

	<p style="text-align: center;">Executive 12 April 2010</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Report from the Director of Environment and Culture</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Wards Affected: ALL</p>	
<p>Brent's Parks Strategy 2010 – 2015</p>	

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an overview of Brent's Parks Strategy 2010 - 2015. This Strategy feeds down from the Cultural strategy. The scope of the strategy includes the following types of urban green space within the borough: **public parks** (including sports amenities within parks), **public open spaces**, **children's play areas** in parks and **allotments**.
- 1.2 The Strategy has been informed by both local survey data and consultation with relevant local groups including the Brent Allotments Forum and Friends of Parks Groups. A twelve-week public consultation on the draft Strategy took place between October 2009 and January 2010. More detail on these findings is outlined in Section 3 of the report.

2.0 Recommendations

That the Executive:

- 2.1 Note the findings of the background research used to inform the development of this Strategy.
- 2.2 Agree the seven key themes as set out in paragraphs 3.10-3.18
- 2.3 Approve the action plan detailed within the Parks Strategy (attached as Appendix 1) and that the Council will lead on those actions identified as such.

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 It is generally accepted that good quality parks and open spaces are important for enhancing the quality of urban life. Quality green spaces have been shown to support the local economy, enhance physical and mental health, benefit children and young people, reduce crime and fear of crime, support social cohesion, aid movement between spaces, and protect biodiversity and the environment (ODPM, 2005).¹
- 3.2 The Council, with support from residents and a range of stakeholders, has achieved many of the recommendations set out in the previous Parks Strategy that came to end in December 2009. For example:
- Annual visits to our parks have increased to nearly 16 million a year from 13 million five years ago²
 - Five of our parks - Gladstone, Roundwood, Barham, Preston, Mapesbury Dell and Queen's Park (in Brent and managed by the Corporation of London) - have received national ('Green Flag') recognition for the high standard of planting and facilities in these parks, and, in 2009 the Barn Hill Conservation Trust retained the 'Green Pennant' award for its work on the Roe Green Walled Garden
 - Our allotment service has been re-vitalised and the quality of several sites has been transformed (e.g. Gladstone Park Gardens and Townsend Lane)
 - A comprehensive range of sports facilities in our parks have been upgraded and new facilities provided in areas of need (for example pitch drainage works a multi use games area and new sports pavilions at Gibbons Recreation Ground, Gladstone Park, John Billam, and the GEC, in addition to pavilion upgrades at Northwick Park, Vale Farm and King Edward VII Park and new multi use games areas at Vale Farm, Hazel Road and Grove Park)
 - The results of the most recent annual Parks Survey show new approaches taken by the Park Warden Service have resulted in improved perceptions of security and safety in parks (including dog control, graffiti and vandalism), improved communications with users and greater community involvement; all issues identified as residents' priorities through the 'Best Value Review' consultation process in 2001
 - In terms of Biodiversity, since 2001 the Council has achieved increases in hay meadow, woodland, hedgerow and pond habitats at Fryent Country Park; and of marshland conservation at the Brent Reservoir where 'Local Nature Reserve' status has been declared
 - *In 2008-09, Brent Parks Service received a 'London in Bloom' Silver Gilt Award for Horticultural Excellence and 3rd Place in both the Community Garden and Parks Bedding in the Discretionary awards. We have an excellent record in the local completion and have represented London in the regional Britain in Bloom competition in which won a silver gilt and came second in category. We retained the*

¹ ODPM (2005), *How to Create Quality Parks and Open Spaces*. ODPM Publications.

² *Annual Brent Parks Surveys 2003 – 2008*

Silver Gilt in 2009-2010 and won an additional Silver Gilt for Gladstone Park in the Best Public Park discretionary award

- Brent Council Parks Service won the Beacon Status Award in 2002 under the theme 'Improving Urban Green Space'
- Our Parks Service has also secured a £1.2 million DCSF 'Playbuilder' grant to improve between 20-24 children's playgrounds across the borough. This project has resulted in improved working relationship with our Children and Families Departments and forged strong consultation networks with young people (For example, findings from the TELUS Survey 2009 shows that the young people of Brent have voted their local parks and playgrounds as the second best in the country. Results will be fed into the new NI199 indicator- 'Satisfaction with parks and playgrounds by young people')

3.3 Despite these successes, we know there is still much to achieve; not least how to address spatial deficiencies in open space, play and sports facilities to meet local needs in some of the most densely populated parts of the borough and, looking to the future, how best to provide and sustain new areas of open space and facilities to meet the needs of the growing population linked to our area regeneration plans. We also know that many of our established park facilities are out-dated and inadequately maintained while improving residents' sense of security in our un-staffed parks and open spaces continues to be a priority. So too is the achievement of further Green Flag awards at Welsh Harp Open Space, King Edward VII Park - Wembley, Brent River Park and, in time, other sites. Now, a new plan is needed to guide the priorities for action in these and other areas of our work in the Parks Service for the coming five-year period.

3.4 Brent's Culture, Sports and Learning Forum has developed a Cultural Strategy for Brent. The Cultural strategy identifies eight principles:

1. Enhancing Cultural Vibrancy
2. Increasing Participation
3. Raising the Profile of Culture
4. Encouraging Young People to Take Part
5. Developing Public Spaces
6. Making the Most of London 2012
7. Supporting the Cultural Economy
8. Promoting Health and Wellbeing

It is considered that these are key to the successful delivery of the vision to; *"develop a range of cultural opportunities that are engaging, accessible and enriching for all local communities."* Brent's parks strategy has themes and priorities that link with these Cultural strategy principles and delivery of the parks activity actions will contribute to achieving the vision of the Cultural strategy.

3.5 To develop the strategy recent consultation and research has also been analysed including:

- Annual Parks Survey 2000-2009
- Active People Surveys 1 and 2
- Playbuilder Surveys with 8-13 year olds
- Youth Parliament Survey 2008
- Club Surveys
- London Parks Benchmarking Surveys
- The Place Survey 2008
- Residents Attitude Survey 2009
- Mosaic information and the Council's evidence base

In addition, internal and external influences were reviewed that may affect the development of parks and open spaces in Brent. The external influences are summarised according to key policy areas where parks and open spaces have the greatest impact i.e. land use planning and regeneration, health and sport (including the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games and Legacy plans), climate change and biodiversity, and, across all these areas, equality of opportunity. All this information informed the content of the strategy.

- 3.6 Public consultation on the draft strategy took place from October 2009 to January 2010. The draft Strategy was available in Brent's libraries and remaining One Stop Shops. It was also available to download from the Parks Service's website and was on the Council's Consultation tracker inviting people to feedback via the online consultation questionnaire. A web link and flyers were sent to members of the Council's User Consultative Forums and the Brent Magazine ran an article on the draft strategy. The Youth Parliament considered the draft strategy and provided detailed feedback which will inform delivery of the actions within the strategy.
- 3.7 Letters and/or emails were sent to the following individuals and organisations together with copies of the draft Strategy and Executive Summary asking for their comments and feedback:
- Senior Council Officers and Members
 - Local Friends of Parks and Open Spaces
 - All of the listed Residents Associations
Youth Parliament
 - Greater London Parks Benchmarking Group
 - Greenspace
 - Council's User Consultative Forums which include Brava, BME, Disability and Older People's Forums
 - All local Schools through the Schools Extranet
- 3.8 The responses from the consultation process have informed the final version of the Strategy. The majority of comments supported the key themes and objectives.

Key Findings

3.9 From the background research and consultation it has been possible identify a number of headline findings which have influenced the key themes and priorities. These findings include:

Patterns of use of Brent's Parks

- Users of the Council owned Parks tend to live locally and visit regularly (31.5% at least three times a week on average)
- 15% always visit alone, whilst 35% always visit in a group – i.e. with a partner, children, other family, friends or a combination of these.
- The average number of people in a group is 3.8.
- Users visit Brent's parks primarily to *exercise, let children play or relax* (these top three responses accounting for 85% of the total). Consequently, *play facilities, access and general atmosphere* came out as highly important aspects of the service. This is consistent with the findings of the Parks Survey in previous years
- 96% of respondents walk to their local Park. This is consistent with previous years' findings and supports the case for the local target for provision of local parks in line with the London Plan target of a 400m walk distance threshold

- Queens Park (a Corporation of London owned site) and Gladstone Park were identified as the most visited Parks in Brent
- The aspects of the service rated most highly were *staff helpfulness, cleanliness and overall maintenance*.
- 83% of respondents (slightly higher than the previous year's 80%) have some concerns with safety. Concerns about '*groups of youths hanging around*' stated by the majority of people, with '*lack of visible assistance in cases of emergency*' cited as the second 'fear inducing' factor.
- Recent consultation indicates that children are more concerned with the quality and variety of the play experience than safety. Children want areas filled with nature, from plants, trees, flowers, and water, to animals and insects. They want different things to do, and developmentally appropriate learning environments that hold their attention for hours.
- In addition there are some gender differences in terms of what improvements children would like to see: The boys wanted the more boisterous, exciting and adventurous play space with a strong emphasis on sport whilst girls preferred an area where they could socialise and be safe. They were also conscious about keeping fit and were interested in the Multi-Use Games Areas concept.

The most frequently cited improvements among adults were (in order of importance):

- A greater emphasis on **safety** – staffing, improved visibility across sites etc.
- Infrastructure **repairs** – including paths, toilets and pavilions

- Control of **dogs** and freedom from dog fouling
- Improved, **updated facilities** e.g. sports and a variety of ‘exciting’ play equipment e.g. sensory gardens, paddling pools etc
- Greater **variety of facilities** especially for youths
- Issues and needs arising from the assessment of the ‘supply’ of Brent’s parks are summarised in the following Table

Table 1: - Summary of Strategic Issues and Needs arising from Consultation Findings

Issue	Needs by Service Area
Spatial provision and need for more open space	Parks – Spatial deficiency in a number of areas of the borough against the 400m walking distance standard taking into account accessible parks across borough boundaries, plus new provision needed in Growth Areas
	Play Areas – Spatial deficiency against Brent Local Standard in a number of areas not met by the ‘Playbuilder’ project roll-out of new and upgraded play areas
	Pitches - By 2016, there will be a need for 40 adult, 77 junior and 30 mini pitches to meet demand. This is almost double the existing pitch provision
	Allotments - Spatial deficiency in certain areas of the borough and unmet expressed demand (waiting lists).
Issue	Needs by Service Area
Quality of provision and need for improvement and/or restoration	Parks - Despite upward trend, 12 parks still have only ‘fair’ satisfaction ratings; Poor standard of toilets in most parks; Longstanding restoration projects in Roundwood Park (open air theatre), and Gladstone Park (Dollis Hill House)
	Play Areas – A number of play areas in parks are in need of improvement. 9 sites identified in recent needs assessment for major improvements in 2008/09 and 2009/10 to improve accessibility and others in future years
	Pitches - Poor quality of many park pitches and changing rooms
	Allotments - Quality issues at most sites
Issue	Needs by Service Area
Safety of Parks and Play Sites in Parks	Concern among parents of ‘ <i>stranger danger</i> ’ and need for greater mobile park warden presence and work with Safer Neighbourhood Teams at those sites without a permanent warden.
Community	Good level of community involvement in parks.

Involvement	Need to identify local park volunteers in those locations where friends groups are not yet established and consider options for greater self-management of park service facilities e.g. allotment sites, sports facilities.
Information	Need for further development of both web-based and park-based information about facilities, programmes and habitats in parks
Maintenance	Need for development of 'green' horticultural maintenance specification Need to identify and secure maintenance budgets to support and sustain any new provision of parks, open spaces, play areas, sports pitches, and allotments. E.g. Playbuilder revenue budget, S106 agreements
Programmes	To achieve physical activity and child obesity reduction targets, need to find innovative ways to expand programme of Events, Health Walks, Cycle training etc within existing budgets and by maximising available grant aid
Bio Diversity	To meet targets of Brent's Tree Planting Programme, need to undertake a survey of tree planting densities in all Brent Parks and identify priority parks for tree planting Need to identify opportunities for hedges, small meadows and rough grassland in parks and open spaces

The Vision

3.10 The overarching vision of this strategy is:

'To provide good quality, attractive, enjoyable and accessible green space which meets the diverse needs of all Brent residents and visitors'

3.11 In order to achieve this vision, seven themes have been identified arising from the consultation and research. These themes take account of the benefits that parks and open spaces can make to achieving wider social and economic objectives as well as improving the quality of life of Brent's residents.

Key Themes

3.12 The seven key themes are:

1 Improving Existing Parks and Open Spaces

2 Providing New Parks and Open Spaces

- 3 **Developing New Activity Programmes in Parks**
- 4 **Achieving Greater Community Involvement and Working towards Inclusivity**
- 5 **Maintaining and Improving Biodiversity in our Parks**
- 6 **Mitigating Climate Change Impacts**
- 7 **Promoting our Parks and Open Spaces and their Value**

Theme 1 - Improving Existing Parks and Open Spaces

3.13 In seeking to continue to improve the quality of Brent's existing parks and open spaces and user satisfaction we will concentrate on the priority public concerns i.e.

- *Safety and security.*
- *Infrastructure repairs and landscape improvements.*
- *General maintenance and upkeep.* Through our contract management policies and procedures and other actions, we will continue to strive to improve general standards of parks maintenance and upkeep. In the case of proposals and opportunities for new parks and open spaces and for new amenities in parks, a sustainable maintenance plan and allocated budget will be in place as a priority before proceeding.
- *Independent Auditing.* We will increase the number of independent park audits undertaken to assess improvement priorities (through the existing KMC Green Space Performance Management system).

Theme 2-Providing New Parks and Open Spaces

3.14 We will respond to opportunities where they arise in areas where there is evidence of need to create new public open spaces. We will focus on those areas where spatial mapping and survey evidence shows a significant level of deficiency against the London Plan standards, and on the population Growth Areas. We will also respond positively to opportunities to increase amenities within new and existing open spaces

Theme 3 - Developing New Activity Programmes in Parks

3.15 We will seek out and respond to opportunities to deliver new activity programmes aimed at increasing participation in sport and physical activity, particularly by children and young people. In particular:

- We will maximise opportunities for activity programmes in our Parks resulting from the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games supported by the Mayor's Legacy Plan for 'A Sporting Future for London' (April 2009).

Theme 4 - Achieving Greater Community Involvement and Working towards Inclusivity

3.15 We will continue to work in close partnership with existing parks friends groups and similar organisations, encourage more community involvement in our parks and open spaces and work to ensure that our parks are accessible to all in the borough's diverse community by:

- *Inclusive Play Areas.* Ensuring all of the new and upgraded play sites under the 'Playbuilder' programme have inclusive play areas that can be used by disabled children, cater for a wide age group and accommodate parents, guardians and carers within a socially integrated setting. As part of this commitment and supported by the Transition Team Manager, a group of children with disabilities will work with designers and will be actively involved in the design, planning and evaluation of sites.
- *Broadening the User Profile of Allotment Sites.* Continuing to work with allotment holders, schools and other local groups to attract more use of the allotment sites by those groups identified in recent monitoring as non- or low-users i.e. young people, older females, disabled people and certain Asian minority ethnic groups.

Theme 5 - Maintaining and Improving Biodiversity in our Parks

3.16 Actions in this priority area will include:

- *Creating new hedges, meadows and rough grassland areas.* Continuing to protect existing valuable grasslands and habitats (informed by existing audit information and the Biodiversity Action Plan 2007) and undertake a survey to identify opportunities for hedges, small meadows and rough grassland in our parks and open spaces
- *Tree Planting.* Undertaking a survey of tree planting densities in all Brent Parks and identify priority parks for tree planting to meet targets of Brent's Tree Planting Programme

- *Grounds Maintenance.* Developing a 'Green' Horticultural Grounds Maintenance Specification to reduce the use of pesticides etc.
- *A Guide to Biodiversity in Brent's Parks and Open Spaces.* To inform our residents and visitors to the borough about the tree, plant and wildlife species and habitats in the parks and open spaces and to aid people's understanding of our rationale for adopting particular policies (e.g. around planting and maintenance regimes).

Theme 6 - Mitigating Climate Change Impacts

3.17 We will continue to improve our approaches to environmental sustainability and seek to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change in all aspects of our work. Specific actions will include:

- *Trees.* In assessing tree densities and designing the Borough's future tree planting programmes (including the selection of tree types), we will take into consideration the importance of trees in parks in providing areas of shade for both people and habitats.
- *Shrubs and Plants.* We will take into account climate change and sustainability considerations (e.g. shade value, water conservation and floodplains, maintenance requirements) in our selection of shrubs and plants for our parks and open spaces.
- *Water Conservation and Water Management.* We will continue to consider carefully the water conservation and water management implications in all areas of our work and, in consultation with other service areas, review regularly policies and procedures in all relevant areas (e.g. planting, watering, maintenance, water collection and recycling)

Theme 7 - Promoting our Parks and Open Spaces and their Value

3.18 We will continue to work to improve the promotion of our parks and open spaces, our canals and waterways, the Capital Ring and other walking routes in the borough. We will promote their value to everyone in our community as important resources for people's health and wellbeing, for sport and play, for maintaining biodiversity and for mitigating the impacts of climate change. In particular, over the period of this strategy we will:

- *Website.* Develop more information material on the Council's website about facilities, programmes and habitats in our parks and open spaces
- *Signage.* We will work to upgrade signage in parks to improve clarity and to make information more accessible to everyone in our diverse community
- *Interpretation.* We will strive to provide improved information both on our website and in the parks and open spaces themselves to help

people understand points of interest relating to the history and heritage of the spaces and features within them, cultural links, wildlife, plant and tree species etc.

- *Quality Assurance.* Work to retain the ISO 900/200, ISO14001 quality assurance accreditations and the Customer Service Excellence Award (formerly Charter Mark) currently held by the Council's Parks Service
- *National and Regional Competitions.* Continue to encourage and support local groups participating in the Britain / London in Bloom award scheme
- *Accreditations.* Identify the additional resources necessary to Increase the number of sites in the borough with Green Flag / Green Pennant awards through strategically focused improvements on the identified sites

Action Plan and Review

- 3.19 The Strategy contains an action plan which a number of both internal and external partners will play a role in delivering. It identifies the potential partners and lead organisations and shows how these actions link up to achieving the priorities within each theme. Progress against the action plan will be reviewed annually by Brent's Parks Service and a report produced which will be presented to the Culture, Learning and Sport Forum. A comprehensive review of the strategy will commence in 2014 to allow sufficient time for a subsequent strategy to be produced.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Many of the actions within the action plan can be implemented within existing budgets. Some actions however such as the restoration of Barham Park and the Summer Theatre at Roundwood will require substantial Capital investment and no provision currently exists within the Capital programme. The Barham Park project is estimated to cost around £1.4million and the Roundwood Theatre anywhere between £100,000 and £500,000. Where opportunities arise additional or external funding will be sought to deliver specific elements of the strategy.
- 4.2 Any additional Council funding will be subject to approval during the annual budgetary process for both revenue and capital budgets.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Council has power pursuant to section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to provide such recreational facilities as it thinks fit. This power includes the power to provide buildings, equipment and assistance of any kind.

- 5.2 Over and above these specific powers, the Council has the general power to do anything which it considers is likely to promote and improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of its area under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000. In exercising this power it has to have regard to its Sustainable Community Strategy.

6 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Brent's Parks Strategy identifies that additional development work should focus on a number of target groups that are currently under represented in terms of usage of parks. These groups are: young people, disabled people, women and girls.
- 6.2 Paragraphs 3.5 to 3.9 detail the consultation that was undertaken in the production of the draft strategy and the public consultation. This included consulting with Brent Youth Parliament, Friends and Consultative forums.
- 6.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure that the strategy does not adversely impact on Brent's communities.

7 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

- 7.1 None

Background Papers

Brent Parks Strategy 2005-2010

Planning for Sport and Active Recreation Facilities Strategy 2008 – 2021

Contact Officers

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Shaun Faulkner, Head of Parks Service, Ext 5619

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