines, on top of earlier losses since the industrial revolution have led to the UK becoming one of the most nature-depleted nations on Earth. We still have many important habitats and species, and beautiful patches of nature to enjoy, but these are a shadow of what we would have if we recovered nature.”

Nature Positive 2030 summary report, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 2021

Climate and biodiversity

Increasing wildlife and biodiversity and reducing the impact of climate change.



Climate and Biodiversity

“Being in, and observing, the natural world is integral to the wellbeing benefits of parks and green spaces. They should therefore be planted and managed to provide a wide range of habitats and opportunities for people to notice nature. Investments in parks should provide additional opportunities to build human connections with the natural world.”

**Space to Thrive,
Heritage Lottery Fund report, 2018**

We are also keen to provide opportunities for people, particularly children and young adults, to learn about local wildlife, the benefits of green space for the environment (e.g. for climate and clean air) and how they can help look after them, with the aim of ensuring our commitment to biodiversity and climate is sustainable and will be maintained by future generations. We will continue to do this through interpretation (e.g. information signs), education sessions and events and activities such as tree planting, pond dipping and bug hunting.

This priority also includes our aspiration to minimise any negative impact the Parks and Countryside service may have on the environment. We will eliminate the use of peat from our gardening operations so we aren't damaging rare peatland habitats, minimise pesticide use and continue to implement council-wide efforts to reduce carbon use and air pollution, save energy, minimise waste (particularly single-use plastic) and recycle.

Lastly, we recognise the benefits of local food-growing for the environment, food security and health and wellbeing so we are going to produce a management plan for our allotment sites to ensure they are managed in a way that maximises their potential as a community resource. In addition, we will continue to support local community food-growing projects (such as community orchards) by identifying suitable spaces for them in our green spaces wherever possible.

(Leeds parks) “Would be hugely improved if they were more varied, with more woodland, meadows, scrubland, community orchards etc. Obviously keep some mown areas but make them more varied and interesting.”

“More trees, more shrubs, more wildflowers, more habitats for wildlife. Log piles, leaf piles, conservation areas...Less mowing, cutting, tiding.”

“More scrub, more wildflowers, more nurturing of habitats”

“Space for wildlife to thrive with information boards. Not small token gesture areas. More trees! Information on climate emergency in parks. Electric charging points.”

“Tree planting schemes and wildflower meadows created along with other habitats so as to improve species diversity”

Respondents to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy consultation 2020.

Climate and biodiversity case study: Moortown Park

Moortown Park is a relatively small local community park that was opened in December 2018. It was designed in consultation with the local community and has features which benefit both people and the environment.

Climate and biodiversity-friendly features include trees at different stages of maturity, wildflower meadows and having areas of scrub around the edges. Bug hotels and an area to hold water after heavy rainfall were also designed into the park. Facilities for people, which were constructed with environmental considerations in mind, include a timber playground, picnic benches, accessible footpaths and areas of short mown grass for activities like ball games. Since opening, the park has quickly become popular with a wide variety of local people, from children using the playground and making dens among the shrubs, to dog walkers.

An event to celebrate the park's opening was organised by the Friends of Moortown Park. It took place in summer 2019, and was attended by over 500 people, demonstrating how popular this kind of environment-friendly public green space can be.



Goals	Actions	Timescale*
To plant 50 hectares of woodland each year.	Identify and design suitable sites for woodland creation each year in consultation with ward members and the local community.	Ongoing
	Seek external funding to support tree planting.	Ongoing
	Plant 50 hectares of woodland per year.	Ongoing
For all our woodland management to meet the UK Forestry Standard and the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.	Manage woodlands in line with the standards and have them assessed as required.	Ongoing
To increase the quantity, quality, size, variety and connectedness of wildlife habitats (e.g. woodlands, meadows, ponds, hedgerows) on our green spaces.	Management plans for community and city parks to set out minimum of 25% wildlife habitat (where reasonable).	Long
	Reduce the area of seasonal bedding in our green spaces and replace them with more wildlife-friendly alternatives.	Short
	Seek to increase knowledge and understanding of nature conservation in the Parks and Countryside team through recruitment and training.	Medium
	Produce nature conservation management plans for all our green spaces with wildlife designation (SSSIs, LNRs, LWS).	Long
	Work with partners and volunteers to implement management plans at designated sites.	Ongoing
	Regular monitoring of designated sites to ensure valuable habitats are not being lost.	Long
	Seek and use external funding to deliver the management plans from grants and developers' contributions related to Biodiversity Net Gain.	Ongoing
	Develop and implement an Ash Dieback Management & Recovery Plan to ensure the loss of ash trees from the disease doesn't have a negative impact on biodiversity and the climate.	Short
To eliminate the use of peat in our operations.	Stop selling compost with peat in it at the Arium. Only purchase plants from suppliers who don't use peat. (Peat isn't used as a growing medium at the Arium).	Medium
To provide well-managed allotment sites across the city to facilitate local food-growing.	Produce and deliver a Leeds City Council Allotment Management Plan.	Short
To minimise any negative impact the Parks and Countryside Service has on the environment.	Continue to review Parks and Countryside operations (including those of external providers) and implement all viable means to minimise impact on environment e.g. by using electric vehicles where possible, minimising the use of pesticides, stopping using single-use plastic cups and straws at our cafés.	Ongoing
For our zoos to retain the BIAZA (British Association for Zoos and Aquariums) accreditation for conservation of the natural world and education.	Continue to manage zoos to BIAZA standards.	Ongoing
To provide activities (including school visits) for over 5,000 children and adults a year to inspire them about nature and teach them about local wildlife, climate change, and how they can help (including anti-litter message).	Continue to promote and deliver our education programme.	Ongoing
	To promote wildlife-friendly gardening and local food growing at the Arium through selling relevant seeds and plants and providing associated educational information.	Short
	When planning new developments, consider ways to integrate environmental improvements and environmental education into the scheme.	Ongoing

*Timescale for delivery: Short = 1 – 3 years, Medium = 4 – 6 years, Long = 7 – 10 years.



Access for all

Ensuring that parks and green spaces are accessible to everyone.

Access for all

Ensuring that parks and green spaces are accessible to everyone.

We aim to provide public green spaces that are welcoming and easy to visit so that everyone can use them. We also aim to provide something for everyone, no matter what their interests (which could range from horticulture to tennis, skateboarding to bird watching, running to fishing...and so on) so that everyone can enjoy spending time in our green spaces.

The reasons we have decided to prioritise ‘access for all’ are:

- Leeds City Council manage parks and green spaces as a public service and, as such, it is important to us to provide facilities for *all* the people of Leeds, no matter what their physical abilities, backgrounds and interests are. This fits with the Council’s core value of ‘Treating People Fairly.’ Evidence shows that the vast majority of people of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and physical abilities use our parks and we would like to keep it that way!
- Some respondents to the consultation on this strategy told us that they would like physical access to be improved in some locations, with requests including better paths, improved wheelchair access and more benches and toilets.

- By providing shared spaces where a wide range of people can spend time in each other’s company, evidence suggests that public green spaces can help reduce social isolation and improve community cohesion, contributing to one of Leeds City Council’s priorities of creating ‘Safer, stronger communities’.
- Providing accessible parks also contributes to the Council’s goal of making Leeds an ‘Age Friendly City’ and the ‘best city to grow old in’ by providing opportunities for older people to be ‘healthy, active and included’ and making public spaces ‘accessible, safe, clean and welcoming’. In our consultations with older people we have found that their priorities for green spaces are just as varied as those from other age groups (for example, consultation respondents over 65 were very keen on increasing biodiversity, reducing anti-social behaviour and ensuring parks are well maintained) but that they do also comment on access requirements – particularly the need for benches, good quality paths, wheelchair access and car parking for people with disabilities.

In this priority, we are committing to provide good levels of accessibility as a minimum at all our city and community parks and cemeteries and crematoria. We also aim to ensure good quality information about our sites is available on the internet so people can easily find out what’s available and plan their visits.

“Urban green spaces can be disabling environments for people with impairments. Studies of the experiences of people with a mobility impairment found that the interviewees placed a high value on physical closeness to nature and that a lack of accessibility could lead to exclusion from green spaces. The constraints included lack of information about accessibility in terms of paths, obstacles, parking and toilets.”

Out of Bounds, Equity in Access to Urban Nature, Groundwork, 2021

At our visitor attractions at Tropical World, Home Farm (at Temple Newsam) and Lotherton, where entry charges are necessary, we will offer concessions to make sure all local residents are able to visit them. We will also work hard to increase the diversity of our workforce with the aim of ensuring our team is representative of the population it serves.



Access for all

‘Greens’pace should be designed for a variety of user interests and capabilities.

Engaging the community in the design process is important. Often small details can make a big difference to those with health or mobility needs, and these groups can provide valuable insights that might be overlooked by those not directly affected.’

**Improving Access to Green Space - A New Review,
Public Health England, 2020**

In light of recent national events highlighting issues with the safety of women and girls in public spaces, we are keen to ensure that no one is excluded from our sites because they don't feel safe so we are going to work with partners to explore feelings of safety in local parks and green spaces, and identify and implement means to improve safety where appropriate.

Providing ‘something for everyone’ in terms of facilities ranging from specialist gardens to playgrounds, cafés to nature reserves, farm animals to bowling greens (and so on) is a theme throughout this document and is covered under a number of priorities, especially Health and Wellbeing, Child-friendly Leeds and Culture.

“I'd like them (green spaces) to be more inclusive. So more walking routes that are accessible for people in wheelchairs or with reduced mobility.”

“More benches for disabled people like me, elderly, parents - for people to rest and relax.”

“More spaces for all types of people to enjoy”

“Open and accessible to all people of all ages”

“That they continue to be used by a large cross-section of the Leeds community”

**Respondents to Parks and Green Spaces
Strategy consultation 2020.**

Access for all case study: Golden Acre park

As at all our major parks, we work hard to ensure Golden Acre Park is accessible so it can be enjoyed by everyone. There are accessible parking spaces for Blue Badge Holders, plenty of wide, flat paths dotted with benches, toilets for disabled people including a ‘Changing Places’ facility, a fully accessible café, and mobility scooters are available to hire for free. The goal is to make it as easy as possible for people of all abilities to enjoy this beautiful green space.



Goals	Actions	Timescale*
All parks and cemeteries & crematoria to be judged as 'good' (score 7) or higher in 'equal access for all' LQP/Green Flag criteria	To develop a process for auditing the accessibility of our sites.	Short
	To undertake an access audit of all city and community parks every 5 years.	Long
	Feed findings from access audits into 'Plan on a Page' for each community park.	Long
	Seek and use external funding for access improvements.	Medium
	Provide training for relevant Parks and Countryside staff on what makes a truly accessible green space.	Medium
	Design all new developments to be fully accessible by applying the guidance set out in BS8300 2018 where possible.	Ongoing
To ensure our parks and green spaces are welcoming and accessible for older people.	Review number of parking bays for people with disabilities, and bench numbers and locations when putting together plans on a page.	Long
To continue to provide well maintained, accessible public toilets in all our city parks and the Arium.	Install a Changing Places toilet as part of new developments at Tropical World.	Short
	New city centre park (Aire Park) will include accessible public toilets.	Short
To provide correct, up to date and easy to understand information about our sites online.	Get correct, up to date information about all our city parks and the Arium on Euan's Guide website.	Short
	Produce and share an access statement (which sets out what people need to know to decide if a site is suitable for them to visit) for all city parks.	Short
For access to our visitor attractions to remain affordable	Ensure there is good quality information about all our community and city parks, cemeteries and crematoria and local nature reserves available on the internet.	Short
	Discounts on entry to be offered at our visitor attractions for those least able to pay e.g through Leeds card Extra.	Ongoing
For our parks and green spaces to feel safe and welcoming for girls and women.	Collaborate on research to find out how safe women and girls feel in our green spaces and how safety might best be improved.	Short
For our parks and green spaces to provide something for all Leeds residents.	Continue to consider access for all when planning all new developments and proposing major decisions.	Ongoing
To increase the diversity of the workforce in the Parks & Countryside team at every level in the service.	Work with Leeds City Council HR team to produce and implement a plan for diversifying our workforce through the recruitment process.	Long

*Timescale for delivery: Short = 1 – 3 years, Medium = 4 – 6 years, Long = 7 – 10 years.



Culture

Providing exciting, diverse, interesting and enjoyable green spaces that reflect the history and culture of their local communities.

Culture

Providing exciting, diverse, interesting and enjoyable green spaces that reflect the history and culture of their local communities.

We define culture as the distinctive character of a city and its localities, created by what people do there – things like art, music, events, sport, history and science. Our aim is for our parks and green spaces to be cultural hubs – centres of interest, enjoyment and activity that bring communities together and attract visitors from further afield to benefit the economy through tourism.

We believe that having a good cultural offer makes cities more interesting and exciting places to live in and visit, and that parks and green spaces can contribute to that through their visitor attractions, events, specialist gardens, cafés, historical features, walking and cycling routes, play and sports facilities, education and interpretation etc.

The main reasons we have decided culture should be a priority for the Parks and Countryside service are:

- Culture is a priority in Leeds City Council's Best Council Plan and we believe parks and green spaces can make a significant contribution to 'ensuring that culture can be created and experienced by anyone' because they are local, accessible, free and almost everyone uses them.

- We also think we can contribute to the Council's goal of 'enhancing the image of Leeds through major events and attractions'. For example, in 2019 (pre-Covid) our parks hosted two of the biggest events in the city with the Ed Sheeran concerts and Leeds West Indian Carnival attracting over 250,000 people between them. In terms of attractions, Roundhay Park and Temple Newsam come second and third on Trip Advisor's *Top Attractions in Leeds* list, hosting over 11 million (adult) visits a year.
- Evidence suggests that good parks can boost the tourist economy of a city- *Visit Britain* found that, of the 31 million tourists visiting Britain, over a third visit a park or garden.
- Respondents to our consultation on this strategy said that they would like to see more visitor facilities on our sites including more cafés, more art, more cycling routes, more sports facilities and more events and activities.
- The University of Leeds survey of residents revealed that 'events and activities for local communities' was a top five priority for residents in relation to parks.
- We believe that making parks and green spaces engaging, exciting and reflective of the communities around them will increase use of them so more people will benefit in terms of health and wellbeing and social cohesion outcomes.



"Parks are places where history is made, both in terms of major public events–political rallies, mass meetings and civic celebrations– and in terms of people's intimate lives–their romances, friendships, family outings and personal commemorations..."

Leeds Parks Study, University of Leeds, 2017

"Parks should be seen as social as well as physical infrastructure. This means that as well as investing in and maintaining high quality physical environments, funders should also support the activities that animate green spaces and encourage people to use them. Investment should support activities that increase community engagement and bring different social groups together."

Space to Thrive, University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University, 2019



We are committed to sustainably improving and developing a number of visitor attractions in Leeds parks over the next 10 years including creating indoor play facilities at Tropical World and Temple Newsam farm (to improve the winter offer for visitors) and a new visitor hub at Temple Newsam including a 'learn to ride a bike' area, new cycling routes and a café based near the golf facilities. We are also planning to continue to improve Wildlife World at Lotherton with the introduction of some exciting new animal species, and to develop an outdoor water play facility in one of our parks. Many readers will be aware that Golden Acre park has some fantastic gardens and plant collections, and we intend to promote the site as Leeds's own botanical garden in future along with providing more information about the plants and gardens there for those with a keen interest in horticulture, or who just love beautiful places!

As well as developing and improving our visitor facilities, we are aware that we have some really interesting historic features on our sites, and not just at the obvious places like Kirkstall Abbey and Temple Newsam- think Middleton Park with its bell pits and historic railway...or the remnants of the mills in the Meanwood Valley. We are committed to preserving these and telling people about them so they can be understood and appreciated.

Education is also part of the culture priority – we believe that it is key for helping people to get the most from parks and green spaces and ensuring they will be cared for in future – whether it be about the animals in our zoos and farm, the amazing history and heritage of many of our sites, the award winning specialist gardens at places like Roundhay Park, Temple Newsam and Golden Acre Park, or other features of interest such as the war memorials or the geology of Otley Chevin- we are keen to tell people about them through formal school visits, public events and interpretation, and hope that this will increase understanding and enjoyment of these wonderful sites.

Covid restrictions impacted the number of events we could host in our parks in 2020 and 2021 but we look forward to welcoming back hundreds of events ranging from charity fun runs to rock concerts, community galas to food festivals over the next 10 years, particularly in 2023- the designated year of culture for Leeds!

Culture case study: Summer bands in the park

A variety of band concerts take place in parks across Leeds on Sunday afternoons throughout the summer months. They are organised by *Leeds International Concert Season* and enable people to enjoy brass, jazz and concert music (played by local musicians) in the fresh air, for free. These events are popular with people of all ages.

In 2019, concerts took place in 29 different parks ranging from Golden Acre Park to Gledhow Valley Woods, Meanwood to Bramley Park, Wharfemeadows to Farnley Park.

I'd like to see...

"More interesting features to give the different green spaces their own character and make them special e.g. innovative and exciting play equipment, nature trails, references to local culture and art installations."

'More facilities, more events'

"Better integration of arts, culture, recreation and festival activities in parks."

"I'd like to see more innovative opportunities for children's and adult's play...for ages 0 - 100"

Respondents to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy consultation 2020.



Goals	Actions	Timescale*
To provide a range of fantastic visitor attractions that contribute to making Leeds a great place to live and visit.	Create a new indoor play barn at Temple Newsam, Home Farm.	Short
	Create new cycle trails, Learn to Ride area, playground and café on the area of Temple Newsam that was previously a golf course.	Short
	Develop an outdoor water play visitor attraction.	Long
	Continue to improve Wildlife World at Lotherton.	Medium
	Create an indoor play centre at Tropical World.	Medium
	Promote Golden Acre Park as a botanical garden.	Medium
	Develop a new public parkland area at the site that was previously <i>South Leeds Golf Course</i> including a covid memorial woodland, new walking routes, viewpoints and education and information points.	Medium
For lifelong learning to be integrated into our parks and green spaces and associated visitor facilities.	When developing/improving our green spaces and visitor attractions, include relevant education and interpretation features e.g. the new cycle trails at Temple Newsam will include signage about interesting historic features along the way.	Ongoing
	To provide activities (including school visits) for over 30,000 people to educate and inspire them about the animals at Temple Newsam farm, Lotherton and Tropical World, and key features (historic, artistic etc) in Leeds parks.	Ongoing
For our city parks and visitor attractions to be recognised as key elements of the local tourism offer.	Continue to refresh and deliver marketing plans for visitor attractions (Temple Newsam, Lotherton, Arium, Roundhay Park/Tropical World).	Ongoing
To preserve, promote and provide information about features of cultural interest (e.g. historic landmarks) found in our parks and green spaces.	The preservation and interpretation of historic and other interesting features in community and city parks should be included in their management plans.	Long
	Seek and use external funding to preserve, and provide interpretation about, features of interest. Includes large-scale HLF bid for Temple Newsam.	Ongoing
To host a diverse range of events in green spaces across the city every year.	Promote our sites as excellent venues for events of all types and sizes.	Ongoing
	Support community event organisers with advice and guidance.	Ongoing
	(Subject to a suitable business case) create a new event space at Temple Newsam to facilitate more events and move larger events away from the historic core of the estate.	Medium
	Work with Leeds 2023 team to ensure parks and green spaces contribute to the year of cultural activity both as event venues and destinations in themselves.	Short
To provide exciting and diverse parks that reflect the history and culture of their local communities.	When planning new developments, consider their context and history, and be creative to cultivate green spaces with their own unique character, that provide for, and represent their local communities resulting in a varied and complementary offer across the city.	Ongoing

*Timescale for delivery: Short = 1 – 3 years, Medium = 4 – 6 years, Long = 7 – 10 years.

Child friendly

Providing green spaces that children and teenagers love to visit.

As all parents and carers will know, parks and green spaces are absolutely essential when bringing up children – they provide hours of entertainment for young people whilst getting them out in the fresh air, being physically active with friends and family. We aim to make green spaces places that all young people feel safe in and love to visit, as a key contribution to making Leeds a child-friendly city.

“The benefits of playing outside for children and young people include positive impacts on their physical and mental health and wellbeing, improved dexterity and coordination, and the opportunity to build social connections and relationships.”

Parliamentary Inquiry into Public Parks, 2017

The reasons we are planning to prioritise child-friendly parks and green spaces are as follows:

- Following the public consultation on this strategy, we decided to add ‘Child-friendly’ as an extra priority because a significant number of respondents told us that free, outdoor facilities for children and teenagers are important to them when it comes to the future of local parks and green spaces.
- 30% of strategy consultation respondents said that parks and green spaces are important to them because they provide activities for children, and the University of Leeds found that ‘family outings’ are one of the top 5 reasons people visit parks.

- The majority of children access their parks and play areas across the city. A survey of over 17,000 local children and young people in 2017/18 revealed that over 75% of primary school children and 66% of secondary school children had visited a local park or playground in the past four weeks.
- We are aware that, in modern times, there is a temptation for children and young people to stay inside on their computers and that this can be to the detriment of their physical and mental health – for example, cases of obesity and anxiety are rising in under 18s. By providing great parks and green spaces for children and young people we know we can get them outside, being active, having fun and socialising – all things that contribute to reducing these health and wellbeing issues and feelings of social isolation.
- Creating a ‘Child-friendly City’ is a priority in Leeds City Council’s *Best Council Plan* and we believe we can contribute to the goal of ‘improving social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing in young people’.
- By providing child-friendly parks and green spaces we also believe we can make a significant contribution to the outcomes of ‘Enjoying healthy lifestyles’ and ‘Have fun growing up’ that are set out in the council’s *Children and Young Peoples’ plan*.

- When the Child-friendly Leeds team consulted over 14,000 local children about what they thought would make Leeds a child-friendly city, 12 ‘wishes’ emerged. They included some that we are keen to contribute to:
 1. There are places and spaces to play and things to do, in all areas and open to all
 2. Places and spaces where children and young people spend time and play, are free of litter and dog fouling.
 3. Children and young people express their views, feel heard and are actively involved in decisions that affect their lives.
- We also believe that by prioritising children and young people we can contribute to the council’s ‘Commitment to Children’s Play’ by providing opportunities for children to play.



Child friendly
Providing green spaces that children and teenagers love to visit.



👍 Child friendly

“For a child or young person growing up in the concrete jungle, a healthy, biodiverse urban park is much more than just a great place for wildlife; it’s a classroom, an outdoor gym, a playground, a break from work and an oasis, bringing multiple benefits such as happiness, learning and discovery, self-esteem, confidence and exercise.”

A Focus on Nature, the UK’s youth nature network

“Particularly for young people, there is emerging evidence that spending time in green space is associated with a range of benefits including improved motor skills, better academic performance and increased concentration.”

**Improving Access to Green Space, A New Review,
Public Health England, 2020**

We will consult children and young people as well as adults where changes to our green spaces that may affect them are proposed.

In response to a number of comments in the strategy consultation about provision for teenagers, we will carry out a consultation specifically aimed at this age group to find out how we can make our parks and green spaces more teen-friendly.

As well as the child-friendly developments set out in the *Culture* priority, we plan to continue to improve opportunities for children to play in our parks and green spaces across the city, so that good quality outdoor play is accessible to all local children.

And we will ensure there is information available online about how children and young people can enjoy our parks and green spaces.

I'd like to see:

“Much more provision for teenagers so they feel a valued part of our local community.”

“I would like kids getting more active and socialising more facilities such as basketball, cricket, golf, tennis, badminton etc.”

“More exciting and challenging stuff for kids to play on, safe spaces for teenagers to hang out and be active.”

“More facilities to promote keeping fit and keeping children/young adults physically active.”

“More diverse play areas”

**Respondents to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy
consultation 2020.**

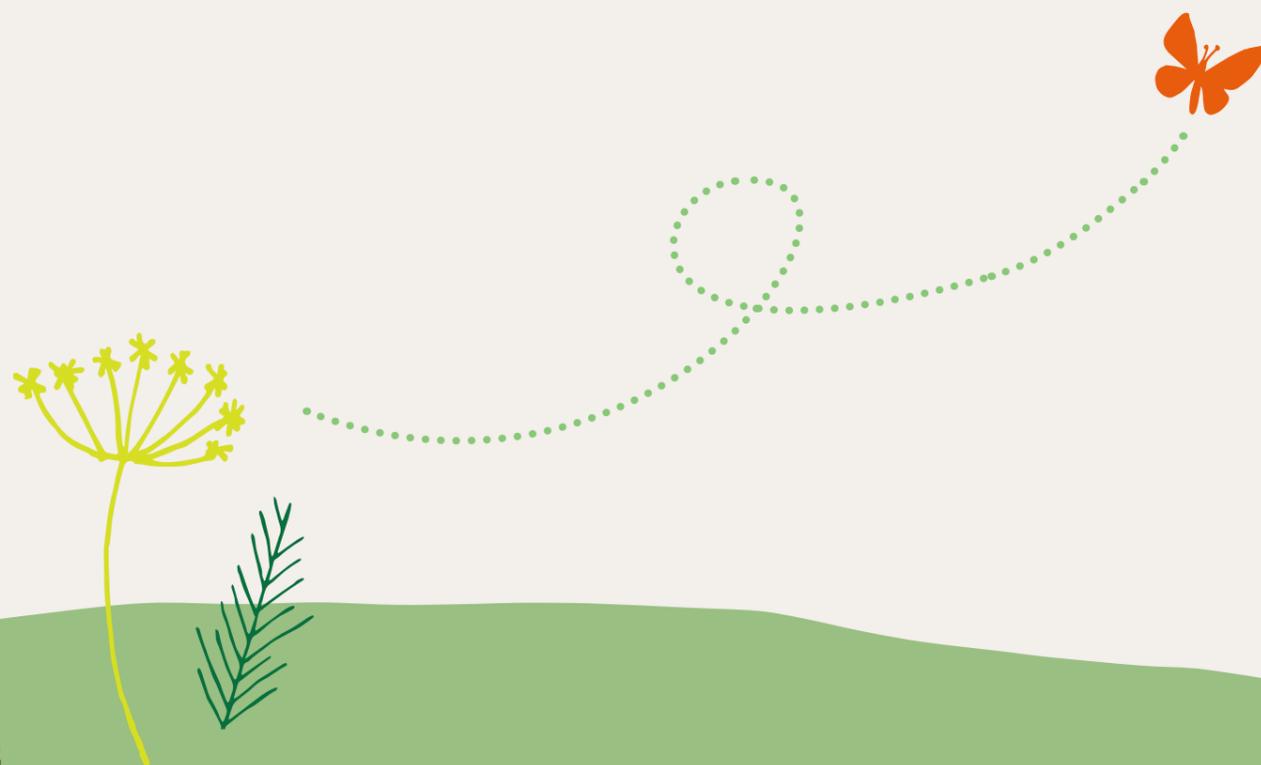
Child-friendly case study: Springhead Park

Another great community park, Springhead Park in Rothwell hosts lots of visitor facilities for people of all ages, including children and teenagers – there’s a playground with equipment for young and older children of all abilities, a multi-use games area, a teen shelter, a skate park, tennis courts, a café, picnic benches, an outdoor gym and an aviary! As well as this, the park itself is very varied with a range of different environments to discover, play and hang out in...from wilder, more natural areas to formal floral gardens, it never gets boring and yet it still feels safe enough for parents to allow their children the freedom to explore.



Goals	Actions	Timescale*
To have child-friendly parks and green spaces.	Consult children and teenagers, as well as adults, ahead of making changes to our sites.	Short
To have a wide range of good quality play facilities for children of all ages and abilities across the city.	Develop a checklist to allow us to assess the quality and accessibility of our playful spaces.	Short
	Audit quantity, location and quality of play facilities across the city so we can prioritise effectively.	Short
	Seek external funding for the creation and improvement of green spaces and related facilities for children and teenagers.	Ongoing
	Top slice income from our chargeable family visitor attractions to improve play facilities in areas where external funding isn't available (often inner city areas).	Short
To ensure there is good provision for teenagers in our parks and green spaces.	Undertake consultation to find out what local teenagers want from green spaces.	Medium
For there to be clear information available on the internet about facilities for children and teenagers in our parks and green spaces.	Provide information about what's available for children and teenagers on green spaces across the city on the internet.	Medium

*Timescale for delivery: Short = 1 – 3 years, Medium = 4 – 6 years, Long = 7 – 10 years.



Working with Communities

Having a positive, open, helpful and collaborative approach to delivering the Parks and Countryside service

We aim to work closely with local communities to deliver great parks and green spaces – using communication and consultation along with community engagement and empowerment to care for parks and green spaces in a collaborative way, because we know that local communities and other partners have a great deal to contribute to the achievement of our goal of providing the best parks and green spaces in the UK.

“Communities already play an important part in supporting their local parks and green spaces and this is expected to increase. For those groups that are keen to do more, additional support and assistance should be given to make the most of their contribution and ensure this collaboration is of mutual benefit.”

State of UK Public Parks report, HLF, 2016

The reasons that ‘working with communities’ has been chosen as a priority are:

- As a public service we are keen to ensure that service-users are able to get the most from the work that we do, so we aim to provide good, clear information about our facilities and be as helpful as possible in our interactions with the public.
- Public parks and green spaces are there for the benefit of the people of Leeds so it is important that they get a say in how they are managed and developed – that way we can ensure we are providing what users want and need from them.

- We recognise that local people (e.g. in Friends groups), other council departments (e.g. Active Leeds) and organisations outside the council (e.g. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust) have valuable skills, knowledge and experience and that we can achieve a lot more by working with them than we can do by working alone. We already have great partnerships with a number of other organisations and we are keen to continue them.
- ‘Working with communities’ is a core value of Leeds City Council and can contribute towards achieving the Council’s priority of creating ‘Safer, Stronger Communities’ by bringing people together to make positive changes to their local environment.
- Providing volunteer opportunities has a range of benefits for the volunteers, as well as the green spaces they are volunteering at, including work experience, exercise, learning new things, improved mental health and meeting new people.
- Many parks and countryside volunteers are older people and we are keen to continue to benefit from their wealth of knowledge and experience whilst fulfilling some of the Age-Friendly priorities of the council, including ‘promoting opportunities for older people to be healthy, active, included and respected’ and ‘helping older people participate in the city through fulfilling employment and learning opportunities’.

“Parks friends groups (in the UK) are estimated to raise £50m per year (and the estimated value of volunteering hours given by park friends and user groups is £70m per year.”

State of UK Public Parks report, HLF, 2016

“We welcome the growth of parks forums, in which friends and community groups can come together to share resources, ideas and learning. We believe that such forums will improve the way in which local authorities can work with their communities in a coordinated and efficient ways.”

Parliamentary Inquiry into Public Parks, 2017

State of UK Public Parks report, HLF, 2016

Working with communities

Having a positive, open, helpful and collaborative approach.

Working with communities

We aim to provide friendly and helpful customer service whenever we interact with the public on our sites, in our shops and cafés, and when people make enquiries online, over the phone and in person. In particular we understand that our Bereavement Services team are often working with people at a very difficult time in their lives so we are committing to use the *Charter for the Bereaved* as a best-practice guide for our work in this area, with the ambitious goal of achieving gold in the Charter's annual assessment for both cremations and burial-related services (currently our cremations are gold and our burial services are bronze). The Charter has been developed by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management to set standards of service for the industry and covers a wide range of the work our Bereavement team undertake including provision of good, clear information, responding to enquiries efficiently and providing a range of options for bereaved people to meet the varied needs of diverse communities.

We will review the way we currently undertake public consultations, and develop and implement a best-practice approach, to make certain we get a good understanding of what local people think about proposed changes and help ensure we provide a service that meets their needs.

We are lucky to benefit from working with a number of organisations outside the Parks and Countryside service including Friends and In Bloom groups, local businesses, third sector organisations, sports clubs, educational institutions, allotment associations, other council departments (such as Museums and Galleries and Active Leeds). We look forward to continuing to work with them and developing new partnerships to deliver great parks and green spaces over the next 10 years.

Hundreds of volunteers a year help us to care for parks and green spaces, including one-off corporate volunteers, regular practical volunteers (doing things like nature conservation, gardening work and maintaining footpaths), event organisers and fundraisers. We will continue to support volunteers, promote volunteering and make sure the volunteer experience of working with us is enjoyable so people will want to work with us and volunteer engagement increases over the life of the strategy.

"I would like to see more local community engagement and support of our green spaces. This includes volunteer support for local 'friends of' and other volunteer/charitable groups."

"Use of Green Space to engage socially isolated and lonely members of the community, giving them purpose/agency in taking ownership of the space for their own wellbeing."

"Allowing local parish/town councils & action groups to maintain woodland in their areas."

"More engagement/consultation with community to help them have ownership of their space, how it looks"

"More investment in community groups who support parks and green spaces"

Respondents to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy consultation 2020.

Working with communities, case study: Volunteers

Without the ongoing support of an army of volunteers, the parks, green spaces and floral displays of Leeds wouldn't be the same.

We are blessed to be supported by over 100 volunteer and community groups (*Friends of* and *In Bloom* groups being the main ones, but plenty of others too) who undertake a range of activities to benefit local green spaces from litter picking to fundraising, tree planting to organising events.

We are also supported by around 1,000 corporate volunteers a year who undertake a range of tasks, from tree planting to painting playgrounds, as a team building exercise, and a way for their company to give something back.

In total, we have estimated that the volunteer hours contributed across Leeds parks and green spaces amounts to the equivalent of 109 full time members of staff!

Research shows that the volunteers themselves also benefit from the time spent volunteering. Volunteering has been shown to benefit mental health, reduce social isolation, improve peoples' employment prospects, increase confidence and self-esteem, plus, volunteering outdoors involves exercise which is why charity TCV have nicknamed it the 'green gym'!



Goals	Actions	Timescale*
To provide good customer service.	To provide customer care training for staff who have public facing elements to their role (includes cafés, shops, rangers, gardeners, technical team, bereavement, admin etc - nearly everyone!).	Medium
	To provide clear and accessible information about the Parks & Countryside service and any changes that might affect service-users.	Medium
To achieve gold in the Charter for the Bereaved annual assessment for both cremations and burial-related services.	Use the Charter as a best-practice guide for the delivery of bereavement services.	Long
To provide parks and green spaces that are valued by local residents.	To develop and implement a 'best-practice' approach to undertaking public consultations when changes to green spaces are proposed.	Short
	Continue to consult Community Committee Environment Sub-groups with regards proposed changes to public green spaces in their areas.	Ongoing
To work in partnership with <i>Friends of, In Bloom</i> groups and other relevant community organisations.	Continue to work with the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum as a key service partner (representing Friends, In Bloom groups and similar).	Ongoing
	Ensure all Friends, In Bloom, outdoor sports clubs, allotment associations and other community groups with an interest in our green spaces have a contact in the Parks & Countryside Service who can support them to achieve shared goals.	Ongoing
	Set out a clear approach to how we will support <i>Friends of, In Bloom</i> and other similar community groups.	Short
To increase volunteer engagement with the Parks and Countryside service and provide volunteer opportunities for everyone who is interested.	Continue to promote and facilitate a wide range of volunteering opportunities.	Ongoing
	Continue to organise and support the following city-wide volunteer groups: Leeds Wildlife Volunteers, Leeds Cemetery Volunteers, Volunteer Rangers and Leeds Voluntary Footpath Rangers.	Ongoing
	To provide training for relevant staff in working with volunteers and communities.	Short
	Seek external funding opportunities for community engagement projects, particularly at sites where communities are currently less involved.	Ongoing
To work in partnerships where they can help us deliver the aims of the Strategy more effectively than we can do alone.	Regularly review current partnerships with external organisations and give due consideration to any new partnership opportunities that arise.	Ongoing
	Continue to work with other council departments such as Regeneration, Active Leeds, Corporate Property Management, Museums and Galleries and Public Health.	Ongoing
To learn from other organisations.	Keep up to date with national research and developments in the public green space sector and attend core cities, APSE and other network events as appropriate to ensure we are applying a best-practice approach to managing green space.	Short

*Timescale for delivery: Short = 1 – 3 years, Medium = 4 – 6 years, Long = 7 – 10 years.

Financial Sustainability

Ensuring that quality public green space is available for the long term.

This priority is about ensuring we have sufficient funds to be able to deliver our goal of providing the best parks and green spaces in the UK and sustain them for future generations to enjoy.

Public green space has been shown to benefit the local economy by attracting residents, businesses and visitors to an area (for example, Roundhay Park hosts approximately 9 million visits a year) and reducing the costs of poor health to the NHS. A Fields in Trust study in 2018 estimated parks to have an equivalent economic value of £30.24 per person, per year based on several objective government measures of non-market goods including willingness to pay, life satisfaction and health.

“The wellbeing value associated with the frequent use of local parks and green spaces is worth £34.2 billion per year to the UK adult population (and) parks and green spaces are estimated to save the NHS around £111 million per year in GP visits alone”

**Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces -
Fields in Trust, 2018**

“Park investments create economic benefits through the flow of money into an area. The value of small-scale and foundational economic activities that can be fostered in parks are critical to the wellbeing of communities, as well as to the individuals who gain employment through those activities...parks can in this sense be economic hubs, creating jobs, providing volunteering and training opportunities, hosting enterprises and delivering the foundational services that allow local areas to thrive economically and socially.”

**Why should we invest in parks? -
National Heritage Lottery Fund, 2021.**

There is a great deal of evidence for the value of public green space, but, of course, there is inevitably a cost to maintaining it. Leeds City Council is committed to providing core funding for the care of parks and green spaces but, as readers will be aware, we have been facing challenging financial times in recent years.

As highlighted in the National Heritage Lottery Fund report ‘State of UK Public Parks 2016,’ there has been a significant national decline in core funding for parks, and in March 2021 APSE (Association for Public Sector Excellence) reported that 71% of local authorities agree with the statement ‘reductions in funding have resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance from some land and an increase in unmaintained land.’ This decline in core funding is reflected in Leeds where, as a result of central government budget cuts, our core funding has reduced by over 50% in the last 10 years. Clearly, it is a challenge to continue to manage green spaces to a high standard given such financial setbacks, but by carefully planning, prioritising and adopting an enterprising approach, we intend to do so!

The Parks and Countryside service has long been committed to the ‘Civic Enterprise’ approach to managing public services. ‘Civic enterprise’ refers to the idea of individuals and private organisations becoming more Civic-minded (giving something back to their local communities, for example, through volunteering or corporate social responsibility as outlined in the last priority), and local authorities becoming more enterprising. As a service, we have been very successful over the last 10 years in generating an income to invest in public green space through enterprises that are popular with park users such as cafes, gift shops, events like the *Christmas Experience* at Lotherton and visitor attractions like Tropical World. It is this approach that we propose to continue with and refine through this priority.

“Identify and factor in resilient funding arrangements for the maintenance of greenspace as early as possible so that it can continue to provide benefits in the long term.”

Recommendation in Improving Access to Green Space - a new review, Public Health England, 2020

“Innovation, adaptation and change are an integral part of successful organisations, including parks services.”

State of UK Public Parks report, HLF, 2018

Financial sustainability

Ensuring that good quality public green space is available for the long term.

Financial Sustainability

Like the rest of Leeds City Council, we will continue to judiciously manage our finances; reviewing costs, fees and charges regularly and using enterprise and innovation to ensure we get best value when we procure or provide goods and services.

We will seek opportunities to secure external funding to help us deliver the priorities in this strategy, for example through grants (such as those from the Heritage Lottery or Sport England) and developers' contributions.

We will continue to apply an enterprising approach to the elements of our service that have commercial potential whilst being mindful of the other priorities in this strategy. This will include generating an income from our visitor attractions, cafés, shops, sponsorship, commercial events and concessions.

“Be creative, assign some resources and plan long term. You might just get your money back!”

“Value of green space to big city acknowledged higher, sustainable maintenance and investment plan – council, community and business activities to ensure valuable green space remains in safe, good and usable condition for next ten years.”

“Potentially some investment in park areas and/or buildings which can be used to generate income to maintain the parks in the long term. But the vast majority should remain free to use.”

“Encourage income producing from cafés and refreshment provision if not already existing.”

Respondents to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy consultation 2020.

Sustainability case study: The Arium

Most of the plants used in parks, flower beds and hanging baskets around Leeds are grown and supplied by Leeds City Council, Parks and Countryside service at our plant nursery, *The Arium*. When it became necessary to move the nursery, because the previous site at Red Hall was required for development, we took the opportunity to make it more sustainable in a number of ways.

The new nursery has been designed so it is more energy efficient, uses rainwater gathered from the glasshouse roof, and treats waste-water and sewage on site (which is more efficient than taking it away).

Because the nursery uses more modern technology to grow the plants, a large number can be grown with less input from staff, which makes it cheaper to run.

Finally, from our experience at Red Hall, we knew people were interested in purchasing surplus stock, so we created a visitor area to make it easier for them to shop, and a café to enable visitors to make the most of the light and airy building. These were complemented by a play area for visitors with children.

As a result, we have reduced costs and increased income (by over £1 million a year on the best year at Red Hall), making the production of our plants much more financially (and environmentally) sustainable for the future.

In 2020, we began growing trees from seed at the Arium too – thousands of these will be planted across Leeds as part of the climate emergency tree planting scheme mentioned earlier, and we are also selling many of the young trees in bulk to other large scale tree planting schemes across the UK.



Goals	Actions	Timescale*
For public parks and green spaces to continue to be managed and core funded by Leeds City Council as a public service, for the benefit of the people of Leeds.		Ongoing
To balance our budget whilst achieving the aims of the strategy over the next 10 years.	Set a sustainable financial plan and review annually.	Ongoing
	Review costs, fees and charges regularly and use innovation (such as new technology) to ensure we are getting best value where we are purchasing, or providing, goods and services.	Ongoing
	Ensure new developments are sustainable before investing e.g. by checking the business case for commercial developments.	Ongoing
	Seek external funding (e.g. from HLF or developers' contributions) to support the delivery of the priorities in the strategy.	Ongoing
	Continue to explore and develop the income generating opportunities of our service such as visitor attractions, sponsorship, cafés, events, shops and concessions.	Ongoing
	Continue to develop and implement marketing plans for income generating schemes and facilities.	Ongoing

*Timescale for delivery: Short = 1 – 3 years, Medium = 4 – 6 years, Long = 7 – 10 years.



Health and Wellbeing

Providing and promoting a wide range of opportunities for people to get the health benefits of spending time in green spaces.

Evidence shows that being in green spaces has significant benefits for people's mental and physical health. We aim to provide good quality parks and green spaces that incorporate a wide range of opportunities for people to be active, so that everyone can enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of spending time in the great outdoors.

“Evidence shows that living in a greener environment can promote and protect good health, and aid in recovery from illness and help with managing poor health...Greener environments are also associated with better mental health and wellbeing outcomes including reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and fatigue, and enhanced quality of life for both children and adults.”

Improving Access to Green Space, A New Review, Public Health England, 2020

“Access to high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities.”

Planning for a Healthy City, Director of Public Health (Leeds) Annual Report, 2015

The main reasons we have chosen health and wellbeing as a priority are:

- **Health and wellbeing** is a priority in the Best Council Plan and evidence shows that parks and green spaces can make a significant contribution to ‘supporting healthy, physically active lifestyles’ and ‘reducing health inequalities’.
- Research shows that regularly spending time in green spaces dramatically reduces incidence and severity of conditions that are a real concern in modern life, such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, anxiety and depression in people of all ages and backgrounds (but which tend to be more common in deprived neighbourhoods).
- We can contribute to the Get Set Leeds ‘Active Environment’ goal which was identified following a public consultation involving over 4,000 local people; *In Leeds I am surrounded by things that make it easy and obvious for me to be active.*
- We are responsible for managing a large number of popular outdoor sports facilities (including over 300 sports pitches, 29 outdoor gyms, 62 bowling greens, 90 tennis courts and 2 golf courses) and we need to ensure they are fit for purpose and cater for everyone.

“Prioritise improving access to greenspace and creating greener communities, especially in areas of deprivation, as an important part of the wider plan to reduce health inequalities locally. Greener neighbourhoods benefit everyone, but appear to disproportionately benefit disadvantaged groups, and socioeconomic-related inequalities in health are lower in areas with greater access to greenspace.”

Recommendation in Improving Access to Green Space, A New Review, Public Health England, 2020

The University of Leeds research showed that people prefer to use good quality parks, so fulfilling that priority is key to our contribution to public health, as it is one of the best ways to ensure people come to our green spaces. When it comes to investing in getting our parks and green spaces to a quality standard, we will prioritise those in areas of deprivation (especially where the housing is high density and many people don't have their own private gardens) as a way to have the biggest positive impact on public health where resources are limited.

“With increasing rates of physical inactivity and obesity, there is a growing commitment from the sports and health sectors to use parks as a means to promote more active and healthy lifestyles. Initiatives to promote more regular and active use of parks are on the increase.”

State of UK Public Parks, HLF, 2018

Health and wellbeing

Providing a wide range of opportunities for people to receive the health benefits of spending time in green spaces.

♥ Health and Wellbeing

“Parks and green spaces should be managed to support health and wellbeing. Design, maintenance, and activities should encourage physical exercise appropriate of all sections of the population. They should also create restorative spaces and activities that enable people to recover from the stresses of life.”

Space to Thrive, University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University, 2019

We are committed to providing a wide range of opportunities for people to be physically active in our green spaces so everyone can enjoy being active outdoors, no matter what their abilities or interests. In order to deliver this, we will adopt a strategic approach to investing in sports facilities so they are as varied and accessible as possible whilst providing good value in terms of cost to the council per user. We will work with local and national partners such as football and rugby clubs, Leeds Parks Bowls Partnership, the Lawn Tennis Association, Parkrun and England Cricket Board to promote, care for and improve the facilities.

In particular, we recognise the value of walking as a free, accessible, simple and effective form of exercise so we will create and promote at least one signposted ‘healthy walking’ route in every suitable community and city park.

We understand that in many cases green spaces, particularly the public rights of way network, provide ideal settings for active travel like walking and cycling (which benefits both health and the environment), and we will work with partners to promote cycling and walking opportunities at, and through, our sites where it is suitable. An example of this is at Temple Newsam that has several great cycling routes going to, and round it...and there are more to come!

The *Rights of Way Improvement* Plan for Leeds, which sets out a ten-year plan for developing and improving the public rights of way network for walkers, horse riders, cyclists and those with visual or mobility impairments, will be reviewed and updated.

We are also committed to continuing to develop and promote the ‘country parks’ initiative across the city. The idea, which is well developed in West Leeds but needs expanding elsewhere, is to identify, improve and promote walking routes connecting up green spaces and local communities, so people can access and enjoy them easily on foot (or by bike where suitable).

Lastly, with partners, we’ll promote the benefits of spending time in green spaces to raise awareness of how good it can be for mental and physical health, and we’ll encourage people to use them for this purpose. We’ll also improve the information that is available about our sports facilities (from tennis courts to walking routes) so that people can easily find out what’s where.

“More sports spaces (e.g. free and well-maintained tennis courts with permanent/metal nets).”

“It would be good to see more sport equipment integrated in the parks. More robust table tennis tables, and basketball nets spread throughout the city for example.”

“The outside gyms are a great idea. Would love to see more of these rolled out across the Leeds parks.”

“Some floodlit 5 a side pitches to use in the evening.”

“More bike paths, but clearly marked as such, even if experimental.”

“More waymarked walking and cycling routes either on site or online to download.”

“More connectivity – green walking routes, cycle routes”

Respondents to Parks and Green Spaces Strategy consultation 2020.

Health and wellbeing case study: Wyke Beck Valley

The 7-mile long Wyke Beck Valley runs from Roundhay Park to Temple Newsam and is connected by several other public green spaces in between.

Over more than a decade, partners including Sustrans, Leeds City Council, Friends of Wyke Beck Valley, Groundwork, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and TCV worked to create and promote the green walking and cycling routes that connect communities in East Leeds and provide healthy, sustainable and beautiful options for getting from one place to another.

In addition to the walking and cycling routes, the green spaces along the valley host a range of sports facilities including an outdoor gym, tennis courts, bowling greens, a golf course, football, rugby and cricket pitches and a running track.

By working with local people to improve green spaces, link them up and share walking and cycling routes (e.g. a booklet of walks was produced), we’ve been able to increase the number of people using those green spaces for healthy recreational activity.



Goals	Actions	Timescale*
To provide good quality public green space that people want to visit (see priority 1!) - particularly in areas of deprivation where the positive impact on health will be greater.	As necessary, possible and appropriate, prioritise investment in green spaces in areas of deprivation.	Ongoing
To provide a range of opportunities for people to be physically active in green spaces across the city, so everyone can enjoy being active outdoors, no matter what their level of ability or interests.	Update and publish the <i>Playing Pitch Strategy</i> (which sets out future priorities for football, rugby and cricket pitches) to ensure there is a plan in place for providing an appropriate level of provision across the city.	Short
	Audit and keep a record of the condition of all other sports facilities (tennis courts, bowling greens, outdoor gyms, MUGAs) on our sites so the information can be used to prioritise investment in them in a strategic way.	Short
	Develop new opportunities for people to cycle at our sites (where suitable).	Medium
	To create and promote a measured and signposted walking route in every suitable community and city park (to go in <i>Plan on a Page</i>).	Long
	To make every effort to accommodate healthy activity, including new sports, on our sites.	Ongoing
	Work with local sporting organisations and national sporting bodies to develop, maintain and promote sports facilities and activities across the city.	Ongoing
	Seek external funding to develop and improve sports facilities in parks and green spaces.	Ongoing
For our green spaces to be used for 'active travel' around the city as a healthier, more environmentally friendly option than driving.	Update and implement the <i>Rights of Way Improvement Plan</i> .	Short
	Work with partners to support the development of off-road walking and cycling routes across the city (where possible).	Ongoing
For people to use 'active travel' to get to and from our green spaces.	Develop and promote walking routes connecting green spaces and communities across the city, prioritising areas of deprivation where the public health benefits of accessing green space will be greater.	Long
	Promote active ways to get to our green spaces on our website e.g. cycling and walking routes.	Short
	Seek funding to install bike stands at all our most popular sites.	Long
To increase awareness of the benefits of spending time in green spaces for health and encourage people to use them for that purpose.	(With partners) promote the mental and physical benefits of spending time in parks and green spaces.	Medium
	Improve the availability of, and access to, information about our sports facilities and walking and cycling routes on the internet and through the use of new technology (such as online bookings and walking apps).	Short
	Sell local cycling & walking route leaflets, maps & books from our shops.	Short

*Timescale for delivery: Short = 1 – 3 years, Medium = 4 – 6 years, Long = 7 – 10 years.

Key Performance Indicators

From the priorities set out above, we have identified 2 key performance indicators (KPIs) for the Parks and Countryside service – these are the elements of our work that we think it is *most* important for us to deliver over the next 10 years. They are:

1. Number of city and community parks at, or above, Leeds Quality Park standard

There are 70 parks in Leeds including East End Park, Armley Park, Horsforth Hall Park and Middleton Park to name but a few. They incorporate a range of facilities (such as benches, playgrounds, sports pitches, walking routes, cafés and gardens) and are based across the city in local communities. Parks are the most popular green spaces in Leeds- the *University of Leeds* Parks Study found that parks host around 45 million adult visits a year. Because they are local and so relatively easy to access, and also because of the variety of facilities in them which serve a diverse range of people, we have decided that getting them to, and keeping them at, a good quality standard is fundamental for our service. By doing this we are committing to providing welcoming, safe, accessible, well maintained, clean, environmentally friendly parks – the kind of parks that people have told us they want to use, and this is why we have chosen it as a KPI.

2. Hectares of trees planted

To help combat the climate emergency, we are planning to plant 50 hectares of trees every year to 2045 (1,250 hectares in total) to absorb carbon and protect the city against some of the other impacts of climate change such as extreme weather. Because it is so important both globally and locally to tackle the climate emergency, we have identified our goal of planting 50 hectares of trees in Leeds every year for the next 10 years as our contribution to the council’s goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 and the second key performance indicator in this strategy.



Leeds Quality Park Criteria

When judging a park, it must be given a score of 0 – 10 on the 26 criteria listed below.

0 1	2 3 4	5 6	7	8	9	10
Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Exceptional

Criteria	Category
A Welcoming Place	1 Welcoming
	2 Good and safe access
	3 Signage
	4 Equal access for all
Healthy, Safe and Secure	5 Appropriate provision of quality facilities and activities
	6 Safe equipment and facilities
	7 Personal security
	8 Control of dogs/ dog fouling
Well Maintained and Clean	9 Litter and waste management
	10 Horticultural maintenance
	11 Arboricultural and woodland maintenance
	12 Building and infrastructure maintenance
	13 Equipment maintenance
Environmental Management	14 Managing environmental impact
	15 Waste minimisation
	16 Chemical use
	17 Peat use
	18 Climate change adaption strategies
Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage	19 Management of natural features, wild fauna and flora
	20 Conservation of landscape features
	21 Conservation of buildings and structures
Community Involvement	22 Community involvement in management & development
	23 Appropriate provision for the community
Marketing	24 Marketing and promotion
	25 Appropriate information channels
	26 Appropriate educational and interpretational information

Implementing the strategy

The Parks and Countryside Service will focus on the actions set out above over the next 10 years. We will also consider the priorities outlined whenever changes are proposed. For example, when we receive funding to invest in a park, we will consider how it could be used to increase quality, accessibility and biodiversity; we will look for opportunities to make that park more child-friendly and culturally interesting (e.g. by restoring an historic feature) and how it might be used to promote health and wellbeing. We will look at how the investment might be used to help reduce the impact of climate change (by including tree planting, for instance) and we will also make sure any changes to the site are financially sustainable.

Progress on delivering the strategy will be reviewed annually, and there will be a more detailed review, to check the priorities and actions are still relevant, in 5 years' time.



Checklist for staff

Before any changes are made to the way the Parks and Countryside Service operates during the life of this strategy, consideration should be given to how they will impact on the delivery of the aims set out in the strategy, with the intention being to help deliver those aims.

This table below can be used to help with that process.

Priorities and aims of Parks and Countryside Service (as set out in Parks & Green Spaces Strategy)	Does the proposed change contribute to the achievement of the aims of the Strategy? <i>Answer: Yes/No/No change</i>	How does the proposed change contribute to, or impact upon, the achievement of the aims of the Strategy?
Quality - Providing high quality parks and green spaces.		
Climate & biodiversity - Increasing wildlife and biodiversity and reducing the impact of climate change.		
Access for all - Ensuring that parks and green spaces are accessible to everyone.		
Culture - Providing exciting, diverse, interesting and enjoyable green spaces that reflect the history and culture of their local communities.		
Child-friendly Leeds - Providing green spaces that children and teenagers love to visit.		
Working with communities - Having a positive, open, helpful and collaborative approach to delivering the parks and countryside service.		
Financial sustainability - Ensuring that good quality public green space is available for the long term.		
Health & Wellbeing - Providing and promoting a wide range of opportunities for people to be get the health benefits of spending time in parks and green spaces.		

Conclusion

We would like to thank everyone involved in the consultation for taking the time to share your thoughts with us – we hope we have captured the main priorities of the people of Leeds in the strategy and that the people who live, work and visit the city continue to enjoy its parks and green spaces for the next 10 years and beyond. We look forward to fulfilling our ambition to provide the best parks and green spaces in the country and making a significant contribution to Leeds being the Best City in the UK!



Glossary

Accessible: Able to be easily visited and enjoyed by everyone.

Biodiversity: The existence of a wide variety of plant and animal species living in their natural environment.

Community parks: Parks with a range of facilities (including playgrounds and sports facilities) aimed at local communities e.g. Springhead Park, East End Park, Armley Park, Burley Park. There are 63 community parks in Leeds.

City Parks: Parks providing a wide range of visitor facilities that attract both residents of Leeds and visitors from further afield. The range of visitor attractions in these parks generally includes a café, toilets and unique features such as animal attractions and specialist gardens. There are 7 city parks in Leeds as follows: Roundhay park, Temple Newsam, Middleton Park, Golden Acre Park, Kirkstall Abbey Park, Lotherton and Chevin Forest Park.

Green Flag: The *Green Flag Award* is the benchmark national standard for publicly accessible parks and green spaces in the United Kingdom. Parks (and other types of public green spaces) and their management plans are assessed against a set of criteria by independent judges from across the UK.

Interpretation: When it comes to public spaces, the word *interpretation* refers to a way of providing information about something, for example, a sign about the history of an area or a leaflet about the wildlife on a site.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): A quantifiable measure used to evaluate the success of an organisation.

Leeds Quality Park (LQP): Local measure of a good quality park based on the *Green Flag* site assessment criteria and judged by experienced local Parks and Countryside staff and volunteers.

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Leeds Parks and Countryside

Findings of public consultation into Parks and Green Spaces Strategy

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Local strategies

Leeds Biodiversity Action plan

Leeds Playing Pitch Strategy (draft)

Vision for Leeds 2011- 2030

White Rose Forest Strategy 2021

Leeds City Council strategies and plans

Age friendly Leeds Strategy and Plan

Leeds Adopted Local Plan

Leeds Children and Young People's Plan

Leeds City Council, Best Council Plan

Leeds Commitment to Children's Play

Leeds Culture Strategy

Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Leeds Transport Strategy consultation document

Living Well With Dementia In Leeds – our strategy 2020-25

Our Spaces Strategy

Other

Big Leeds Climate Conversation consultation report, Leeds City Council, 2019

Leeds Observatory website

Leeds Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment

Planning for a Healthy City, Director of Public Health Annual Report, 2015