

## **APPENDIX 8**

### **STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

#### **Parks and Gardens**

A national survey, 'The Use of Public Parks in England' (2003), was commissioned by Sport England, the Countryside Agency and English Heritage. This survey aimed to find out what activities people take part in when visiting parks, the reasons why they choose particular parks and levels of satisfaction with the amenities on offer. The main findings of the survey were;

- Just under two thirds of adults in England had visited a public park during the previous 12 months
- There is a distinct bias in the use of parks by social group, with almost three quarters of adults from the higher social group visiting a park compared with only half of those from the lower social group.
- People from Black and ethnic minority communities also have relatively low participation rates, as do those adults with a disability
- Over 8 in 10 adults who had used a park in the previous 12 months did so at least once a month during the spring/summer months, with almost two thirds visiting a park at least once a week
- Women tended to visit parks more often than men
- The most popular type of park visited was an urban/city/town park. Over half of adults had visited such parks in the last 12 months
- Adults from the higher social group were more likely to visit country parks, formal gardens and heathland, than those from the lower social group

The 'Public Parks Assessment' (2001) prepared by the Urban Parks Forum outlines the findings of a survey of local authority owned parks completed by over 400 local authorities. Some of the main findings include:

- A tendency for the majority of users to live close to parks and within walking distance
- A pattern of frequent use by many users, most of whom visit parks once or several times a week
- A predominance of passive recreational use such as sitting and walking
- The condition of parks in deprived areas is generally poorer and in decline
- 82% of the population does not have access to good quality parks
- Provision of basic visitor facilities like toilets and shelters has declined by over 25% in the last 20 years

In terms of the quality of parks and gardens, the Green Flag Award provides a benchmark of excellence which makes a statement about the quality of the experience the visitor can expect.

On a local level, Policy R1: 'Provision of Recreation and Leisure Facilities' in the Adopted Local Plan is relevant to parks and gardens. It states that planning applications for the provision of indoor and outdoor recreation and leisure facilities will not be permitted if they cause detrimental impact on the landscape, historic parks and gardens.

### **Natural and Semi-natural Greenspace**

In 2003 English Nature published 'Providing Accessible Natural Greenspace in Towns and Cities'. This guidance provides a methodology and advice on applying English Nature's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (see Appendix 6 for details on standards).

The document suggests that *"...the model should be viewed as a point of reference against which to assess the natural greenspace resource and from which local targets for continual improvement can be developed...an aspiration to meet its requirements as fully as possible"*.

It also goes on to note that *"...creative site management might make it possible to develop areas of accessible natural greenspace within existing sites that have a range of other primary functions. The willingness to consider greenspace as multi-functional is key to the effective implementation of the model"*.

At a local level, the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan was launched in 1998 as a joint venture between several organisations including Staffordshire County Council, English Nature and The Staffordshire Wildlife Trusts, and is currently being updated.

The plan aims to promote, educate and harness the biodiversity themes within the region, and bring about changes in practices detrimental to the environment and wildlife. The action plan highlights the importance of open spaces in providing habitats for a range of different species. Natural and semi-natural open space and open access land (such as commons) are particularly important in this regard.

The South Staffordshire Local Plan (adopted 1996) also makes particular reference to natural greenspace in 'Chapter 8: Landscape and Nature Conservation':

- Policy LS1: 'Landscape Character – Protection and Enhancement' states that permission will not normally be granted for development which would destroy or damage the landscape character of the District
- Policy LS10: 'Landscape Improvement Areas – Development Proposals' states that the District Council will seek to ensure that existing landscape features and wildlife habitats are conserved and that new planting of locally native species is provided as part of any proposed development

## **Green Corridors**

PPG17 Annex A states that *“the need for green corridors arises from the need to promote environmentally sustainable forms of transport, such as walking and cycling within urban areas”*. PPG17 also suggests that planning authorities should take opportunities to use established linear routes as green corridors, and supplement them by proposals to *“plug-in”* access to them from as wide an area as possible.

The report entitled ‘A framework for the future: green networks with multiple uses in and around towns and cities’ (1997) produced by English Nature identifies how green corridors play an important role in creating and sustaining green networks. It notes how *“green networks can connect urban, rural and natural landscapes and often have ecological foundations which recognise natural factors and the connections between urban systems and their surroundings”*.

The Adopted Local Plan (paragraph 7.32) mentions a potential to develop and enhance the footpath network, and develop cycleways/tracks making use of resources such as canal towpaths and disused railway tracks in order to promote and develop walking linking country parks, public access land, individual villages and the recreation resources in adjoining local authority areas.

The District Council also encourages the development and improvement of a network of wildlife corridors alongside watercourses, canals and disused railways linking the countryside with urban areas.

## **Amenity Greenspace**

Research undertaken on behalf of the Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions (DTLR) in 2002 identified that informal and passive activities are the main reasons that people visit urban green spaces.

At a national level the ODPM (now the Department for Communities and Local Government) identified five main barriers that deter people from using urban green spaces. These apply to amenity spaces (but not exclusively), and include:

- Lack of, or the poor condition of, facilities
- Other users, including undesirable characters
- Concerns about dogs and dog mess
- Safety and other ‘psychological’ issues
- Environmental quality issues such as litter, graffiti and vandalism

In terms of the quality of amenity greenspace, the Green Flag Award provides a benchmark of excellence in recreational green areas which makes a statement about the quality of the experience the visitor can expect.

At a local level there are a number of policies in the South Staffordshire Local Plan (adopted 1996) that are relevant to amenity green space, including:

- Policy R4: 'Open Space - Protection of Open Space and Parks'

*"Permission will not normally be granted for development which would cause the loss of existing public open spaces and parks, particularly in areas where a deficiency has been identified, unless suitable replacement open space is provided".*

- Policy R5: 'Open Space- Provision of Open Space and Children's Play Space'

*"The District Council will require all new residential development to include adequate open space and children's play space in accordance with the adopted standards. Developers will, where appropriate, be encouraged to create new wildlife habitats and areas of nature conservation interest in housing and industrial layouts and recreation developments".*

## **Young People and Children**

'Best Play: What Play Provision should do for Children' (2000) published by the NPFA, PLAYLINK and the Children's Play Council, looks at the values and principles of play and how children can benefit from play opportunities. The report identifies seven objectives for play provision and ten criteria for an enriched play environment.

Also operating at a national level is 'The Children's Play Initiative', which is a new strategic programme for children's play, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The Children's Play Initiative is based on the 2004 report 'Getting Serious about Play' and is made up of three elements:

- Children's Play Programme: Local authorities work with partners to develop a play strategy and portfolio of project as the basis for an application for an allocated sum of money
- Playful Ideas Programme: An open bidding process for innovative projects in planning, design or delivery of free play opportunities
- Regional Support and Development Programme: £15million awarded to the National Children's Bureau to establish Play England

The Children's Play Council is piloting area-wide performance indicators for play, however until these have been formalised the Six Acre Standard produced by the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) (2001) provides national recognised standards for outdoor playing space that include provision of equipped play areas.

At a local level the 'Play Strategy for South Staffordshire (2007-2010)' has identified the following key strategic priorities in terms of delivering children's play:

- Being healthy – promoting children's health through play
- Stay safe – balancing risk and safety through children's play
- Enjoy and achieve – allowing children to enjoy achieving through play

- Positive contribution – enabling children to have a voice through play
- Economic wellbeing – providing quality play and a quality play work force

The following policies set out in the Local Plan (adopted 1996) are also relevant to the provision of play facilities for children and young people:

- Policy R4: 'Open Space – Protection of Open Spaces and Parks' states *"permission will not normally be granted for development which would cause the loss of existing public open spaces and parks, particularly in areas where a deficiency has been identified, unless suitable replacement open space is provided"*.
- Policy R5: 'Open Space – Provision of Open Space and Children's Play Space' states that *"the District Council will require all new residential development to include adequate open space and children's play space in accordance with the adopted standards"*

The Local Plan also recommends that at least 0.2 ha of children's play areas should be available for every 200 dwellings in new residential developments. Children's play areas should also be located so that no child has to travel more than ¼ mile to get to one. Children should not have to cross a major traffic route to get to a play area.

The District Council currently uses the NPFA standard of 6 acres per 1000 persons as a general guide in planning outdoor playing space provision. The 6 acre figure is sub-divided by the NPFA into:

- 4-4.5 acres for youth and adult uses
- 1.5-2.0 acres for children's play

## Allotments

The Local Government Association noted in 'A New Future for Allotments' (2000) that allotments serve a wide variety of functions, including:

- Ecological assets – sensitive management of allotments could ensure that wildlife habitats are encouraged
- Leisure facilities – increase in small households and the increases in the density of housing developments could result in fewer people having access to a private garden
- Open space – ensuring openness in the urban environment
- Assets for community development

In particular, gardens and allotments have been shown to encourage cross-cultural ties and provide a good community focus, bringing people together and creating *"a real sense of neighbourhood"* (The Value of Public Space, CABE 2004).

The modern legislation covering allotment provision and protection has developed in a piecemeal fashion with various Allotment Acts being introduced between 1908 and 1950. New legislation was used during this period to reflect the changing role of allotments. The various Acts are still mostly in force and continue to define many aspects of allotment provision.

Under Section 8 of the 'Small Holdings and Allotments Act' (1908) for example, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments when they consider that there is a demand. Local allotments authorities are also encouraged through guidance 'Growing in the Community: A good practice guide for the management of allotments' (DETR, 2001) to adopt an allotments policy and develop a strategy in order to ensure that allotments are provided where they are needed, to meet the community's needs, and have adequate resources dedicated for their management and maintenance.

A 'Survey of Allotments, Community Gardens and City Farms' was carried out on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2006. The key findings from the results of the 241 local authorities who responded to the survey include:

- Most authorities (72%) offered incentives to potential plot holders retired people, new plot holders or the unemployed
- Two thirds of respondents had not disposed of any sites, in whole or part, since 1996. Those who had disposed of sites were more likely to have more than twenty vacant plots
- In terms of anti-social behaviour, almost one in five had faced low level problems or none at all
- 92% of the authorities maintained waiting lists for potential plot holders. Of the people on a waiting list, one third waited more than a year for a plot
- Almost half (49%) of allotments authorities did not provide facilities to encourage environmental friendliness. Respondents who said they had an allotments policy were more likely to provide facilities

Although there are no specific policies within the South Staffordshire Local Plan which relate directly to allotments, the Council "*places importance on the protection of such areas of open space for recreation and for their potential nature conservation value*".

## **Cemeteries and Churchyards**

There are few national standards for cemeteries and churchyards. The PPG17 Companion Guide suggests that developing quantity standards for churchyards is inappropriate as *“churchyards can only exist where there is a church”*, therefore the only form of provision standard which will be required is a qualitative one.

The Green Flag Award criteria provide a benchmark of excellence against which the quality of cemeteries and churchyards may be assessed. Between 2003 and 2007, the number of Green Flag Award winning cemeteries and crematorium memorial gardens in Great Britain increased from 3 to 14.

CABE’s publication ‘Cemeteries, Churchyards and Burial Grounds’ (2007) emphasises the importance of these sites in terms of their heritage value and use, and calls for separate cemetery strategies within local authorities.

The 1994 report ‘The Management of Old Cemetery Land’ by Dunk & Rugg identified four different kinds of value which cemeteries represent to today’s society:

- Historical
- Ecological
- Education benefits
- Leisure (or amenity) benefits

Their importance within the wider green space typology and their many benefits supports the case for an improvement in the quality of cemeteries and burial grounds nationally.

There are currently no Local Plan policies or documents relevant to cemeteries and churchyards in South Staffordshire.

## **Civic and Heritage Spaces**

Civic spaces can be important open spaces in some areas, particularly in more urban areas and town centres. There are no national quantity standards for the provision of civic spaces, because as stated in PPG17 *“they are normally provided on an opportunistic and urban design-led basis”*. For this reason *“it may be desirable for planning authorities to promote urban design frameworks for their town and city centre areas”*.

The quality and accessibility of civic spaces is however important as *“they are the focal points for communities, the fundamental platform of civic life. Across all ages groups they provide a sense of delight and stimulation within our towns and cities”* (Living With Risk: Promoting Better Public Space Design, CABE 2007).

CABE’s ‘Better Public Buildings and Civic Spaces’ (2002) suggests ways in which local authorities can help to create better places in which to live and work and to visit.

It emphasises the importance of good design and co-ordinating the public realm to reduce clutter in public spaces and promote pedestrian friendly environments.

In his speech entitled 'From rags to riches: the case for better public spaces', Sir Stuart Lipton identifies five challenges that he believes must be met to achieve better quality public space:

- We need to start taking more risks – there is currently a poverty of creativity and innovation
- We have to put quality back into the ordinary
- We need a better understanding of what constitutes 'best value'
- The planning profession and process needs a complete overhaul – they have to be at the root of excellence in urban form
- Rights must be balanced with responsibility for creating a better civic environment – we each have a role, but without shared ownership change will not come

A consideration of the quality of heritage sites is also important as the historic environment *"is something from which we can learn, something from which our economy benefits and something which can bring communities together in a shared sense of belonging"* (The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future, DCMS 2001).

The report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future, 2001) identifies the following key objectives in support of the Government's vision for the future of the historic environment:

- Public interest in the historic environment is matched by firm leadership, effective partnerships, and the development of a sound knowledge base from which to develop policies
- The full potential of the historic environment as a learning resource is realised
- The historic environment is accessible to everybody and is seen as something with which the whole of society can identify and engage
- The historic environment is protected and sustained for the benefit of our own and future generations
- The historic environment's importance as an economic asset is skilfully harnessed

There are no national standards for the provision of heritage sites although the quality of Green Heritage Sites (such as parks and green spaces which are of local or national historic interest) may be assessed against a set of criteria under the Green Flag Award scheme.