

### **Development of the Revised Parks Strategy Consultation Process**

#### **Introduction**

The following outlines the various consultation sources which have informed the Revised Parks Strategy.

The consultation process involved looking at the standard of parks in the borough and whether they meet the demands/needs and expectations of communities both now and in the future. This process also involved finding out what were the real issues amongst stakeholders, how well used and appreciated parks and open spaces are, how accessible they are and what improvements and changes people wish to see.

Brent Parks Service has carried out four annual 10% random surveys of Brent's residents through Brent Parks Service's Performance Management system.

The Resident's survey was first distributed in 2000 and has to date elicited responses from 6,025 of the Borough's residents. This is a significant number on which to glean a picture of resident's perceptions about the Borough's parks.

In addition to the aforementioned surveys, a considerable amount of additional consultation and research around Parks and their facilities in particular sports facilities has been carried out in the last four years and this information has also been used to inform this Strategy process:

#### **Residents Attitude Survey**

This survey (2002), carried out by MORI, consisted of face to face surveys with 1000 residents. The survey asked whether parks and open spaces were important, whether they were well run whether improving parks would contribute to make Brent a better place to live.

#### **Citizens Panel**

Two citizen panel surveys (Autumn 2002 and Summer 2003) have asked questions around sport and sports pitch provision. Firstly to identify current levels of participation, barriers to participation and what would encourage people to take part in sport, and secondly, questions with regard to the importance of sport provision and satisfaction levels with that provision.

## **Sports Club Audit**

In September 2003 questionnaires were sent to all sports clubs in the Borough primarily to ascertain their current provision and to help establish a data base of sports clubs and providers in the Borough, but it also gave them an opportunity to air their views and make comments. This survey elicited information on the quality and usage of sports pitches.

## **Focus Groups**

Four focus groups sessions were held in November 2002. These groups were made up of 'elders', 'young people' (two groups) and people with links to Brent's Social Inclusion unit. The sessions were facilitated using the 'pinpoint technique' and those attending were asked what they felt were the barriers stopping them from participating in sport and asked them to recommend solutions to address these barriers. The findings included information on sports provision in Parks and Open Spaces

## **St Raphael's, Brentfield and Mitchellbrook Neighbourhood Renewal Consultation 2003**

This consultation exercise was undertaken in 2003 for the Green Space Maintenance project, as part of the St. Raphael's, Brentfield and Mitchellbrook Neighbourhood Renewal Project. This project was grant aided through SRB finance and aimed to provide an initial year's finance for a Park Neighbourhood Warden, and a modest budget for maintenance (revenue or capital) improvements in green spaces in the Neighbourhood Renewal Area. Both the Warden role and the improvements were to be informed by a public consultation exercise.

The consultation highlighted a range of inter-connected issues relating to the use of green spaces in general but in particular to the greenspaces surrounding the Neighbourhood Renewal area. The problem issues included a range of issues that affect, or are perceived to affect, these urban green spaces. User surveys and pinpoint sessions were the two consultation mechanisms used for this project.

## **BVPI General Survey 2004**

Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are part of the performance management framework for local authorities introduced by the Government since 1997. As part of the duty of Best Value introduced in the Local Government Act 1999, authorities are required to seek continuous improvement in their services. Best Value Performance Indicators are designed to monitor service improvement with regard to the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of service delivery.

The Government specifies that local authorities (and other best value authorities) collect and report on a number of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) that explicitly reflect users' perceptions of a range of

services provided. These perception-based performance indicators are collected triennially, with 2003/4 marking the second time all local authorities have had to collect perception-based measures of performance. This document contains the findings of a "General Survey" carried out for Brent Council to collect a range of BVPIs. This survey follows from the initial General BVPI Survey MORI carried out in 2000/1.

### **Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Group Consultation Workshops 2002**

Three workshops were conducted with residents from Brent's black and ethnic minority communities between October and December 2002. This research was carried out by Brent's Consultation Team and included data on participants views of the Borough's Parks and Open Spaces.

### **Playing Pitch Strategy Consultation 2003**

As part of the production of the Play Pitch Strategy, a comprehensive survey of all 73 schools and colleges in Brent were carried out to establish the extent of secured community use of their playing pitches. In addition, the 77 identified sports clubs in the Borough were sent a postal questionnaire; requesting their views on current quality and suggestions for future improvements. An overall response rate of 27% was achieved. Even though the response rate from football clubs was disappointing at only 19%, the survey results actually represented 46% of the total number of sports teams in Brent. The borough has a large number of one team clubs formed by local pubs which are less likely to respond to a detailed questionnaire.

### **Gladstone Park PE and Sports Programme**

Consultation was undertaken as part of the New Opportunities Fund: PE and Sports Applications

All the nine schools within reasonable walking distance of Gladstone Park have been contacted. Two other schools are considered to be within reasonable walking distance by Gladstone Park Sports Club, and were also contacted. All nine schools have provided comments, and meetings were held with five schools.

### **Allotments Consultation 2004**

Allotments Questionnaires were sent to every Brent Council Allotment Holder with their yearly invoices in April 2004. 685 invoices were sent. By May 7th 2004 102 had been returned (15%) Results are available on [www.brent.gov.uk/parks](http://www.brent.gov.uk/parks) click on the hyperlink allotments.

# Current Consultation

## Introduction

This section of Appendix 1 contains the general findings from focus groups held during November 2004, as part of the consultation process to inform the Revised Parks Strategy.

Included are the following:

- Consultation Objectives
- Methodology
- Interpretation of Findings
- General Findings
- Conclusions

## Consultation Objectives

In order to increase parks usage, Brent Parks Services needs to target those groups whose participation reflects the local borough demographics. Women, disabled people and people from black and minority ethnic groups are proportionally underrepresented as participants in consultation specifically focused on parks and open spaces. The Parks Service therefore focused additional consultation work with 5 target groups. These target groups were

- **Young people.**
- **Older people.**
- **Black and ethnic minority people.**
- **Disabled people**
- **Women and girls.**

Participants for the women's group were randomly selected from respondents to the 2004 annual park survey. The remaining groups were targeted from databases produced by the Council's Consultation team.

The purpose of this consultation is to inform the Draft Parks Strategy 2004-2008 and identify whether the Parks Strategy proposals represent the needs and expectations of the Borough's diverse communities.

## Methodology

The methodology employed throughout was the focus group technique.

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be feasible using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails. Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain

individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context. **Compared to observation, a focus group enables the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time.** Observational methods tend to depend on waiting for things to happen, whereas the researcher follows an interview guide in a focus group. In this sense focus groups are not natural but organised events. Focus groups are particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals, when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, and when one wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic.

These focus groups are being used as a supplementary source of data to support the findings of consultation carried out as part of the development of the Draft Parks Strategy.

Specifically, the process involved the groups generating discussion /ideas in response to the following questions posed by the facilitator. This process was facilitated by an Officer from Brent's Consultation Team. Questions were formulated using the key strategic themes outlined in the revised parks strategy document.

#### **Accessibility**

- How difficult is it to get to your nearest Park?
- How easy is it to get to all the areas in the park once you are there?

#### **Design & Layout**

- What do you think about the layout of Brent's parks?
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#### **Facilities**

- What facilities do you like to see in parks?
- What kind of activities would you visit one of Brent's parks for?
- What kind of things you would like to see in parks which would encourage you to visit more often?

#### **Safety**

- How safe do you feel visiting Brent's Parks?
- How do you think parks could be made safer for you?
- How do you think parks could be made safer for your children?

## Signage

- How well are the parks in Brent signed?
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## Maintenance

- How do you think the parks are maintained in relation to other parks you might have visited?

## Interpretation of Findings

Qualitative research is designed to give an in depth insight into feelings, opinions and attitudes of individuals in different stakeholder groups. This process is therefore different, from quantitative research, in which snapshot opinions only are presented statistically.

Although it's worth noting that a group discussion environment is likely to elicit criticism and more negative views than occurs in normal circumstances, the qualitative process has distinct advantages. When run properly it slows participants to make informed choices and promotes a more positive view of the research subject matter.

Even so the question arises 'To what extent can the findings of qualitative research be considered to be representative of the wider group'? Strictly speaking findings are not representative. What can be said however is that there is a likelihood of 'common ground' with regard to shared opinions and feelings amongst members of the same group from which general conclusions might be drawn. This factor coupled with the in depth nature of the discussion process gives the findings considerable value.

## General Findings

### Accessibility

Physical access to parks was not generally considered to be a barrier by any of the groups. Although most people felt that their local park was within reach and physical access was by 'walking', for a small group of people, travel by car was involved and there were issues around parking availability and charges.

All of the groups identified disabled access and lighting as issues that impacted on accessibility and that might be improved on. There was also a measure of agreement that the existence of a set of basic requirements such as cleanliness, safety, varied and good quality facilities had an indirect impact on the perception of how accessible parks were.

### Facilities

Lack of quality facilities and lack of variety were commonly agreed themes. Groups tended to adopt a 'slightly partisan' approach – identifying facilities they thought either lacking or in need of improvement as ones commonly enjoyed by their peer group. Even so, there was general agreement that facilities for children and young people could be made better. More facilities in the wider context included 'more events'.

Cafes, improved seating, toilets and more litter bins were universally recognised as areas for improvement.

## **Design and Layout**

Most groups felt that design and layout were important, had ramifications for safety and therefore directly impacted on the extent to which parks were used by the public. There was universal agreement that parks should be 'welcoming', well designed and well laid out. There was also some agreement that aspects of poor design/layout might 'lend themselves to vandalism'.

Most of the groups identified characteristics associated with a 'high risk' environment. These included; poor lighting, poor visibility, overgrown and isolated areas and areas of concealment.

## **Safety**

All groups had issues and concerns over safety. These ranged through anti social behaviour, (youths 'hanging around' mini motorcycle gangs etc), evidence of drug taking, (sharps/needles etc), uncontrolled dogs to physical issues such as inadequate lighting and rubbish dumping.

There was also general agreement that unsafe parks could be perceptual and was exacerbated in some part by rubbish, graffiti and generally poor maintenance.

All of the groups produced suggestions for improving parks safety. These centred round; more park wardens, extending the street warden service, late night Police patrols, improved lighting and CCTV.

## **Marketing**

More of everything was the general message on this issue. Posters & leaflets, greater use of the Brent Magazine, more use of park notice boards and information in other community languages, information direct to schools and the targeting of residents associations were mentioned. The young peoples group pre-empted the Parks Brochure, (currently being produced), and suggested a 'parks directory' with a map for local residents.

## **Signage**

There was general agreement that signage could be improved. More educational and informative signage, (including park maps), signs for toilets

and 'penalty' signs for dog fouling as well as clear exit and transport link signs were recommended.

## **Maintenance**

Inconsistency in standards of maintenance was a commonly held perception. Many participants had personal anecdotes about parks or open spaces that were either well maintained or poorly maintained. Cleanliness, (including measures to reduce dog fouling

## **Conclusions**

Each group had different views on priorities for expenditure e.g. the women's participants placed a greater emphasis on facilities for young people than any other group and the BME participants felt that there needed to be increased expenditure on the following: dog control, horticultural maintenance e.g. more floral displays, cultural events and facilities, general infrastructure including; improved pathways ,increased number of dog bins and benches and more public toilets.

However, they shared a common set of basic requirements for their parks and open spaces. **These requirements include parks and open spaces that are:**

- **Clean** – without litter, dog mess or graffiti
- **Safe** – preferable with a visible staff presence
- **Green** – restful, rich in wildlife
- **Varied** – with activities and events and a variety of local choices
- **Welcoming** – well maintained, with good infrastructure and signage.



## CONSULTATION TIMETABLE

Target Group	Methodology	Date & Venue	Facilitator	Status
BME (Black and Minority Ethnic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus group randomly selected from database held by the Consultation Team</li> </ul>	09/11/04 Barham Park Offices	Nisha Popat	Completed Report available  19 people attended from various organisations e.g. Tamil Refugee Action Group
Girls/Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus group with sixth form girls at Kingsbury High</li> <li>Focus group with young people at Alperton High</li> </ul>	01/11/04 Schools	Vikash Mistry	Completed Report available
Older People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus group with members of the Pensioners Forum</li> </ul>	Town Hall	Brian Winterbottom	Completed Report Available  37 individuals in attendance

Target Group	Methodology	Date & Venue	Facilitator	Status
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selected a random sample from ILAM/KMC database and ran a cohort focus group</li> </ul>	04/11/04 Barham Park Offices	Consultation Team	Completed Report Available
Disabled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional development to be conducted in the New Year.</li> </ul>	New Year TBC	Consultation Team	In progress

In addition, the Allotments Application form has been modified to enable the Parks Service to conduct a demographic and ethnographic analysis of allotment holders. A copy of the analysis from the 2004 allotments survey is available on [www.brent.gov.uk/parks](http://www.brent.gov.uk/parks).