

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Meeting of the Executive

13 December 2004

Report from the Director of Environment

Report Title: Revised Parks Strategy 2004 - 2008

Forward Plan Ref: ES-03/04-228

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an overview of the revised Parks Strategy for Brent. The Strategy identifies key issues affecting the use and management of parks and open spaces in the borough. It also identifies the various partners involved in the provision of improvement opportunities for parks. This Revised Park Strategy is a strategy for the development of parks and open spaces in Brent and is a framework document which outlines how the Parks Service (BPS) will deliver improvements to the borough's parks and allotments.

2.0 Recommendations

That the Executive:

- 2.1 Note the findings of the revised Parks Strategy.
- 2.2 Agree the key themes and key service priorities within the Revised Parks Strategy.
- 2.3 Agree to adopt the revised Parks Strategy.

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 In 2001, BPS underwent a Fundamental Best Value Service Review. Following the Review process, a Best Value Improvement Plan was developed to form the basis of an outline Parks Strategy. This document covered the period 2000 to 2005 and is the subject of the strategy revision referenced in this report. In view of recent

consultation findings, (See Appendix 1 of this report) and recommendations from Best Value inspections it was timely to comprehensively review the outline Parks Strategy.

- 3.2 During the 2001 Best Value Review process, the Audit Commission used the findings from the 'Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) – General Survey' and the 'Citizen Panel Survey' (both conducted by MORI in 2000/01) to support their final assessment that the Service was 'Fair' but had promising prospects for improvement.
- 3.3 The BVPI Survey stated that BPS had an overall satisfaction rate of 57% and had an **ALG ranking of 25**; with rankings based on overall satisfaction scores and results from **28** London Boroughs. In 2004, this situation has improved considerably with results from the recently published BVPI Survey Update (April 2004) reporting a **9%** increase in satisfaction and an **ALG ranking of 17**; with rankings based on overall satisfaction scores and results from **29** London Boroughs.
- 3.4 Under BVPI 119 – Cultural and Recreational Services, Parks and Open Spaces received the highest satisfaction score (66%) in Brent.

Service Area	% Satisfied	% Dissatisfied
Parks and Open Spaces	66	15
Libraries	56	14
Sports and Leisure Facilities	38	21
Theatres and concert halls	29	16
Museums and galleries	25	16

- 3.5 The increase in satisfaction levels indicates that residents acknowledge that considerable improvements have been made since the 2001 inspection.
- 3.6 Also in 2004, BPS was inspected as part of the Audit Commission's assessment of Brent's Cultural Services. The Audit Commission's probe into Brent Parks stated that:
BPS clearly demonstrates a positive contribution to the achievement of community and corporate priorities and that the service is strength for the council. This assessment has contributed to the improved rating for Parks from 'Fair' to 'Good' and will further contribute to the Council's aim to achieve an excellent CPA rating in 2006.
- 3.7 Public consultation for the revised strategy took place during October and November 2004. The revised strategy was available in Brent's libraries as well being available to download from the Parks Service website.
- 3.8 Identified through the Parks Service resident's consultation database, individuals were invited to attend focus group meetings, specifically chosen to represent identified target groups. These are as follows:
- Black and Ethnic Minorities
 - Pensioners
 - Youth

- Women
 - Disabled
- 3.9 The focus group meetings were held in conjunction with the Council's Consultation team and findings have been incorporated into the Strategy document.
- 3.10 This revised strategy sets out a vision for Brent parks over the next five years. It will provide a framework within which future planning, provision, improvement, maintenance and use of parks can take place. It will form a sub-strategy to the developing Open Space Strategy for Brent and will be integral to that process.
- 3.11 The aim of the Strategy is to sustain and enhance parks to maximise their potential for cultural, environmental, social and economic value while supporting the Council's Corporate Strategy 2002-06.
- 3.12 In preparing the Strategy, it was the aim, as far as possible to promote equality of opportunity for all and ensure that this strategy is integrated with and consistent with other relative strategies.
- 3.13 This Strategy also sets out the strategic vision for the future of BPS. It identifies the influences affecting future service contribution to meeting national, regional and local priorities, whilst meeting Brent Council's shared priorities. BPS has a substantial role to play under the Council's Corporate Strategy 2002-06 'Building A Better Borough'.
- 3.14 The following are the BPS revised key service priorities as set out in the revised strategy:
- To consult and engage with borough residents, those who use or have an interest in the borough's parks and involve them in the management and development of Brent's parks.
 - To provide parks and sports services and facilities that met the needs of Brent's diverse local communities.
 - To increase access to parks in areas of the borough where there is an identified deficiency.
 - To continue to ensure a safe, clean and healthy environment in all parks.
 - To meet Agenda 21 and sustainability objectives in the delivery of parks services.
 - To invest in the future of Brent's parks in order to ensure that high quality services are provided.
 - To ensure that parks services are incorporated into wider strategic programmes (e.g. regeneration, health, sustainability, lifelong learning and community safety).
 - To provide an economic, effective and efficient service that represents Best Value to the residents of Brent.

Scope

The following describes the scope of the revised Strategy:

3.16 The Strategy pulls together information from a number of sources that have been reviewed and analysed to inform the recommendations. This information includes:

- A profile of the Borough of Brent including demographic and socio economic factors
- A review of the considerable amount of consultation that has been undertaken in the last three years including; challenge days, citizens panels, residents surveys, focus group surveys and residents attitude surveys.
- A review of the internal and external influences that affect the development of sport including funding regimes, finances, planning influences, legislation, national and regional sports strategies and initiatives and other strategic documents.
- Analysis of the current levels of provision of indoor and outdoor facilities and other local providers and initiatives in order to identify gaps in provision and areas requiring support and development.

Key Findings

3.17 From the background research and consultation it has been possible to establish a picture of Brent Parks today. The Strategy identifies a number of 'headline findings' which are of particular importance and have influenced the key themes that have arisen from the strategy. These headline findings include:

- Fear of crime and lack of facilities are the two most frequently cited barriers to participation
- 95% of survey respondents walk to their local park
- 40% of survey respondents use Parks to exercise
- 39% of survey respondents use Parks to relax
- 48% of survey respondents requested improvements in Parks Security
- 34% of survey respondents requested improvements in dog regulations
- 31% of survey respondents requested more seats and bins in their local park
- 28% of survey respondents requested improvements in the provision of affordable facilities for the Borough's youth

- 75% of survey respondents were interested in taking part in physical exercise in Brent Parks

Recent consultation undertaken with identified target groups supported the above key findings. Particular emphasis was placed on issues relating to the extension of park wardens across other parks in the borough and the enforcement of dog byelaws in relation to fouling.

Key Themes and the Allotment Development Plan

- 3.18 Based on assessments and consultation findings, the strategy establishes Key Themes which will form the strategic focus for the improvement of Brent parks and open spaces. These themes take account of the benefits that parks can bring to achieving wider social and economic objectives as well as improving the quality of life of Brent's residents.
- 3.19 Indications are that parks are failing to meet standards mainly on sustainability issues, such as poor infrastructure and facilities, e.g. toilets and paths. This suggests that though parks are provided, **(theme 1 –Provision)** the challenge is to seek ways to improve maintenance programmes **(theme 2 – Maintenance)** through funding opportunities, **(theme 3 – Funding)** thereby increasing green space use **(theme 4 – Participation)**.
- 3.20 To that end, BPS has chosen the following Key Themes to deliver improvements to parks and open spaces:

THEME 1 – PROVISION OF PARKS

To provide green space for the benefit, enjoyment, health and well being of Brent's residents, visitors, and wildlife.

THEME 2 – MAINTENANCE

To maintain green space through economic, creative and collaborative means to achieve clean, safe, inviting and inspiring spaces for people and wildlife.

THEME 3 – FUNDING

To build and improve the financial and other resources to adequately provide maintain the quality, quantity and equitable provision of green space.

THEME 4 – PARTICIPATION

To promote and strengthen community participation in the planning, creation, management, use and stewardship of our parks, open spaces, recreational facilities and streetscapes.

- 3.21 These Themes have been developed further into a revised Improvement Plan 2004-2006, that identifies actions which will be undertaken to deliver the revised Parks Strategy.

3.22 Included in the revised Parks Strategy is an Allotment Development Action Plan. The Plan has been produced for the Council's allotments managed by BPS.

3.23 The Allotment Development Action Plan will:

- Provide guidance for setting standards for the provision of allotments in Brent;
- Outline improvements to the maintenance of sites;
- Outline ways to improve funding for future improvements
- Increase the benefits derived from allotments; and
- Increase the uptake of allotments

In implementing the Allotment Development Plan a service will be developed in which people can expect:

- improved access, security, pathways and water provision;
- opportunities and encouragement to individuals and communities wishing to be involved in the cultivation of allotments;
- efficient and effective allotment administration;
- effective and appropriate allocation of resources;
- fair open and equitable treatment, and safe tenure;
- opportunities for developing gardening skills;
- encouragement to sites and associations to develop self-management;
- fair charges and rents.

The production of this Plan is seen as a key step in developing and implementing a Best Value regime for allotments and focusing resources to achieve the Council's Corporate strategic objectives.

3.24 It is a working document and is incremental in its development. It will be reviewed annually to assess the success of short term targets and their relevance to an ever changing environment.

3.25 Fundamental to the success of the Plan is BPS' partnership with the Brent Allotments Forum. This is the forum through which BPS consults to ensure that the Plan is, where possible, meeting the needs of the community and to ascertain whether a quality service is being provided.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 BPS will be able to implement the majority of the Action Plan targets within existing budgets. At the 14 June Executive meeting, the Parks Capital programmes spend for 2004/2005 was approved. The Capital programme for subsequent years has also been approved but actual spend has yet to be finalised.
- 4.2 BPS will seek external funding where possible to deliver specific elements of the strategy. Such examples of funding may include the Heritage Lottery Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal funding, New Opportunities funding, Section 106 and private partnership funding.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Analysis of consultation has identified that there is a lack of knowledge about what facilities should be provided to make parks, open spaces and allotments more attractive to certain groups within the community. These groups are: young people, people from black and minority ethnic groups, disabled people, older people, women and girls. Further research with specific focus groups will be necessary to find out the needs of hard to reach groups. Funding has been secured from the Improving Brent fund in partnership with the Sports Service and Libraries, to specifically undertake research with hard to reach groups early in 2005.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 Any additional staff costs resulting from the revised Park Strategy will be found from within existing revenue budgets.

8.0 Environmental Implications

- 8.1 The revised Park Strategy for Brent promotes culture, leisure and physical activity within the built environment and outdoors. Improvements to outdoor facilities including sports pitches, the development of outdoor informal opportunities for sport and the improvements to allotment sites will help improve the environment.

Background Papers

Details of Documents:

A Strategy for Sport & Physical Activity in Brent 2004 - 2009

Brent Playing Pitch Strategy 2003 – 2008

Revised Deposit Unitary Development Plan 2001

Parks Service Best Value Fundamental Service Review Report 2001

Parks Service Best Value Improvement Plan 2001-2006

Contact Officers

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact:

Shaun Faulkner, Head of Parks, 660 Harrow Road, Sudbury, Wembley, HA0 2HB, Telephone 020 8937 5619.

**Richard Saunders
Director of Environment**