

## **National strategic context**

### **DLTR**

#### **Green Spaces, Better Places - The Final Report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, DTLR (2002)**

1.1 The main messages to emerge from Green Spaces, Better Places are:

- urban parks and open spaces remain popular, despite a decline in the quality as well as quantitative elements
- open spaces make an important contribution to the quality of life in many areas and help to deliver wider social, economic and environmental benefits
- planners and planning mechanisms need to take better account of the need for parks and open spaces including related management and maintenance issues
- parks and open spaces should be central to any vision of sustainable modern towns and cities
- strong civic and local pride and responsibility are necessary to achieve the vision reinforced by a successful green spaces strategy
- there is a need for a more co-ordinated approach at the national level to guide local strategies.



#### **Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener ODPM (October 2002)**

- 1.2 The Government stated that parks and green spaces need more visible champions and clearer structures for co-ordinating policy and action better at all levels.
- 1.3 Several existing national bodies have responsibilities or programmes with impact on various aspects of urban green spaces including English Heritage, Sport England, Groundwork, English Nature, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission.
- 1.4 Instead of setting up a new body, the Government stated it would take action on three levels to improve co-ordination of policy and action for urban parks and green spaces. It will:

- provide a clearer national policy framework
- invite CABE to set up a new unit for urban spaces (CABE Space)
- encourage a strategic partnership to support the work of the new unit and inform national policy and local delivery.



**Improving urban parks, play areas and green space, DTLR (May 2002)**

- 1.5 In May 2002 the DTLR produced this linked research report to Green Spaces, Better Places which looked at patterns of use, barriers to open space and the wider role of open space in urban regeneration.
- 1.6 The vital importance of parks and other urban green spaces in enhancing the urban environment and the quality of city life has been recognised in both the Urban Taskforce report and the Urban White Paper.



***Wider Value of Open Space***

- 1.7 There are clear links demonstrating how parks and other green spaces meet wider council policy objectives linked to other agendas, like education, diversity, health, safety, environment, jobs and regeneration can help raise the political profile and commitment of an authority to green space issues. In particular they:
- contribute significantly to social inclusion because they are free and accessible to all
  - can become a centre of community spirit
  - contribute to child development through scope for outdoor, energetic and imaginative play
  - offer numerous educational opportunities
  - provide a range of health, environmental and economic benefits.
- 1.8 The report also highlights major issues in the management, funding and integration of open spaces into the wider context of urban renewal and planning:
- 1.9 ***Community Involvement*** - Community involvement in local parks can lead to increased use, enhancement of quality and richness of experience and, in particular, can ensure that the facilities are suited to local needs.
- 1.10 ***Resources*** - The acknowledged decline in the quality of care of the urban green space resource in England can be linked to declining local authority green space budgets but in terms of different external sources for capital development, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Section 106 Agreements are seen as the most valuable.
- 1.11 ***Partnerships*** - between a local authority and community groups, funding agencies and business can result in significant added value, both in terms of finances and quality of green space.
- 1.12 ***Urban Renewal*** - Four levels of integration of urban green space into urban renewal can be identified, characterised by an increasing strategic synergy between environment, economy and community. They are:
- attracting inward economic investment through the provision of attractive urban landscapes

- unforeseen spin-offs from grassroots green space initiatives
- parks as flagships in neighbourhood renewal
- strategic, multi-agency area based regeneration, linking environment and economy.

### Sport England

#### Planning for Open Space, Sport England (Sept 2002)

- 1.13 The main messages from Sport England within this document are:

- Sport England's policy on planning applications for development of playing fields (A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England) provides 5 exceptions to its normal stance of opposing any loss of all or part of such facilities and are reflected in PPG 17 (paragraphs 10-15)
- Sport England must be consulted on development proposals affecting playing fields at any time in the previous 5 years or is identified as a playing field in a development plan
- it is highly likely that planning inspectors will no longer accept a Six Acre Standard approach in emerging development plans and therefore increasing the importance of setting local standards
- in undertaking a playing pitch assessment as part of an overall open space assessment, local authorities will need to consider the revised advice and methodology 'Towards a Level Playing Field: A manual for the production of Playing Pitch Strategies'.



#### A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England / Playing Fields for Sport Revisited, Sport England (2000)

- 1.14 These documents provide Sport England's planning policy statement on playing fields. It acknowledges that playing fields:

- are one of the most important resources for sport in England as they provide the space which is required for the playing of team sports on outdoor pitches
- as open space particularly in urban areas are becoming an increasingly scarce resource
- can provide an important landscape function, perform the function of a strategic gap or provide a resource for other community activities and informal recreation.



### CABE Space

- 1.15 CABE Space is part of the Commission for the Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and is



publicly funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). CABA Space aims :

*“to bring excellence to the design, management and maintenance of parks and public space in towns and cities.”*

1.16 Through their work, they encourage people to think holistically about green space, and what it means for the health and well being of communities, routes to school and work, and recreation through play and sport. Their ultimate goal is to ensure that people in England have easy access to well designed and well looked after public space.

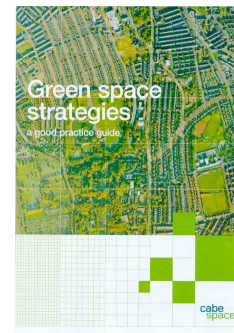
1.17 Lessons learnt for some of CABA Space’s case studies include:

- strategic vision is essential
- political commitment is essential
- think long-term
- start by making the case for high quality green spaces in-house (persuading other departments is key – high priority)
- a need to market parks and green spaces
- a need to manage resources more efficiently
- work with others - projects are partnerships
- keep good records: monitor investments and outcomes
- consult widely and get public support for your work.

### **Green Space Strategies – a good practice guide CABA Space (May 2004)**

1.18 The guidance draws on the principles of the Government’s Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 and will help contribute to national objectives for better public spaces, focusing on three broad stages in producing a green space strategy.

- **Stage 1:** Preliminary activities
  - provides the foundation of a successful strategy
- **Stage 2:** Information gathering and analysis
  - provides the objective and subjective data necessary to make informed judgements
- **Stage 3:** Strategy production
  - preparing a consultation draft and final strategy drawing on consultation responses.

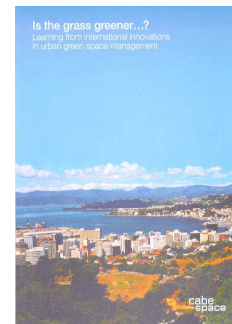


1.19 The document demonstrates why a green space strategy is important and the potential opportunity and benefits that it can provide, including:

- reinforcing local identity and enhancing the physical character of an area, so shaping existing and future development
- maintaining the visual amenity and increasing the attractiveness of a locality to create a sense of civic pride
- securing external funding and focusing capital and revenue expenditure cost-effectively
- improving physical and social inclusion including accessibility, particularly for young, disabled and older people
- protecting and enhancing levels of biodiversity and ecological habitats.

### Is the grass greener...? Learning from the international innovations in urban green space management, CABE Space (July 2004)

- 1.20 This is an international perspective using examples of good and bad practice that demonstrate the many issues common to English local authorities that international cities also face and providing practical solutions that have combat the problems overseas.
- 1.21 The guide focuses in particular on aspects of management and maintenance practice, providing a series of challenging and inspiring solutions to common issues that are not dissimilar to current English practice.



### The problem in England!

- 1.22 The document describes the problems faced by green space and how English towns and cities are often criticised for:
- **being poorly maintained** – uncoordinated development and maintenance activities
  - **being insecure** – the hostile nature of many green spaces
  - **lacking a coherent approach to their management** – conflicting interventions by a multitude of agencies, without clear overall responsibility
  - **offering little to their users** – lacking in facilities and amenities and being a haven for anti-social behaviour
  - **being poorly designed** – unwelcoming to people, created with poor quality materials.

**Manifesto for better public spaces, CABE Space (2003)**

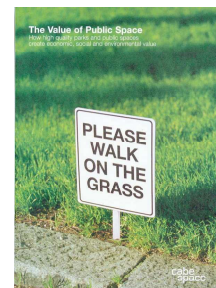
- 1.23 There is huge national demand for better quality parks and public spaces. Surveys repeatedly show how much the public values them, while research reveals how closely the quality of public spaces links to levels of health, crime and the quality of life in every neighbourhood. CABE Space 'manifesto for better public spaces' explains the 10 things we must do to achieve this:



- 1) **ensure** that creating and caring for well-designed parks, streets and other public spaces is a national and local political priority
- 2) **encourage people of all ages** – including children, young people and retired people – to play and active role in deciding what our parks and public spaces should be like and how they should be looked after
- 3) **ensure that everyone understands** the importance of good design to the vitality of our cities, towns and suburbs and that designers, planners and managers all have the right skills to create high quality public spaces
- 4) **ensure that the care** of parks and public spaces is acknowledged to be an essential service
- 5) **work to increase public debate** about the issue of risk in outside spaces, and will encourage people to make decisions that give more weight to the benefits of interesting spaces, rather than to the perceived risks
- 6) **work to ensure** that national and local health policy recognises the role of high quality parks and public space in helping people to become physically active, to recover from illness, and to increase their general health and well-being
- 7) **work to ensure** that good paths and seating, play opportunities, signs in local languages, cultural events and art are understood to be essential elements of great places – not optional extras that can be cut from the budget
- 8) **encourage people** who are designing and managing parks and public spaces to protect and enhance biodiversity and to promote its enjoyment to local people
- 9) **seek to ensure** that public spaces feel safe to use by encouraging councils to adopt a positive approach to crime prevention through investment in good design and management of the whole network of urban green spaces
- 10) **encourage people** from all sectors of the community to give time to improving their local environment. If we work together we can transform our public spaces and help to improve everyone's quality of life.

**The Value of Public Space, CABE Space (March 2004)**

- 1.24 CABE Space market how high quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value, as well as being beneficial to physical and mental health, children and young people and a variety of other external issues.





1.25 Specific examples are used to illustrate the benefits and highlight the issues arising on the value of public space:

- **the economic value of public spaces** - A high quality public environment is an essential part of any regeneration strategy and can impact positively on the local economy. For example - property prices
- **the impact on physical and mental health** - Research has shown that well maintained public spaces can help to improve physical and mental health encouraging more people to become active.
- **benefits and children and young people** - Good quality public spaces encourage children to play freely outdoors and experience the natural environment, providing children with opportunities for fun, exercise and learning.
- **reducing crime and fear of crime** - Better management of public spaces can help to reduce crime rates and help to allay fears of crime, especially in open spaces.
- **social dimension of public space** - Well-designed and maintained open spaces can help bring communities together, providing meeting places in the right context and fostering social ties.
- **movement in and between spaces** - One of the fundamental functions of public space is to allow people to move around with the challenge of reconciling the needs of different modes of transport.
- **value from biodiversity and nature** - Public spaces and gardens helps to bring important environmental benefits to urban areas, as well as providing an opportunity for people to be close to nature.

### **A Guide to Producing Park and Green Space Management Plans, CBE Space (May 2004)**

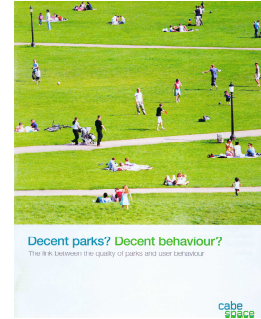
1.26 A primary intention of the guide is to encourage wider use of management plans by dispelling the myth that the creation of a site management plan is an exceptionally difficult task that can be undertaken only by an expert.

1.27 The guide presents ideas on benefits of management plans identifying steps to be taken to writing the plan. It also provides a list of subject areas that need to be addressed in any comprehensive management plan. The document has been split into two sections, providing a logical explanation of the management process:

- **Part 1: Planning the plan**
  - the who, what, when, where and how questions that may arise in the preparation of a park and green space management plan.
- **Part 2: Content and structure of the plan**
  - what information needs to be contained in the final management plan and how should that information be presented?



**Decent parks? Decent behaviour? – The link between the quality of parks and user behaviour, CABE space (May 2005)**



- 1.28 Based on research that supports public consultation that poor maintenance of parks, in turn, attracts anti-social behaviour. Encouragingly it provides examples of places where a combination of good design, management and maintenance has transformed no-go areas back into popular community spaces.
- 1.29 There are nine case studies explored in the report. Below are some of the key elements that have made these parks a better place to be:
- take advantage of the potential for buildings within parks for natural surveillance e.g. from cafes, flats offices
  - involve the community early in the process and continually
  - involve 'problem' groups as part of the solution where possible and work hard to avoid single group dominance in the park
  - provide activities and facilities to ensure young people feel a sense of ownership. Address young peoples fear of crime as well as that if adults
- 1.30 The evidence in this report suggests that parks were in decline and failing to meet customer expectations long before anti-social behaviour started to become the dominant characteristic, however by investing and creating good-quality parks and green spaces, which are staffed and provide a range of attractive facilities for the local community, can be an effective use of resource.