



Resources for Improving Parks



A Report from Overview & Scrutiny





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Reports that have been submitted to Council can be downloaded from www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny.



Preface

By Cllr John Alden,
Chairman, Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee



Birmingham is very fortunate in having over 450 parks and open spaces. Our first public park was Calthorpe Park opened in 1857, following a very generous donation of land by Lord Calthorpe. This was followed by Cannon Hill Park Edgbaston in 1873 and Victoria Park, Small Heath in 1876 from land donated by Louisa Ryland.

Several of our large parks are held in trust for the benefit of the Citizens of Birmingham and not owned by the City Council, but are managed by the City Council as Sole Corporate Trustee.

It is widely accepted that well maintained parks and open spaces are beneficial to local residents. Unfortunately there has, in my view, been a lack of adequate funding for maintaining our Parks for more than a quarter of a century.

Scrutiny has no powers to raise funds, or commit the City Council to additional expenditure. I am therefore limited to urging the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture and his Cabinet colleagues to make the improvement of our parks a greater priority.

I would suggest that we need substantial additional funding to make inroads into improving the quality of our Parks and Open Spaces and hope that this Scrutiny Report will help towards this end.

John E Alden.



Summary

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The idea for this review came from concerns expressed by Members about the ability of parks and playing fields to meet the needs of residents for sport, recreation and healthy leisure. Members are concerned about the condition of some of the city's parks and are aware that parks have not been a particularly high priority for Council resources; consequently conditions in some parks have deteriorated. The Committee agreed at their meeting on 11th June 2008 to undertake an Overview exercise in order to find out more about the resources available for improving parks and playing pitches and to make suggestions to the Executive as to how resources might be increased.
- 1.1.2 A series of presentations were made to the full O&S Committee to inform them of the importance of improving parks and to describe the resources currently available. During the course of the review, the committee concentrated on Capital Resources and did not look at Revenue Resources. The presentations included not only information on the capital resources available inside and outside the City Council, but also the role of the Constituencies, the voluntary and community sector and Be Birmingham.
- 1.1.3 During discussions on the Conclusions and Suggested Actions of the Overview in March 2009, it became apparent that there were serious issues that needed to be brought to the attention of the Executive. It was decided by the Chairman of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee to report to Council in a Scrutiny Review format to enable a fuller discussion of the issues and to firm the suggested actions into recommendations.

1.2 Findings

- 1.2.1 Birmingham has a proud history of providing parks for public use and this has resulted in a wealth of parks and open spaces making Birmingham one of the greenest cities in Europe. Historic plans show a city rich in open spaces and surrounded by parks and green estates, many of which were gifted to the city by wealthy industrialists to be laid out as parks for the citizens of Birmingham. Local people are justly proud of their parks and today Birmingham possesses some 470 parks, recreation grounds and open spaces covering 3,200 hectares which are the responsibility of the City Council.
- 1.2.2 Parks are not only tools to promote urban regeneration - as the emphasis on healthy lifestyles and the need to address obesity has increased, they are also places to promote physical and mental health. With greater emphasis being placed on moderating the effects of climate change, open spaces along rivers are potential flood plains. Parks and open spaces can also be outdoor meeting places where people of different ages and cultures can meet and promote community cohesion and they can foster the sense of being involved which promotes community empowerment.



- 1.2.3 However over the past 30 years there have been substantial reductions in revenue funds for parks, an erosion of capital programme funding and a loss of many historical and horticultural features. Too often there are competing demands on City Council resources as other statutory services, significant projects and the need for savings, take priority. The associated reduction in quality has led to a cycle of decline which has left some parks in a poor state of repair which has turned people away.
- 1.2.4 The overall strategic plan for guiding the future of the city 'Birmingham 2026: Our vision for the future' reinforces the importance of green open spaces. The City Council's parks strategy 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces' sets out a clear framework. However unless strategies and policies are backed up by financial resources, parks will continue not to fulfil their potential. Parks need champions to ensure that they are cherished and improved. The first recommendation of the Review is to create a Member-led partnership group to promote the importance of parks and open spaces, co-ordinate funding and involve the local community.
- 1.2.5 Celebrating the heritage of our parks needs greater emphasis, so that their role in the city is enhanced. Our second recommendation is designed to promote and celebrate the importance of parks in our city's heritage - after all we celebrate our historic buildings and personalities.
- 1.2.6 The Birmingham City Council Budget 2009/10 awarded 6% of its capital resources to the Leisure, Sport and Culture Portfolio. Of this, improvements to parks were allocated 21% or £5.8m. The majority of these resources derive from Section 106 Planning Obligations payments (85%). Corporate resources for new schemes in 2009/10 amount to only £358,000 - most of which are essential safety works. Therefore there is very little investment from this source planned for our parks. The move by the City Council from an annual capital 'bidding round' to a longer term capital strategy and planning process is an advantage. However in the short term this has had no positive impact on the capital allocations available for improving parks. We welcome the newly established Environment and Culture Capital Strategy Group and our third recommendation encourages the production of a Capital Planning Strategy for Parks.
- 1.2.7 In addition to corporate resources, the Constituencies Fund is available for local capital projects, however the priorities in the Constituencies are to carry out urgent maintenance works to buildings, such as libraries and swimming pools in order to keep local services running - therefore improving parks is not a high priority and there are only a handful of proposed parks projects. Our fourth Recommendation asks for a future report to see if parks schemes are being supported at this local level.
- 1.2.8 It is obvious that by far the largest proportion of capital funds to improve parks is derived from sources outside of the City Council, especially if Section 106 Planning Obligations monies are viewed as external funds. However sources relied upon in the past such as the Lottery Fund, the Government's New Deal for Communities Funding and the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Funding programme are either no longer available, or difficult to secure. Assembling funds for schemes over £1m is a lengthy and complicated process. Schemes such as Handsworth Park take



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years to bring to fruition - they require revenue funds for the development process and corporate finance for match funding. Finance from Section 106 Agreements has been significant over the last few years however the current recession may result in developments being put on hold with payments therefore not due to be paid.

- 1.2.9 Therefore it is essential that the City Council becomes as knowledgeable as possible about the possible sources of external funds and how to access them. Work is already done on this, but it needs to be disseminated more widely, including to the Constituencies and Friends of Parks. Our fifth recommendation suggests that that a guide to external funding sources is published.
- 1.2.10 Constituency Parks and Open Spaces Action Plans are the vehicle Constituencies use for identifying action needed, prioritising projects and seeking funding. They were initiated by the publication in 2006 of 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces' policy document. The way that these plans are used and incorporated in the Constituencies' processes varies across the city. If gathered together, they could become a potent argument for more resources for parks and therefore our sixth recommendation requests that once a year the ten plans are published together.
- 1.2.11 The Green Flag Awards are run by the Civic Trust and the scheme is designed to recognise and reward high standards in parks and open spaces. It is already the policy of the City Council to increase the number of Green Flag Awards year by year. The advantage of a local award would be that more parks would get a chance to be recognised and the process could involve many more Friends of Parks in championing quality and improvement. Our seventh recommendation suggests that the Cabinet Member discuss with the Birmingham Civic Society and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum the feasibility of creating a local Green Flag Award scheme.
- 1.2.12 The voluntary and community sector has a vital role to play in the delivery and management of good quality, well designed, safe public spaces. The involvement of Friends of Parks not only accesses local skills but also facilitates community engagement. Much private and public sector funding is not available to local authorities, but can be accessed by local community organisations. The case studies presented by Birmingham Open Spaces Forum confirm that income generated by Friends is very significant to achieving quality parks. Support to BOSF could be a very cost effective way of increasing funding for parks and therefore our eighth recommendation is that consideration is given to grant-aiding BOSF to enable more support to be given to Friends of Parks, in particular support in accessing funding sources.
- 1.2.13 The valuable work of the Friends needs more publicity if the number of groups is to be increased. There are some areas of the city where, for a variety of reasons, there are few groups. This means that parks in these areas are less likely to benefit from local fundraising and the enthusiastic presence of volunteers on site. Local Members will already be aware of the groups in their Wards, but a higher profile for the Friends would increase their success in improving parks. Therefore we suggest in our ninth recommendation that a joint report be produced on the Friends of Parks groups in the city, including their distribution across the city by Constituency.



- 1.2.14 The Birmingham Environmental Partnership has the role of delivering the environmental targets of the Local Area Agreement. It is one of the seven thematic partnerships within Be Birmingham, the Local Strategic Partnership which implements the Sustainable Community Strategy. It is a multi-agency grouping, receiving £3million of Working Neighbourhoods Funds over three years to deliver agreed targets. It appears that the profile of parks within the Environmental Partnership has never been very prominent due to the emphasis in the past on the 'clean and green' neighbourhood agenda. From October, 2008 the revised structure appears to relegate parks even further down the agenda. Parks are considered within the climate change readiness group, the Adaptation Partnership. In order to ensure that the importance of parks in all their roles is recognised, we suggest in our tenth recommendation that the Cabinet Member considers becoming the Vice-Chairman of the Environmental Partnership.
- 1.2.15 It is possible that the importance of parks could be emphasised in other areas of Be Birmingham activity, so that they are included in a number of different Delivery Plans and therefore be eligible for funding. In particular the importance of parks as places to strengthen community cohesion and empowerment could be emphasised. As new sources of funds are becoming available through Be Birmingham we suggest in our eleventh recommendation that opportunities should to taken to bid for 'Area Based Grant'.



2 Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R1	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture convenes a partnership group to promote the importance of parks and open spaces, co-ordinate funding opportunities and involve the local community.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	June 2010
R2	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture, through the Heritage Steering Group, recommends including an exhibition on the importance of historic parks in Birmingham in the programme of the Museum and Art Gallery.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	December 2009
R3	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture produces a Capital Planning Strategy for Parks for the 2010/11 financial cycle, by November 2009.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	November 2009
R4	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture reports back to the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on the parks schemes approved by the Constituencies using the Constituency Fund for 2010/11.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	February 2010
R5	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture produces a guide to funding sources for parks and open spaces within a year of the publication of this report.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	June 2010
R6	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture works with Constituency Committees to co-ordinate the production of Constituency Parks and Open Spaces Action Plans (having regard to the Parks and Open Spaces policy) and that once a year, commencing in October 2009, the ten plans are published together and presented to the O&S Committee.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture and Constituency Chairmen	October 2009
R7	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture discuss with the Birmingham Civic Society and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) the feasibility of creating a local Green Flag Award scheme.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	December 2009



R8	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture considers grant-aiding BOSF to enable more support to be given to Friends of Parks, in particular support in accessing funding sources.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	December 2009
R9	That a named officer in the Directorate of Environment and Culture be identified as the first contact for BOSF and that a joint report be produced on the Friends of Parks groups in the city, including their distribution across the city by Constituency within a year of the publication of this report.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	June 2010
R10	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture considers putting his name forward as the Vice-Chairman of the Birmingham Environmental Partnership, in order to ensure that the importance of parks and open spaces is recognised.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	September 2009
R11	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture examines the Be Birmingham Delivery Plans, seeks opportunities to bid for Area Based Grant and works to include targets to promote the importance of Birmingham Parks.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	December 2009
R12	Progress towards the achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee in February 2010. Subsequent reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	February 2010



3 Introduction

3.1 Reasons for the Overview

3.1.1 The Leisure, Sport and Culture Review and Scrutiny Committee expressed concern about the ability of parks and playing fields to meet the needs of residents for sport, recreation and leisure and commented on the decrease in resources available for making improvements to them. The Committee agreed at their meeting on 11th June 2008 to undertake an Overview exercise.

3.2 Terms of Reference

3.2.1 The work outline for this Overview is as follows:

Our key question:	To find out more about the resources available for improving parks and playing pitches and to make suggestions to the Executive as to how resources might be increased.
1. How is O&S adding value through this work?	A series of presentations will be made to the O&S Committee to inform them of the importance of improving parks and playing pitches and to describe the resources currently available. These presentations will be written up and used as a basis for discussion with O&S members to enable Suggested Actions to be developed to assist the Executive.
2. What needs to be done?	Six presentations are proposed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of parks and the policy context • Financial resources for parks within the City Council • Financial resources for parks external to BCC • The role of the voluntary sector in levering in resources • Financing sports facilities
3. What timescale do we propose to do this in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations to Committee in July, September, October, November and December 2008 • Discussions with Committee on Conclusions and Suggested Actions in January 2009 • issue paper to be drawn up by Executive and Scrutiny officers - February 2009 • discussions with members to generate Suggested Actions - March 2009 • draft report – March 2009 • consultation with Members at informal meeting – March 2009 • discussion between Scrutiny Chairman and Cabinet Member- March 2009 • pre agenda meeting for Committee, 31st March 2009 • presentation of Overview Report to Committee 15th April 2009
4. What outcomes are we looking to achieve?	Information will be gathered about possible sources of resources for improving parks and playing fields. It is hoped that ways will be uncovered to increase the availability of resources to enable the Cabinet Member to make improvements to parks and playing pitches.
5. What is the best way to achieve these outcomes and what routes will we use?	An Overview report will be produced with Suggested Actions. This will be discussed with Members and presented to Committee in April 2009.



3.3 The Definition of Resources

- 3.3.1 During the course of the review, the Committee concentrated on Capital Resources and did not look at City Council's Revenue Resources. Previous Overview work has been carried out by the committee on the re-tendering process for the Grounds Maintenance Contracts. In March 2009 new Grounds Maintenance Contracts were awarded by the City Council for 10 years. The Suggested Actions of the Overview were taken into account in this re-tendering process. The way that the parks are maintained through the contracts has an important impact on the appearance of the park. Where the contracts allow on-site Park Keepers, the involvement of the local community is enhanced and this in turn improves the use and appearance of the park. No evidence was collected as part of this Review on the revenue resources available to parks, nor on the Grounds Maintenance Contracts.
- 3.3.2 Each Constituency has a Parks Manager and the Council's Ranger Service and Tree Officers also work hard to improve the appearance, safety and use of parks. No evidence has been collected on the considerable revenue resources allocated to these services.

3.4 From Overview to Scrutiny Review

- 3.4.1 During discussions on the Conclusions and Suggested Actions of the Overview in March 2009, it became apparent that there were serious issues that needed to be brought to the attention of the Executive. It was decided by the Chairman of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee to report to Council in a Scrutiny Review format to enable a fuller discussion of the issues and to firm the Suggested Actions into Recommendations.

3.5 The Process of Carrying Out the Review

- 3.5.1 Members of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee received presentations at Committee meetings as follows:
- The importance of parks and the policy context – 9th July 2008
 - Financial resources for parks within the City Council - 10th September 2008
 - Financial resources for parks external to the City Council - 8th October 2008
 - The role of the constituencies - 12th November 2008
 - The role of community engagement - Birmingham Open Spaces Forum and the Friends of Parks - 12th November 2008
 - The Birmingham Environmental Partnership - 14th January 2009



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- 3.5.2 Following the collation of these presentations, together with the comments made by Members at the meeting, a report of the evidence was sent to all the Members of the committee by the Chairman on 28th January 2009 asking for comments on Conclusions and Suggested Actions.
- 3.5.3 A copy of the report of evidence was also sent to Birmingham Open Spaces Forum who made some further comments.
- 3.5.4 Further research was carried out by the Scrutiny Office in February 2009 on areas where evidence was incomplete, where the Chairman needed more detail or where information was needed to amplify the conclusions.
- 3.5.5 A draft report including conclusions and recommendations was then drawn up at the beginning of March 2009. It was circulated to the officers who had given evidence to check facts (in particular the financial figures) and for comment on the recommendations. An informal meeting of Members of the committee was held on Wednesday 13th May 2009 to agree the draft report for formal consultation with the Executive.
- 3.5.6 Consultation on the draft report then took place with the Executive including both the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture and the Constituency Chairmen. Their comments were requested regarding the practicality of the proposed recommendations. They were also given the opportunity to correct any factual errors or any inaccurate conclusions. Their comments were considered by an all party sub-group of committee Members on 10th June and the draft was agreed by the Chairman under his delegated authority to act on behalf of the committee.

3.6 Structure of the Report

- 3.6.1 The report is divided into the key areas focused upon in the evidence gathering , namely:
- Introduction
 - Background
 - Findings - The Importance of Parks
 - Findings - Financial Resources within the City Council
 - Findings - Financial Resources external to the City Council
 - Findings - The Role of Constituencies
 - Findings - The Role of Community Engagements: Birmingham Open Spaces Forum and the Friends of Parks
 - Findings - The Birmingham Environmental Partnership
 - Appendices

Each section includes the presentations to committee, Members views raised in discussion, further research and conclusions and recommendations.



3.6.2 This review report contains 12 recommendations that the Executive should take into account when further developing the Parks Service.



4 Background

4.1 Birmingham's Heritage

4.1.1 Birmingham has a rich history of providing parks for public use. This has resulted in a wealth of parks and open spaces which are an essential part of the day to day life of Birmingham's residents. Today Birmingham possesses some 470 parks, recreation grounds and open spaces covering 3,200 hectares which are the responsibility of the City Council. Historic plans show a city rich in open spaces and surrounded by parks and green estates, many of which were gifted to the city by wealthy industrialists to be laid out as parks for the citizens of Birmingham. Many of our parks and open spaces are historically significant and relate to the former hamlets and villages of Birmingham - local people are justly proud of their parks.

4.1.2 Birmingham's parks and open spaces are the 'Green Lungs' of the urban environment and contribute to making Birmingham one of the greenest cities in Europe. They comprise:

- Sutton Park, at 2500 acres, is the largest urban Nature Reserve in England and carries the same national designation from English Heritage as Stonehenge – a Scheduled Ancient Monument;
- Six Strategic Parks which have local and national significance: Handsworth Park, Aston Park, Castle Vale Centre Park, Edgbaston Reservoir, Cannon Hill Park and Kings Heath Park;
- Six Country Parks, four of which are based on river corridors: Kingfisher, Sheldon, Newhall Valley, Shire, Woodgate and Lickey Hills;
- Major urban parks with historic significance where part or all is held in Trust; examples include Victoria Park Small Heath, Calthorpe Park, Highbury Park, Rectory Park, Adderley Park, and Ward End Park;
- Numerous local public open spaces.

4.1.3 Over the past 30 years there have been substantial reductions in revenue funds available, an erosion of capital programme funding and a loss of many historical and horticultural features. This decline in funding has left many parks in a poor condition.

4.1.4 However the importance of open space is now becoming increasingly recognised.

4.2 Concerns About the Decline in Public Parks

4.2.1 In November 1999 the Department of Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee Report on Town and Country Parks was published highlighting concerns about the national decline in public parks. This followed concerns that the quality of urban green space declined during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Reasons for this decline included the increasingly



competitive demands on local authority leisure and other service budgets, inflexible and insensitive contracting out of maintenance work and a fall in the local and national political and administrative priority given to green space.

- 4.2.2 Then in November 2000 the Urban White Paper was published and in 2001, the Government set up an Urban Green Spaces Task Force to advise Ministers on how to go about raising green space quality and ensure that it received the priority that its importance to local communities deserved.

4.3 Urban Green Spaces Taskforce

- 4.3.1 In 2002, the then Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions produced the report '*Green Spaces, Better Places*'. It encouraged renewed interest and investment in parks. The report saw parks as an essential part of urban renaissance with parks forming the heart of many regeneration projects. The City Council contributed to the Taskforce through the Local Government representative Cllr Brenda Clarke, who was Chairman of the City Council's Leisure Services Committee at the time. In addition, the then Head of Landscape Development sat on one of the six working groups.

- 4.3.2 In July 2002, revised planning rules (PPG17) called upon local authorities to assess the existing and future needs of their communities for open space and to set local standards for the maintenance and adequate supply of facilities. They stressed the importance of a strategic approach to ensure that resources were targeted.

4.4 European Union Project 'URGE'

- 4.4.1 In 2004, the Department for Urban Regions published the report '*Making Greener Cities*'. This recorded that more and more countries across the European Union are recognising the importance of parks and urban greenspace in helping to define the sustainable development of cities and urban regions.

4.5 CABE Space

- 4.5.1 In 2004, the Commission of Architecture and the Built Environment published '*The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and open spaces create economic, social and environmental value.*' It states that 'Parks and green spaces are an essential element of liveable towns and cities in which people want to live. They can contribute to the urban renaissance by helping to regenerate and improve the economic performance of areas, enhance and support biodiversity of the built environment, enable healthy living and lifelong learning opportunities and foster local pride and community cohesion. At their very best, parks and green spaces can be delightful, beautiful, even enthralling places that contribute to our physical and psychological health with positive benefits for the NHS'.



4.6 National Audit Office

4.6.1 In March 2006, the National Audit Office published a report on 'Enhancing Urban Green Space'¹. It stressed the importance of parks "Good quality green space plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of urban life. Urban green spaces help to provide opportunities for city dwellers to relax, take exercise, play sport and meet friends and neighbours. The existence of high quality urban green space contributes to wider Government objectives such as improved health, more sustainable neighbourhood renewal and better community cohesion, especially in more deprived communities." However it recognised that "Green space is still too often treated as a Cinderella service. Its voice is often dissipated within local authorities and underrepresented in important decision making arenas."

4.7 The City Council's Parks Strategy

4.7.1 In November 2006, the City Council published *'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces'* as Supplementary Planning Guidance (part of the city's Local Development Framework under revised planning rules PPG17). The scope and depth of the strategy is rated as an example of national best practice.

4.7.2 The Strategy is intended to guide the planning, design, management, maintenance and provision of parks and public open spaces in the city over the next 10-15 years. The Strategy aims to address local concerns by promoting a comprehensive approach to park regeneration and through developing stronger partnership working and community involvement. Specific policy objectives are detailed in later sections of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and address the following issues of concern:

- Deliver peoples' visions for their parks and green spaces and respond to community need.
- Guide future provision and improvement of parks and open spaces through the planning process.
- Following adoption of the Parks Strategy as a Supplementary Planning Document, develop a prioritised list of open space improvements through the production of Local Open Space Action Plans which will guide the future allocation of resources.
- Publish a 'Sustainability Checklist' for Parks, to cover all aspects of park design, management and maintenance.
- Promote urban regeneration and socio-economic development.



- Develop partnerships with all relevant public, private, voluntary and community agencies and the local community; and will explore how to create a parks orientated Member-led partnership body.'

(Source: Page 19, paragraph 3.6.1 of the Birmingham Parks and Open Spaces Strategy).

- 4.7.3 The strategy makes reference to the need for investment in parks.
- 4.7.4 The recent history of parks throughout the country has been a story of reduced expenditure and a lack of investment. The associated reduction in quality has led to a cycle of decline which has left parks in a generally poor state of repair which has turned people away. After years of decline and lack of investment, parks are now being seen to be of greater importance, relevance and interest contributing to a revived period of urban renaissance. The importance of parks is now more widely appreciated by both politicians and the general public, which has resulted in increased capital funding at a national, though not a Local Government level. Similarly no additional revenue funding of significance has been forthcoming to date.
- 4.7.5 In order to achieve the aspirations of the Parks Strategy, even higher levels of capital and revenue are necessary, in order that good quality parks, recreation grounds and open spaces can be sustained for the use of future generations of people in Birmingham. Many of the recommendations can be achieved by the redirection of existing resources, by the restructuring of existing responsibilities or by working in partnership with other agencies. However there are a number of new initiatives which are over and above what is currently provided by the City Council.
- 4.7.6 Seeking external funding is a key objective of this strategy. The City Council must maximise its ability to secure external funding sources for improving parks as it is unlikely that additional City Council funds could be made available to support the objectives of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.' *(Source: Page 76, Section 7.7)*

4.8 Local Open Space Action Plans

- 4.8.1 The objective within the Parks Strategy to develop a prioritised list of open space improvements through the production of Local Open Space Action Plans to guide the future allocation of resources has been achieved. Most Constituencies have Action Plans - best practice includes them within the Constituency Strategic Partnership and the Constituency Investment Statement. Parks and open space issues can be raised by Members at Ward and Constituency Committees.

4.9 The Sustainable Community Strategy

- 4.9.1 This Strategy is published by Be Birmingham which is the local strategic partnership that brings together partners from the business, public, community, voluntary and faith sectors to deliver a better quality of life in Birmingham. Be Birmingham is committed to uniting Birmingham's family of partnerships to improve the social and economic well-being of residents. Their strategy



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'Birmingham 2026 Our vision for the future' was published in September 2008. It has five clear outcomes:

- Succeed economically
- Stay safe in a clean, green city
- Be healthy
- Enjoy a high quality of life
- Make a contribution

4.9.2 Under Outcome 1: Succeed economically, within the section on 'The Environment and Climate Change', reference is made to Birmingham's parks and open spaces and to the need for environmental improvements to help raise the profile of the city.

4.9.3 Under Outcome 2: Stay safe in a clean, green city, one of the early priorities for action is to 'tackle serious acquisitive crime and increase public and investor confidence in neighbourhoods. We will do this by dealing with local crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour and creating cleaner, greener and safer neighbourhoods and public spaces.'

4.9.4 Under Outcome 3: Be healthy, one of the early priorities for action is to 'increase the physical activity of people in groups and in areas with poor health outcomes, including their use of leisure facilities and access to physical training and exercise programmes' - parks offer locations for sports pitches and playing fields.

4.9.5 Under Outcome 4: Enjoy a high quality of life, one of the criteria for a high quality of life is that 'more people will be satisfied with our parks and open spaces and will have access to cultural activities (such as libraries and museums) and enjoy our leisure and entertainment facilities at a time and place that suits them.' One of the improvement targets under this outcome is 'By 2026 Birmingham will achieve the best parks in the UK and will measure this by resident satisfaction with parks and open spaces.' One of the early priorities for action is to 'create recreational havens; improving access to recreational facilities and raising the quality of, and satisfaction with, local parks, open spaces and waterways (including canals). We will create a new city park and involve the public in its design.'

4.9.6 Implementation of the Community Strategy is to be achieved through the Local Area Agreement.

4.10 Local Area Agreement 2008/11

4.10.1 The LAA is the delivery mechanism within Be Birmingham for the delivery of the Community Strategy. It is an agreement between Central Government and Birmingham - its people, communities and partners within the public, private, community, voluntary and faith sectors. It represents a three-year programme to transform the city and to deliver the first steps of 'Birmingham 2026', our new sustainable community strategy. The LAA consists of two parts - the



Outcomes Framework and the Delivery Framework, which sets out how the outcomes are to be achieved. This is based on delivery plans within a structure and governance framework.

- 4.10.2 Although parks appear under four outcomes in the community strategy 'Birmingham 2026', they only appear in the LAA Outcomes Framework under Outcome 2: Stay Safe in a Clean, Green City within item 8 to tackle serious acquisitive crime and increase public and investor confidence in neighbourhoods by dealing with local crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour and securing cleaner, greener and safer neighbourhoods and public spaces. Here it is confirmed that 'clean streets, parks and open spaces free of litter, graffiti and other environmental degradation has a major impact on the quality of life of residents, the overall attractiveness of neighbourhoods, perceptions of crime and safety and the actual incidence of offending. A high quality local environment can exercise a strong influence on business making investment decisions and conversely poor environmental quality drives businesses and jobs away from the city.' This is the only reference in the LAA to a park or parks and there are no occurrences in the document of the phrase 'open spaces'.
- 4.10.3 There is no National Indicator to measure attractiveness or environmental quality of parks. The LAA delivery mechanisms have been set up to deliver both National and Local Targets.
- 4.10.4 The LAA (and therefore the strategy Birmingham 2026) is to be implemented by seven thematic partnerships - these cut across the five outcomes. One of them is the Birmingham Environmental Partnership - more information about which is set out in Chapter 10.



5 Findings – The Importance of Parks

5.1 The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

5.1.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee meeting on Wednesday 9th July 2008, the Nature Conservation and Sustainability Manager gave a presentation on the importance of parks. He referred to the Council's strategy document 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces'. His presentation is set out here;

5.1.2 "The historic context to parks is both fascinating and crucial to understanding their future success and purpose. For that reason we must understand their critical success factors. We must also look at the effect they have had on the politics of towns and cities, establishing the notion of a public entitlement and the effect they had on the gravitas of future institutions of cities. Parks had their origins in the 'picturesque' movement which promoted the value of nature and beautiful green landscape. In Victorian times their popularity was huge and politicians went out of their way to provide them as they were so popular. Birmingham has a particularly fine heritage and a fantastic legacy from generous private benefactors. They were deliberately laid out to improve the health of residents, provide a site for entertainment, enhance local property values. They were created using a wide variety of methods including adaptation of gifted estates, options, shares, sales, events and raising money through business. They affected the Edwardian development of the city as all major institutions wanted to be located in a green parkland environment."

5.2 The Strategy

5.2.1 "The city leads the way nationally with its Parks Strategy. 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces' was published as a Supplementary Planning Document (part of the city's Local Development Framework) in November 2006. The scope and depth of the strategy is rated as an example of national best practice. Implementing the strategy requires complex mechanisms including through the production of Local Open Space Action Plans. Nothing is instant, quite the reverse, parks schemes tend to be very slow. The inclusion of the community is central to the Birmingham approach with a very successful and growing network of Friends Groups."

5.3 Funding

5.3.1 "The one sticking point is obtaining significant funds to support the failing infrastructure and refurbish parks to modern standards and customer expectations. It is vital that Birmingham looks elsewhere to lessons of success and seeks to apply these lessons to Birmingham in its role as a global city. Birmingham City Council was the UK national representative on a three year pan-European study into the role of parks in the development of sustainable cities across 13 European



countries. In the last few years notable successes in park restoration and refurbishment can be seen in Birmingham, at Handsworth Park and Attwood Green.”

5.3.2 In the presentation it was pointed out that although some capital funding can be found, it is normally very tightly geographically tied. This creates perceived inequalities across the city. An even larger problem exists with accessing revenue funding. These funds are not usually associated with capital schemes.

5.3.3 As the committee meeting was held at Handsworth Park, Members were particularly interested in the funding arrangements for the park, which were as follows:

The Funding of Improvements to Handsworth Park

The refurbishment of Handsworth Park was enabled by putting together a package of funding from various sources. The main funders are detailed below:

Birmingham City Council Capital	£1.526m
Heritage Lottery Fund	£4.982m
SRB6	£1.265m
European Regional Development Fund	£1.245m

In addition there were contributions from Section 106 agreements and Neighbourhood Renewal Funds which totalled a further £223,900.

The total funding utilised in refurbishing the Park is therefore £9.241.800.

The refurbishment of the Park was completed and a reopening event held in July 2006. The Park was entered for Green Flag accreditation in 2007 and was successful at its first attempt. The outcome of the application to retain its status as a Green Flag Park for 2008-2009 was successful.

Figure 1: The Funding of Improvements to Handsworth Park

5.4 Community Engagement and Ownership

5.4.1 “There are excellent examples of community engagement and corporate support through regeneration and across the development spectrum. Modern and effective global cities have already put parks and the network of green spaces at the heart of their sustainable development plans for those towns and cities – Birmingham must take note. Local people in Germany are managing their own events programmes, local community businesses and franchises are able to establish themselves in parks in France, in Holland residents provide ‘top-up’ maintenance for their neighbourhood green spaces, which qualifies them for a Council Tax discount and win green awards. The Friends of Birmingham Parks as coordinated by the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum are very important in accessing different funds and developing community engagement.”



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5.5 Members Views Raised in Discussion

5.5.1 Several Members confirmed how important they thought parks were to the quality of life of the citizens of Birmingham. Two Members pointed out that parks in their Ward needed more resources and therefore the review was to be welcomed.

5.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.6.1 Urban Parks in Birmingham make a huge contribution to health, regeneration, local history, sustainability and neighbourhood cohesion. However investment in parks has declined and the standards of both facilities and green space have declined. The overall strategic plan for guiding the future of the city 'Birmingham 2026: Our vision for the future' reinforces the importance of green open spaces. The City Council's parks strategy 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces' sets out a clear framework.

5.6.2 However unless strategies and policies are backed up by robust delivery plans and financial resources, parks will continue not to fulfil their potential. Too often there are competing demands on City Council resources as other statutory services, significant projects and the need for savings, take priority.

5.6.3 Parks fill such a wide variety of roles that their needs cut across many funding streams. Parks are seen as tools to promote urban regeneration and improvements at Handsworth Park and Aston Park received funds from the Government's Single Regeneration and New Deal for Communities budgets. As the emphasis on healthy lifestyles and the need to address obesity has increased, they are seen as places to promote physical and mental health. More recently with greater emphasis being placed on moderating the effects of climate change, open spaces along rivers are being seen as potential flood plains. Parks and open spaces can also be seen as outdoor meeting places where people of different ages and cultures can meet and promote community cohesion and they can foster the sense of being involved which promotes community empowerment.

5.6.4 However gathering together resources from the numerous sources that exist to fund these diverse objectives is a challenge. Parks need champions to ensure that they are cherished and improved.

5.6.5 The 'Future of Birmingham's Parks & Open Spaces' report stressed that "the City Council is committed to working in partnership with the local community, local businesses, Parks Friends Groups, all agencies and other organisations in the planning, design, maintenance, management and provision of public open space" *Policy 4 Page 41*. The policy states that "the City Council will explore how to create a park orientated Member-led partnership body." It is suggested that it is timely to set up such a group. Its role should include promoting the importance of parks and achieving funding for further development, maintenance and management of parks and green spaces.



Recommendation 1:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture convenes a partnership group to promote the importance of parks and open spaces, co-ordinate funding opportunities and involve the local community.

- 5.6.6 Many of Birmingham's parks are historically very important and contribute significantly to the city's heritage. Some of them were closely associated with city fathers such as the Calthorpe Estate and the Chamberlain and Ryland families. Celebrating the heritage of our parks needs greater emphasis, so that their role in the city is enhanced. The Heritage Steering Group, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture could have a stronger remit regarding historic parks, as they do not yet feature highly on the agendas of the meetings.

Recommendation 2:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture, through the Heritage Steering Group, recommends including an exhibition on the importance of historic parks in Birmingham in the programme of the Museum and Art Gallery.



6 Findings – Financial Resources Within the City Council

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 10th September 2008, the Head of Landscape and Contract Development gave a presentation on how the City Council provides capital funding for its parks and playing fields from within its own resources. It included a general summary of the levels of capital funding and the specific funding sources and it set out how future financial resources for parks may be secured within the context of a corporate capital strategy. Her presentation is set out here.
- 6.1.2 Members received a presentation on the importance of parks and their policy context at the last Committee meeting in July 2008. The Birmingham Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, which was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document to the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan in November 2006, sets out the social, economic and environmental importance of parks and refers to funding sources in Chapter 7 – Local Visions.
- 6.1.3 Paragraph 7.8, page 16. states -'It is important to understand how parks and green spaces relate to other aspects of life in the city and beyond. Park regeneration schemes are not just about restoring the physical fabric of the park but are also about regenerating the social, cultural and economic value of the area, improving people's health and addressing community safety. It is therefore important to think laterally to ensure that environmental improvements are linked to other agency initiatives, such as reducing crime or promoting health, sports and education, and link fully with the Sustainable Development agenda.'

6.2 Capital Budgets Directly Funded from City Council Resources

- 6.2.1 The table below (Figure 2) outlines the source of the capital budgets directly funded from City Council resources from the outturn figures for 2005/06 to 2007-08 to the budget for 2008/09, which is the first year in the current 3-year programme."



Funding type	Funding source	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Future years
		£	£	£	£	£
Earmarked receipts	Leisure Sport and Culture Strategic -	582,346	19,350	173,053	800,990	201,744
	Constituency	0	0	36,319	18,905	0
	Housing	-	31,881	631,020	1,163,892	349,754
Corporate resources - New bids	Leisure Sport and Culture Strategic -	46,174	641,448	495,310	2,097,011	100,000
	Constituency	87,458	339,864	470,214	1,119,795	0
	Safety	106,474	44,912	232,625	86,025	0
Total		822,452	1,077,455	2,038,541	5,286,618	651,498

Figure 2: City Council Capital Resources as at September 2008

6.2.2 The total resources identified above are £9,876,564.

6.3 Key Issues

6.3.1 The figures above demonstrate that recent investment in parks is determined through developments generated by the housing market, Government investment programmes (such as New Deal for Communities and the Single Regeneration Budget), and specific needs identified within the Constituencies.

6.3.2 Whilst this report is dealing with internal City Council resources, it should be noted that funding from external sources such as Section 106 contributions and Government Programme grants such as New Deal for Communities must be spent on specific items related to either a legal agreement or programme objectives. The City Council has limited discretion on how and where these funds are spent.

6.3.3 It therefore makes sense to target internal capital resources at those areas within the city which do not fulfil Government Regeneration programme criteria and thus are unlikely to attract external funds and where opportunities for private development are limited so the potential to secure Section 106 Development Agreement funds is restricted.

6.3.4 Assembling multi-funded capital schemes which can be delivered in a single parks refurbishment contract can be very difficult to achieve. When the City Council bids for external funding to organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund or European Regional Development Fund there is always a requirement for the City Council to contribute substantial sums in match funding. The



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securing of this level of match funding is often hampered by competition from higher priority projects and bids from other sections of the City Council for the very limited capital resources pot.

- 6.3.5 The new and additional revenue consequences associated with capital improvement projects in parks and open spaces is another challenge facing the City Council. There are often more opportunities to secure capital resources for projects rather than revenue for aftercare, so it is vital that when capital resources are earmarked for new improvements, the revenue increases are secured at the same time either from corporate and service resources or alternative streams of external funding, such as Section 106 agreements or grant award bodies. If this issue is not resolved then potential capital investment could be lost.
- 6.3.6 The capital budget process has traditionally been a process of “bidding” for corporate funds, which is perceived as having tended to result in a relatively ad hoc list of capital bids. It is important that the capital planning process is integrated with the City Council’s overall business planning (service, budgets and assets) processes to which end a new Capital Planning process for the 2009/10 financial year is being developed.
- 6.3.7 Funding from City Council Corporate resources is also generated through capital receipts. Capital receipts are monies from the sale of fixed assets where the receipt value is greater than £10,000. Council policy surrounding the use of capital receipts is refreshed by Cabinet and the City Council in the Budget Report each year. Currently, the city operates an ‘incentive share scheme’, where a capital receipt is generated from an asset managed by Constituencies, the standard rule is that the Constituency is entitled to 25% up to a ceiling of £710,000 and a further 10% to the Strategic Service up to a ceiling of £290,000. Where strategic facilities generate a capital receipt, 25% is retained by the Portfolio, with the remaining 75% retained by the Corporate Centre.
- 6.3.8 Capital receipts are a corporate resource for use to support the Council’s policy priorities, but service departments may be entitled to the ‘earmarking’ of a receipt for a particular purpose. This use of receipts must not be for ad-hoc purposes and will need to support, for example, a wider regeneration initiative aligned to the Council’s strategic priorities.
- 6.3.9 Work is currently underway in Parks and Nature Conservation, based on both existing asset management data and the Parks Strategy Action Plans, to identify capital funding requirements.

6.4 Members Views Raised in Discussion

- 6.4.1 At the meeting of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 10th September 2008, Members made the following comments:
- 6.4.2 One Member remarked on the funds shown in the table as earmarked receipts resulting from the sale of housing land and he was advised that this most often occurred within regeneration projects eg Allenscroft. It was pointed out that the future demands for housing and the rate of redevelopment could not be predicted so these funds were not reliable. In addition these resources are usually restricted to the local area, so some areas of the city where there are



regeneration projects have received more open spaces funds than other areas. It was suggested that BCC internal funds should be prioritised in areas where external funds were not available.

- 6.4.3 The importance of BCC funds being available for 'match-funding' external resources was emphasised. Revenue funding to maintain schemes funded with external capital was acknowledged as really important.
- 6.4.4 Members asked for more details of the revenue monies available.
- 6.4.5 One Member stressed the importance of the Ranger Service in looking after parks and they needed more funding. Another stressed the importance of toilets in parks.
- 6.4.6 The Chairman suggested that the Cabinet Member should strongly lobby for additional corporate resources for parks in the future.

6.5 Further Research on the Capital Expenditure Plan

- 6.5.1 Since September 2008, further research has been carried out by the Scrutiny Office into the City Council Budget process for 2009/10. The Budget 2009/10 was reported to the City Council on 24th February 2009. Extracts from the 'Report of the Executive to the City Council' are included here on the suggestion of the Head of City Finance:
- 6.5.2 *"During 2008/09, services have adopted a draft ten year review of their capital investment needs. This has been done in the context of strategic corporate and service priorities and directions over the year period and forms part of the Council's Long Term Financial Strategy. Further development of the draft ten-year service capital strategies will enable strategic choices to be made and achieve good value from investment decisions. Services are working hard to renew their asset portfolios and respond to the changing needs of the future.*
- 6.5.3 *There are some general strategic aims underlying capital planning for all services. These are:*
- To integrate capital planning into the Council's overall strategic planning, including alignment with corporate and service priorities and financial alignment with the Long Term Financial Strategy;*
 - To maximise external funding and to supplement this with the City Council's own resources where appropriate, especially where external funding supports the City Council's priorities;*
 - To procure the use of capital assets by the means which is affordable and which delivers good value for money to the City Council, including a robust process for the appraisal and approval of capital projects and programmes (the 'Gateway' process);*
 - To welcome the use of partnership working whilst retaining clear lines of accountability and responsibility;*



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- *To keep the City Council's portfolio of capital assets under review and managed according to best practice through the Asset Management Planning process, including the rationalisation of property holdings where appropriate.*

6.5.4 *The capital planning process for the 2009/10 cycle is significantly different from previous years in its aim to develop:*

- *A strategic view of asset use and investment need which responds to the overall vision for service change and delivery over the next 10 years;*
- *A ten year view in line with the Council's Long-Term Financial Strategy;*
- *A framework in which individual capital proposals are developed in line with the strategic view and taking into account the availability of resources;*
- *Plans for an appropriate level of revenue maintenance for existing and new assets;*
- *A Capital Strategy for each of the Council's main service areas (at directorate and portfolio level) consistent with the above approach.*

6.5.5 *A Capital Strategy Group has been formed to oversee the process and review the proposals at an officer level.*

6.5.6 *This strategic ten year approach is intended not just for the 2009/10 cycle, but as the basis for ongoing capital planning into the future. It is recognised that some services have a more developed strategic solution for capital than others. The Capital Strategy for individual services seeks to identify the main areas where progress is required in order to implement plans for strategically aligned and affordable asset use and capital investment.*

6.5.7 *Asset maintenance strategies need further development in some areas to ensure that asset portfolios are sustainable and do not deteriorate. For new capital investment in particular, services will set aside resources into a cyclical maintenance reserve for future cyclical maintenance and replacement needs.*

6.5.8 *This Capital Strategy proposes that 'corporate strategic capital allocations' will in future be made to services in accordance with their ten year capital strategy developed through this process. In the short term for the 2009/10 budget, corporate capital resources are very limited.*

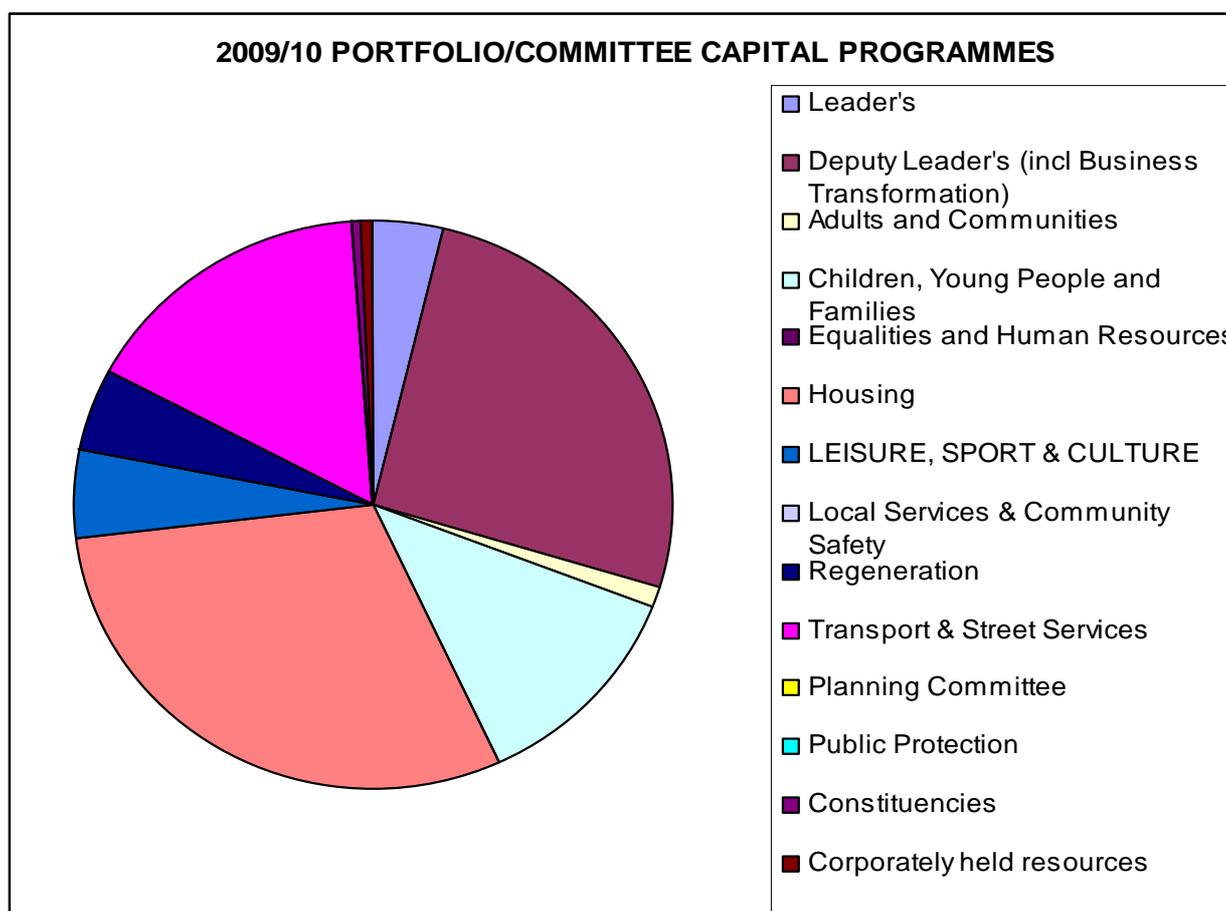


Figure 3: 2009/10 City Council Capital Programmes

Source: BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BUDGET 2009/10 Report of the Executive to the City Council 24 February 2009, Page 40.

Leisure, Sport and Culture Capital Expenditure Plan

- 6.5.9 *This Portfolio covers a wide range of services which do not generally receive regular capital funding from Government. This makes the maintenance and renewal of the extensive property portfolio particularly challenging. The draft capital strategies for Museums, Arts and Parks and Open Spaces require significant external funding, given the limited level of City Council capital resources likely to be available.*
- 6.5.10 The Portfolio was awarded 6% of the City Council's Capital Budget for 2009/10, which is £27.8m of the total resources of £549m. This is illustrated in Figure 3 above. Of this £27.8m, only £5.8m relates to parks.
- 6.5.11 The approach adopted by the Leisure, Sport and Culture Portfolio to initiate a long term capital strategy for the portfolio involves an overarching portfolio strategy supported by individual service strategies, including one for Parks.



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- 6.5.12 The Parks Service Strategy is supported by a schedule of project options put forward by service managers. Both Strategic and Constituency service managers contributed to the Parks Service Strategy. This Strategy was used as a basis for resource allocation decisions.
- 6.5.13 The 2009/10 capital resources for Leisure, Sport and Culture have been allocated as illustrated in Figure 4 below - parks schemes comprise 21% of the portfolio's resources; this is £5,752,000.

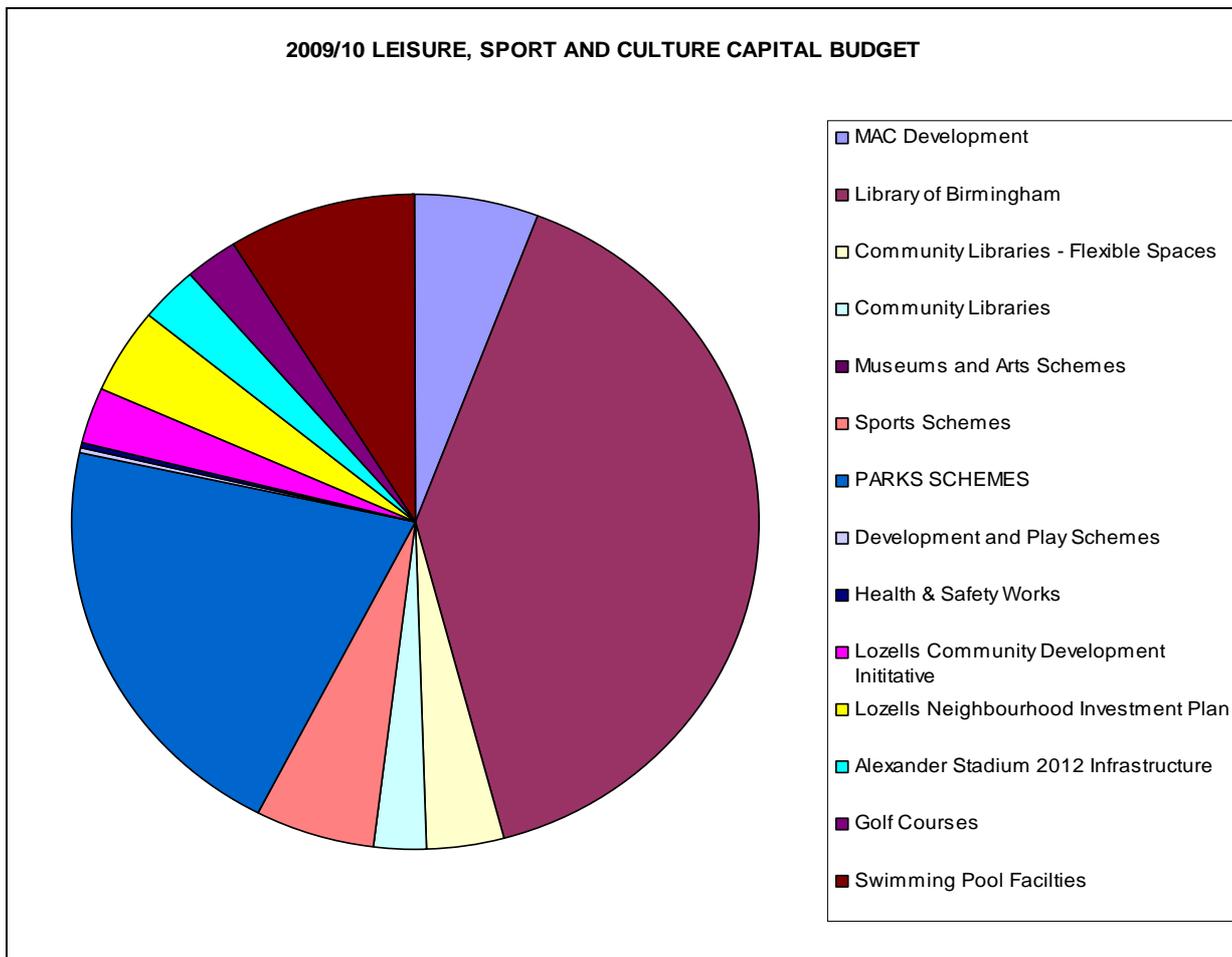


Figure 4: 2009/10 Leisure, Sport and Culture Capital Budget

Source: BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BUDGET 2009/10 Report of the Executive to the City Council 24 February 2009, Page 67.



Parks Capital Expenditure Plan 2010-2012 - Funding Analysis				
	Budget	Budget	Budget	Budget
	2009/2010	2010/11	2011/12	Total All Years
	£,000	£,000	£,000	£,000
Third Party Contributions	99	0	0	99
Earmarked Receipts	264	0	0	264
Corporate Resources	527	0	0	527
Section 106	4,863	1,785	1,545	8,193
Total Resources	5,752	1,785	1,545	9,082

Figure 5: Parks Capital Expenditure Plan 2010–2012

- 6.5.14 The £5.8m parks allocation is derived from a number of sources as set out in Figure 5 above. This shows: third party contributions have been received to complete payments for Noble House and Westminster public open spaces (£99,000); earmarked receipts have been received to complete payments for Quinton Meadows, Yardley Brook, Tiverton Road and Belgrave Middleway (£264,000); corporate resources have been allocated to complete payments on 7 parks schemes (£168k).
- 6.5.15 The corporate resources available for new schemes for 2009/10 (£358,000) concentrate on essential works which are:
- Safety works to parks - £29,505
 - Safety works to park buildings 'Electricity at Work' - £15,939
 - Green Waste recycling (wood-chip project) - £150,000
 - Kings Heath Park Training School - £150,000
 - Safety Works in Park Pools - £13,068
- 6.5.16 In the evidence submitted to this committee in September, Section 106 or Planning Obligations resources were discussed as resources external to the City Council. Figure 6 at the beginning of the next chapter of this report, suggests that Section 106 resources would be £3.4m in 2008/09 and £2.3m in future years.
- 6.5.17 In the City Council's Budget 2009/10, Section 106 resources are included as internal resources. In the Capital Expenditure Plan (Figure 5 above) Section 106 resources for 2009/10 are estimated at £4.9m which is 85% of the capital resources allocated for this year. This is predicted to fund improvements in 45 parks in the city.



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- 6.5.18 Finance from Section 106 Agreements has been a very significant source of funding for park improvements over the last few years. When planning permission is granted for certain developments, a legal agreement requires funds to be paid to the City Council when the development is started. For 2009/10 it is estimated that nearly £5m will be generated in this way. It is to be hoped that the current recession does not result in developments being put on hold with payments therefore not due to be paid.
- 6.5.19 More detailed figures for Section 106 were obtained from the Planning Obligations Officer of the Development Directorate as part of the research by the Scrutiny Office. These are based on "live" schemes since the year 2000 which total £4.4m. These schemes are monitored every six months by the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee as part of their Overview on Section 106 agreements. Of the £4.4m, only 13% of this finance has been received and committed. A further 7% has been received, but is not yet committed to schemes on the ground and 6% represents completed schemes. This means that over 74% of the finance, £3.4m is allocated to signed Section 106 agreements, but its receipt is not guaranteed. It is not guaranteed as the developments have not yet started and therefore the payments are not yet due. More details of these figures are shown in Appendix 1. These figures show that Section 106 resources are not evenly spread across the ten Constituencies because developments are not evenly distributed.

Constituency Capital Expenditure Plan

- 6.5.20 The following evidence was received on June 10th 2009 from the Head of Strategy and Delivery, Housing and Constituencies:
- 6.5.21 "At the point of devolution and localisation in 2004, Constituency Committees were not given delegated responsibility for capital expenditure. However, in 2006/07 the City Council identified £1m per annum of capital resources, from the (ex) Local Services Directorate allocation of £15m, for locally determined, small scale, service improvements and enhancements. In practice, this meant each Constituency Committee could prioritise schemes up to £0.1m, across the portfolio of services for which they had responsibilities – primarily Community Development and Play, Sport and Leisure, Libraries and Neighbourhood Offices. The Parks service is delivered in Constituencies through a Service Level Agreement, and costs are merely recharged from the service provider to Constituencies, who do not have budget allocations for repairs and maintenance etc (Strategic Parks are not included in this arrangement). Nevertheless, a number of improvement schemes in Parks were funded by Constituency Committees through their £0.1m annual capital "allocation", or from Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (now concluded), and Your City Your Birmingham programmes.
- 6.5.22 In February 2008, Council approved a new capital allocation of £3m over three years for Constituency managed services. It was assumed these resources would be managed as in previous years i.e. each Constituency would have a nominal "allocation" of £0.1m per annum for three years and the opportunity to prioritise schemes against that "allocation", according to local needs and circumstances. However, a number of major and urgent repairs issues emerged in



front line facilities managed in Constituencies, mainly relating to Community Libraries but also touching on Community and Leisure Centres, and Neighbourhood Offices. Most of the issues reflected serious problems with the fabric of buildings ie they were no longer weather proof or presented significant health and safety risks such that the closure of facilities and loss of service to local communities was a distinct possibility. The key point is that no capital resources were available within the Strategic Services to fund such repairs and, obviously, the costs were outside the scope of individual Constituency annual capital "allocations" of £0.1m, or repairs and maintenance revenue budgets.

- 6.5.23 Consequently, a proposal was developed to "pool" the £3m of resources to address the immediate priorities in a more strategic manner - rather than giving each of the ten Constituencies a nominal annual "allocation" as is the usual practice. Following discussion with Constituency Chairmen, Cabinet approved this approach in October 2008 and agreed to match the Constituencies £3m resources with a further allocation of £2.95m to enable the most immediate priorities to be addressed. The list of priorities included in the overall £5.95m programme was drawn up in light of Constituency Committee priorities, intelligence from the Local Property Management Team, and following consultation with the strategic service leads. In the case of Libraries, the evidence base was supported by individual building condition surveys.
- 6.5.24 Two schemes relating to Parks are included in this "urgent" programme.
- Small Heath Park (£50k)
 - Handsworth Park Sewers (£30k)
- 6.5.25 In addition, those Constituencies with no schemes in the "urgent" programme (Edgbaston, Erdington, and Northfield) were each allocated £0.1m for local priorities and £30k has been agreed for the Woodgate Country Path pathway. A number of the Parks schemes are also still "live" although the funding may have been approved in previous years.
- 6.5.26 As noted above, the £5.95m three year Constituency Capital programme is already committed to meet immediate priorities. However, in February 2009, the City Council approved a further £1m for local determination in 2010/11. At this stage, it is envisaged that the annual allocation of £0.1m per Constituency will be reinstated at that time, and Constituency Committees will have the opportunity to determine their local priorities. Whilst this could include schemes in parks, it is likely that priority will need to be given to maintaining those services open to the public, and which generate income.
- 6.5.27 As noted above, in the past, investment resources for parks have also been identified at a local level through programmes such as Your City Your Birmingham. In addition, more recent schemes have also been funded through the Constituency Investment Fund and the Community Chest programme. These remain potential sources of small scale funding, along with Section 106 agreements, assuming appropriate business cases can be made and programme criteria met.



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6.5.28 The annual £1m capital allocation to Constituencies is a small element of the city's overall capital programme and the Strategic Parks service is able to make bids for specific projects, along with all other City Council services. However, it is likely that funding will be very limited in future and parks will be in competition with all other services for these scarce resources. In order to ensure best value is achieved in the use of the resources, decisions about which schemes are funded will be guided by service ten year strategic capital strategies."

6.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

City Council Capital Expenditure Plan

6.6.1 The evidence received by Committee in September 2008 leads to a number of conclusions:

- The multi-funded nature of capital investment in parks
- The heavy reliance on external funding and associated limiting factors
- The difficulties in assembling multi-funded capital schemes
- The difficulties of securing additional revenue costs associated with capital projects
- The 'bidding' nature of the previous capital budget process
- The prioritisation of other projects competing for limited City Council capital resources

6.6.2 These factors contribute to the situation where capital funding for parks is very limited and project planning is difficult.

6.6.3 The move by the City Council from an annual capital 'bidding round' to a longer term capital strategy and planning process is an advantage. However in the short term this has had no positive impact on the capital allocations available for improving parks. No resources have been allocated for advanced design fees for park improvements that might be funded from external sources or resources for match funding.

6.6.4 The Corporate resource available for new schemes for 2009/10 is only £358,000.

6.6.5 The finance estimated to be available from Section 106 agreements may be over optimistic. The recession may result in some developers delaying the start of approved works and therefore not paying the agreed planning obligation to the City Council.

6.6.6 The Parks Service will have to consider how it can maximise external funding including possible capital receipts and how it prioritises its projects to meet the requirements of the Capital Strategy.

6.6.7 The City Council Budget Report (para. 4.1) acknowledges the work done to establish capital strategies, but goes on to say that "further work is therefore needed during 2009 to produce affordable and sustainable long-term capital investment plans". It also says that this is particularly relevant "for those services not well supported by Government capital allocations."



- 6.6.8 This further work will be undertaken for the Leisure, Sport and Culture Portfolio by the newly established (May 2009) Environment and Culture Capital Strategy Group. In addition the group will ensure that the City Council's Projects and Programmes process is effectively embedded in the Directorate as well as exploring funding issues for services. The group will include Constituency representation.

Recommendation 3 :

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture produces a Capital Planning Strategy for Parks for the 2010/11 financial cycle, by November 2009.

Constituency Capital Expenditure Plan

- 6.6.9 The priorities in the Constituencies are to carry out urgent maintenance works to buildings, such as libraries and swimming pools in order to keep local services running. Especially urgent are those repairs needed for safety reasons. Therefore improving parks is not a high priority for local resources, except where there are statutory safety requirements for example park pools. As stated in 6.5.26, "it is likely that priority will need to be given to maintaining those services open to the public, and which generate income".
- 6.6.10 This again emphasises the importance of external sources of funds for improving parks.

Recommendation 4 :

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture reports back to the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on the parks schemes approved by Constituencies using the Constituency Fund for 2010/11.



7 Findings – Financial Resources External to the City Council

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 8 October 2008, the Head of Landscape and Contract Development gave a presentation on how the City Council secures funding for its parks and playing fields from external sources; to provide a general summary of the levels of funding and the specific funding sources; and to set out how future financial resources for parks may be secured within the context of a corporate capital strategy and the Parks Service Strategy. Her presentation is set out here.

7.2 Source of the Capital Budgets Funded from External Resources

7.2.1 "The table below outlines the source of the capital budgets funded from external resources from the outturn figures for 2005/06 to 2007-08 to the budget for 2008/09, which is subject to a period 5 review at the time of this report.

Funding type	Outturn 2005-06	Outturn 2006-07	Outturn 2007-08	Budget Forecast 2008-09	Budget Forecast Future years	Total for funding type
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Grants from Central Govt Departments*1	-	44,785	-	-	-	44,785
Third Party Contributions*2	1,398,898	169,097	296,762	696,560	103,696	2,665,013
Section 106 contributions	933,597	1,300,083	2,224,489	3,381,873	2,304,022	10,144,064
Grants from Non-departmental Public Bodies*3	177,806	43,416	-	101,238	-	322,460
National Lottery Funding	1,037,103	2,491,198	717,403	3,733,571	-	7,979,275
Single Regeneration Budget Funding	1,032,809	280,464	-	-	-	1,313,273



Funding type		Outturn 2005-06	Outturn 2006-07	Outturn 2007-08	Budget Forecast 2008-09	Budget Forecast Future years	Total for funding type
New Deal For Communities 1 Funding *4		497,879	364,353	164,293	79,000	-	1,105,525
New Deal For Communities 2 Funding *5		-	872,875	1,404,784	912,866	-	3,190,525
Neighbourhood Renewal Funding	Capital	1,979,272	668,632	669,102	-		3,317,006
	Revenue	467,064	240,159	342,535	-		1,049,758
Community Chest Funding	Capital	667,757	133,366	181,535	52,440		1,035,098
	Revenue	40,004	56,920	113,303	31,800		242,027
Neighbourhood Elements Funding	Capital	-	-	68,987	-		68,987
	Revenue	-	-	16,134	-		16,134
Total for period		8,232,189	6,665,348	6,199,327	8,989,348	2,407,718	32,493,930

Figure 6: External Capital resources as at October 2008

*1 This relates to grants for restoring contaminated land.

*2 This relates to funding from other private organisations for example SITA (Landfill Tax Credit), Sutton Municipal Charities or other stakeholders.

*3 This relates to funding from other public organisations for example Natural England, Forestry Commission or other public grantors.

*4 Kings Norton.

*5 Aston Pride.

7.3 Key Issues

7.3.1 The figure of £32,493,930 above, compared with the figure of £9,876,564 for internal resources previously reported to the Leisure, Sport and Culture Review and Scrutiny Committee on 10th September 2008, demonstrates that recent investment in parks and playing fields has been dominated by external factors, mainly through developments generated by the housing market, Government investment programmes (such as New Deal for Communities and the Single Regeneration Budget) and specific needs identified within the Constituencies through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.



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- 7.3.2 As previously reported it should be noted that the City Council has limited discretion on how and where these external funds are spent. Section 106 contributions and Government programme grants must be spent on specific items related to a legal agreement or programme objectives. Proposed developments often must relate to a specific geographical area that falls within a Regeneration Action Zone.
- 7.3.3 Work is currently underway in Parks and Nature Conservation, based on both existing asset management data and the Parks Strategy Action Plans, to identify capital funding requirements for projects that support the service's strategic priorities. These projects may not attract external funding but where they do they often require the assembly of grants from several different funding organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund or European Regional Development Fund. Often there is a requirement for the City Council to secure match funding either from its own limited resources or seek contributions from other organisations.
- 7.3.4 As previously reported it is prudent to target internal capital resources at those areas within the city which are unlikely to attract external funds but which do support the service's strategic priorities. However there are occasions when the service's priorities coincide with the objectives of an external funding organisation or Government programme and here the City Council can secure significant resources to deliver its own strategic objectives.
- 7.3.5 The use of Section 106 Agreement funds are restricted through the planning process, but can be directed to contribute to multi-funded capital schemes which can be delivered in a single parks refurbishment contract. Assembling funds for larger schemes over £1,000,000 can be a complicated and lengthy process, for which there is often few resources available at the outset. Internal capital resources directed towards the feasibility and bidding stages of a project can lever in significant sums that will in the medium to long term move the service forward.
- 7.3.6 Funding from Capital receipts following the sale of City Council owned property was covered in the previous report. However it is worth noting here that where tenderers bid to purchase City Council owned land, the sum they offer should fully reflect the impact of any planning obligations, including Section 106 agreement contributions, triggered by their development proposals.
- 7.3.7 The new and additional revenue consequences associated with capital improvement projects in parks and open spaces is another challenge facing the City Council. There are often more opportunities to secure external capital resources for projects rather than revenue for aftercare, so it is important that when capital resources are secured for new improvements, every opportunity is investigated to secure the revenue funding at the same time, either from corporate and service resources or alternative streams of external funding, such as Section 106 agreements or grant award bodies. An increase in revenue support from external funding sources invariably results in an equivalent reduction in the capital sums generated. If this issue is not resolved then potential capital investment could be lost.
- 7.3.8 Traditionally the process for bidding for external funds has been driven by local community groups campaigning for improvements to their parks and playing fields, or where additional funds are



required to match an existing capital pot to deliver the full requirements of a project. This is perceived as having tended to result in a relatively ad hoc range of external capital bids. It is important that the capital planning process, including bids for external funding, is integrated with the Council's overall business planning (service, budgets and assets) processes to which end a new Capital Planning process for the 2009/10 financial year is being developed."

7.4 Members Views Raised in Discussion

- 7.4.1 At the meeting of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 8 October 2008, Members made the following comments:
- 7.4.2 One Member raised her concerns about historic buildings within parks, such as Rookery House. Another Member was concerned about the future changes to Section 106 and whether the resources available for open space improvements in the future might be less. This seemed especially important given the figures in the table which suggested that Section 106 funds account for nearly a third of all expenditure from external sources. The importance of Constituency Parks Managers bidding into the Community Chest Funds was emphasised. The Chairman concluded that it was very important that additional resources were found for parks and playing fields.

7.5 Further Research on Heritage Lottery Funding

- 7.5.1 Major park refurbishments recently carried out such as at Handsworth Park and Aston Park relied heavily on finance from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Council made an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund/Big Lottery Fund in 2007 for the refurbishment of Highgate Park. Whilst the quality of the bid ensured that it was one of the three highest regarded bids in the region, it was ultimately not supported.
- 7.5.2 There are concerns that the availability of Lottery Funds for park refurbishments will be limited in the near future due to the diversion of funds to the Olympics 2012.
- 7.5.3 In the longer term it has been recognised that there is a need to co-ordinate the lottery applications from the Council. Following the Scrutiny Review into Aston Hall and Park, the Heritage Steering Group was set up with this co-ordination an important part of its role. It is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture advised by the Head of Museums and Heritage Projects.
- 7.5.4 The Group has produced a Heritage Strategy which lists the Historic Parks in the city. The Group will assess the relative merits of possible contenders for future HLF funding. It is important that the Parks Service is represented at Group discussions.



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BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL – HERITAGE STRATEGY 2007–2012

Historic Parks		
Project	Project Summary	Status
Calthorpe Park	Landscaping works; replanting; refurbishment/improvements to facilities.	Future proposal. Costed feasibility study required
Cannon Hill Park	Landscaping works; replanting; refurbishment/improvements to facilities.	Future proposal. Costed feasibility study required.
Edgbaston Reservoir	Landscaping works, refurbishment of Lodge.	Feasibility study completed for Lodge. Funded from SRB6 and BCC.
Highbury Park	Park restoration and landscaping.	Costed feasibility study completed. Historic conservation study published.
Highgate Park	Big Lottery/HLF (Parks for People) project.	Feasibility study completed. Big Lottery application submitted March 2007. Unsuccessful.
Key Hill/Warstone Lane, Cemeteries	Conservation and refurbishment of cemeteries.	Future project. Costed feasibility study required.
Lickey Hills Country Park	Landscaping works; replanting; refurbishment/improvements to facilities.	Future project. Costed feasibility study required.
Pype Hayes Park	Comprehensive upgrading of park and listed farm outbuildings.	Friends of Park Group established. Work underway.
St Mary's Church Graveyard, Handsworth	Works to Churchyard.	Detailed design work underway, SRB6 and NRF secured. HLF 'Your Heritage' bid submitted.
Victoria Park, Small Heath	Landscaping works; replanting; refurbishment/improvements to facilities.	Future proposal. Costed feasibility study required.
Sutton Park	Landscaping works; replanting; refurbishment of infrastructure, improvements to facilities.	Infrastructure works progressing on site.
Westbourne Road Guinea Gardens (Edgbaston)	Refurbishment and replanting of historic urban garden complex.	Future project. Costed feasibility study required. Long-term lease to be agreed with Calthorpe Estate.

Figure 7: Historic Parks within the Heritage Strategy 2007–2012

7.6 Further Research on Assets Held in Trust

7.6.1 The City Council is sole corporate trustee of a number of assets held for the benefit of the Citizens of Birmingham and has delegated management to the Trust and Charities Sub Committee, which is a cross party group of five Councillors. The parks that are in trust are the result of the generosity



of mainly our Victorian forefathers, and in particular to people such as Louisa Ryland. It is responsible for some major assets such as :

- Cannon Hill Park.
- Highbury Hall and 32 acres.
- Selly Oak Park.
- Victoria Park, Small Heath.

7.6.2 The Committee is looking at ways that they can maintain these assets, and hopefully restore them to their former glory.

7.7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.7.1 It has been demonstrated during this scrutiny work that by far the largest proportion of capital funds to improve parks are derived from sources outside of the City Council.

7.7.2 There are concerns that the availability of Lottery Funds for park refurbishments will be limited in the near future due to the diversion of funds to the Olympics 2012.

7.7.3 During 2007/08 over £1.5m was received through the Government's New Deal for Communities Funding. This funding stream has now ended.

7.7.4 During 2007/08 nearly £1m (Capital and Revenue) was received through the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Funding programme. This funding stream has now ended. It has been replaced by the Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

7.7.5 Finance from Section 106 Agreements has been significant over the last few years. When planning permission is granted for certain developments, a legal agreement requires funds to be paid to the City Council when the development is started. For 2008/09 it is estimated that over £3m will be generated in this way. However this figure reflects those agreements signed, not where developments have commenced and the finance received. It is to be hoped that the current recession does not result in developments being put on hold with payments therefore not due to be paid. For further information see section 6.5 of this report.

7.7.6 Major park refurbishment schemes in the past have been funded by packages of funds. Assembling funds for schemes over £1m is a lengthy and complicated process. Schemes such as Handsworth (£9m) take years to bring to fruition. They require revenue funds for the development process and City Council Capital funds for match funding. The future possibilities for attracting funding for Highgate Park are uncertain.

7.7.7 Searching for alternative sources of funds must be a priority. Officers are working with the City Council's External Funding Unit within the Adults and Communities Directorate to access a database of funding sources including charities. This is very useful work which when completed



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could be disseminated more widely, including within the Constituencies and to the Friends of Parks. The criteria for funding have to be matched against the projects where funds are needed to enable bids to be made. Any guide to funding sources will need to be refreshed on a regular basis as funding sources dry up and new ones emerge, therefore an electronic format for the guide might be the most appropriate.

Recommendation 5:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture produces a guide to funding sources for parks and open spaces within a year of the publication of this report.



8 Findings – The Role of the Constituencies

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 12th November 2008, a Senior Constituency Manager from the Directorate of Local Services gave a presentation on the role of the Constituencies in planning open space improvements and in securing resources to fund them. His presentation is set out below.

8.2 Parks and Playing Pitch Strategies and Constituency Action Plans

8.2.1 In order to protect and improve the provision of parks and playing pitches, the Birmingham Parks and Playing Pitch Strategies were developed as part of the Local Development Framework. Cabinet approved the Parks and Playing Pitch Strategies as Supplementary Planning Documents at their meeting on 27th November 2006. As Supplementary Planning Documents, the Parks and Playing Pitch Strategies are citywide documents.

8.2.2 In assisting Constituencies to identify and meet local needs, Constituency Action Plans were developed. (An example of an Action Plan is set out in Appendix 4.) During 2007, meetings took place with all ten Constituencies to re-engage officers with the Parks and Playing Pitches Strategies, update Action Plans, identify new opportunities and provide support and guidance to help inform investment programmes. Discussion also took place in the Constituencies regarding the best way Action Plans could be implemented. Suggestions included incorporating the Action Plans within the Environmental Theme Group of Constituency Strategic Partnership structures or within Constituencies' Community Sports Networks, or developing close partnership working with external organizations such as the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (see Appendix 2 for further details).

8.2.3 The involvement of organisations such as Friends of Parks Groups, the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF), sports organisations, conservation groups etc. at both the local Constituency level and citywide level has proved to be helpful in identifying local needs and implementing improvements. (See Appendix 3 for a list of the current Friends of Parks).



8.3 Comprehensive Assessment Tool

- 8.3.1 The Comprehensive Assessment Tool (CAT) has been developed by the Parks and Nature Conservation Service to assess the quality and relevance of parks and open spaces to the communities they serve. Using Urban Living funding and supported by BOSF and members of local Friends of Parks groups, 55 Stage 1 CAT assessments have been undertaken in total throughout the city. In addition 20 full CAT assessments have been completed.
- 8.3.2 This work has helped determine priorities for investment in Constituency Action Plans. The intention is to continue undertaking CAT assessments where funds are available which will help update Constituency Action Plans.

8.4 Key Issues

- 8.4.1 Constituencies will work with Parks and Nature Conservation and others to secure future capital and revenue investment in parks and playing pitches through City Council Capital Programmes, Constituency Investment Plans, as well as through resources available through Constituency theme groups and other bodies.
- 8.4.2 Constituencies will continue to assist the Parks and Nature Conservation Service to use the CAT to assess parks and open space. By providing objective evidence with regard to areas for improvement and gaps in provision, this work will help build a strong case for internal and external investment.
- 8.4.3 Constituencies will further develop partnership working with Parks and Nature Conservation to maximise access to resources. In particular, this joint work will include:
- scoping and prioritising of projects
 - assembling internal and external funding bids
 - agreement on best use of Section 106 monies
- 8.4.4 Through Constituency Partnership structures, Constituency Community Sports Networks and other bodies, Members have the opportunity to influence parks and playing pitch improvements in their Constituency. In addition, Constituencies will continue to develop partnerships with local organisations and this community engagement will help identify local priorities for investment. In addition, such work will support existing and help develop new Friends of groups and sports clubs. This will increase the capacity of residents to contribute to parks and playing pitches through voluntary effort and funding bids.
- 8.4.5 In partnership with Strategic Sport, Constituencies will update information related to the use, number, quality and type of playing pitches. This in turn can contribute to the identification of strategic needs at a Constituency level which will help formulate strong external funding bids.



- 8.4.6 Significant levels of capital funding are needed to upgrade Birmingham's parks and playing field facilities. The provision of new and improved facilities will almost certainly have additional revenue implications that could put additional pressures on the current revenue budgets available. The voluntary sector and community groups can bring significant added value in this respect. However, to facilitate this requires extended periods of support and input from existing City Council Constituency, Parks and Sports staff.
- 8.4.7 Constituencies have contributed to improvements to parks and playing pitches across the city. On going partnership work between representatives of Parks and Nature Conservation, the Constituencies and the voluntary sector is vital to secure further improvement."

8.5 Members Views Raised in Discussion

- 8.5.1 At the meeting of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 12th November 2008, several Members said that they were not aware of the process outlined on the report for creating local Action Plans to implement the Parks and Playing Pitches Strategies. As a result Members from one Constituency sought a meeting with their Constituency Chairman and Director and became familiar with the process that was working very well in their particular area. This emphasised the importance of good communications within the Constituencies.
- 8.5.2 Members supported the use of the Comprehensive Assessment Tool (CAT) and welcomed the involvement of BOSF and Friends of Parks in its implementation. They were keen to see the number of CAT assessments increase across the city, so that in time the majority of parks were assessed – ways of supporting this needed to be found.
- 8.5.3 Discussion included the importance of Green Flag Awards – this is a national annual award scheme for parks, which recognises good environmental management. It was suggested that we need to aim for a Green Flag park in each Constituency.

8.6 Green Flag Awards

- 8.6.1 As a result of Members' interest in Green Flag Awards, the following information has been included in this report:



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The Green Flag Award scheme is run by the Civic Trust. It is a national annual award scheme for parks, which recognises good environmental management.

Birmingham currently has six sites with Green Flag status:

Lickey Hills Country Park was the first to earn the Green Flag award and has now held an award for ten consecutive years and has impressed the judges with its conservation of flora and fauna, the high level of community use, Ranger led educational and activity sessions and demonstrable community consultation.

Cannon Hill Park which has been praised for its helpful and well-informed staff and was recognised as providing a welcoming site for diverse communities and people experiencing difficulties with mobility.

Kings Heath Park pond restoration project was singled out for praise by the judges, as was the helpfulness of the staff.

Castle Vale Centre Park is an excellent local park, which is clearly valued. It has benefited from a very high level of community involvement that has created an exemplar of what can be achieved when local people are involved at the outset.

Handsworth Park. This Park is at the heart of its community, responding to different needs and benefiting from its liveliness. With the Leisure Centre and Play Centre, the play and sporting facilities, the lakes and the boathouse, the Sons of Rest Pavilion, the Bandstand, and the natural beauty of the trees, shrubs, views and wildlife, this is a park that offers something for all.

New Hall Valley Country Park. A stunning piece of “captured” Midlands countryside. The great thing is that this Country Park has turned out like it was supposed to be, following a genuine and effective partnership between local people and their Council. Here achievement is driven by an enthusiastic partnership of local people and Council Officers: each doing what they do best.

The Green Flag Award Scheme is designed to recognise the highest standards amongst England's parks and publicly accessed green spaces. It rewards those who attain the demanding criteria and in doing so, it helps to encourage other park authorities and organisations to improve their environment and management standards, so that they in turn may be eligible for a Green Flag. There are eight separately measured criteria that a park must meet in order to reach the required standard. These include:

- Environmental protection and management
- Community involvement and consultation
- Sustainability
- Safety, cleanliness and accessibility.

Applicants are strictly judged on site visits and comprehensive desk-based information by an expert core of volunteer judges. The park must re-apply each year for the award to ensure standards are maintained.

Figure 8: Green Flag Awards



8.7 Comments by Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) on the Comprehensive Assessment Tool (CAT)

- 8.7.1 The Birmingham Open Spaces Forum was invited to comment on the draft report of this review and made the following written representations:
- 8.7.2 "The CAT Tool was originally our idea and was worked up with a team lead by a consultant in partnership with Landscape Practice Group (a division of the Environment and Culture Directorate) and the Parks Department. We developed it as a partnership to be a tool to be used to evaluate our parks and open spaces and score them depending on their condition and facilities present. The field survey is done in partnership with a member of the Friends' Group and a Parks professional working together. They do a walkabout of the site and mark it according to the sheet.
- 8.7.3 There is then the desktop survey to complete with visitor surveys and community consultations. We originally piloted this by doing a field survey on one park per constituency. The Housing Department then used the CAT tool to help them in North Birmingham with the Housing Market Renewal Area (HMRA) survey. The Landscape Practice Group lead on this, a Consultant was contracted to organise it, BOSF and other local people helped out as did the Park Managers. Whilst some of these areas were parks, others were open spaces (not owned by the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture) and small areas of grass. We became involved with the HMRA survey to make sure that the community view was included in to the Housing survey as we do not want to lose any good quality open space, especially if it is valued by the local community.
- 8.7.4 We now want to continue the CAT across other parks and open spaces in Birmingham and we will be writing to the current Head of Parks to ask about continuing this good work."

8.8 Comments by BOSF on Local Resources

- 8.8.1 The Birmingham Open Spaces forum was invited to comment on the draft report of this Review and made the following written representations:
- 8.8.2 "We have a concern here as funding for the parks budget is cut annually centrally in line with all other budgets, some of that reduced money goes down to constituencies to manage some facilities locally and these funds are then cut again as constituencies find the cuts requested of them. The poor park managers are therefore asked to cut the work on the parks again and try to find savings. Some parks are now down to core standard only and other parks are below. Our parks cannot survive these constant cuts in budget!"



8.9 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.9.1 Constituency Parks and Open Spaces Action Plans are the vehicle Constituencies use for identifying action needed, prioritising projects and seeking funding. They were initiated by the publication in 2006 of 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and open Spaces' policy document. The way that these plans are used and incorporated in the Constituencies' processes varies across the city. The Chairman of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee, as part of this scrutiny work, wrote to each Constituency Chairman to enquire about the processes used in each Constituency. To date replies from three Constituencies have been received. It became apparent that there was considerable variation across the city as to the importance attached to the open space planning processes.

Recommendation 6:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture works with Constituency Committees to co-ordinate the production of Constituency Parks and Open Spaces Action Plans (having regard to the Parks and Open Spaces policy) and that once a year, commencing in October 2009, the ten plans are published together and presented to the O&S Committee.

8.9.2 The financial planning process in the Constituencies is set out in section 6.5 of this report. The conclusion is that the priorities in the Constituencies are to carry out urgent maintenance works to buildings, such as libraries and swimming pools in order to keep local services running. Especially urgent are those repairs needed for safety reasons. Therefore improving parks is not a high priority for local resources, except where there are statutory safety requirements for example park pools.

8.9.3 This emphasises the importance of external sources of funds for improving parks. External resources will have to be identified for those park projects that are discussed in the Parks and Open Spaces Action Plans.

8.9.4 The Green Flag Awards are run by the Civic Trust and the scheme is designed to recognise and reward high standards in parks and open spaces. It is already the policy of the City Council to increase the number of Green Flag Awards year by year. However since Birmingham possesses some 470 parks, recreation grounds and open spaces across the constituencies, there could also be scope for a city award scheme. This would be judged on similar criteria as the Green Flag Award, with the bar set at a slightly lower level. Winners of the local award would be likely to aim for the national award in the future. A suitable name for the local award scheme would be needed.



- 8.9.5 The advantage of a local award would be that more parks would get a chance to be recognised and the process could involve many more Friends of Parks in championing quality and improvement. As the Civic Trust is the umbrella for Civic Societies, it would seem logical that any local scheme should involve The Birmingham Civic Society. The Society has had an important role in the past providing quality open spaces in the city.

Recommendation 7:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture discuss with the Birmingham Civic Society and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) the feasibility of creating a local Green Flag Award scheme.



9 Findings – The Role of Community Engagement: Birmingham Open Spaces Forum and the Friends of Parks

9.1 The Government View

9.1.1 The March 2006 report 'Enhancing Urban Green Space' states that "The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sees the voluntary and community sector as having a vital role to play in the delivery and management of good quality, well designed, safe public spaces. They regard the sector as a major source of skills, knowledge and expertise and believe it can facilitate community engagement and empowerment..... The involvement of community groups can:

- Help identify the need for new facilities and suggest appropriate sites for renovation,
- Design or redesign green space so that it is appropriate to local needs,
- Bringing new life to green spaces by encouraging a wider range of uses,
- Encourage a greater sense of ownership by local people,
- Help to generate greater social cohesion – for example by including all members of the community in the design and use of green spaces,
- Keep a watchful eye on the standards of maintenance and staffing levels in a green space,
- Raise funds to which local authorities do not have access,
- Address very local environmental problems – for example anti-social behaviour,
- Provide volunteer labour.

9.1.2 The need to reach out and engage with local communities and relevant user groups is widely accepted as being a prerequisite to effective and sustainable enhancement of urban green space."

9.2 The View of Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)

9.2.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 12th November 2008, representatives gave a presentation on the role and value of the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum and the Friends of Parks. Their presentation is set out below.



Valuing Our Parks and Open Spaces in Birmingham

9.2.2 BOSF and our member groups have felt for a long time that our parks and open spaces are an undervalued and underinvested in resource. National and international research is now providing us with the evidence to back up the experience.

Their financial value - a radiator not a drain

9.2.3 We have always had the problem that internationally, not just in Birmingham, parks and open spaces are seen as a drain on resources. What Friends Groups do is recognise and highlight the value of our open spaces and contribution they make to our city. We live in a world where things need to be counted to be seen as of value. A library with a door and membership can be shown to deliver a valuable service to residents. A park with no gates and no staff appears to be of no value because we can't count how many people use it, how often and what value they get from it.

9.2.4 The Trust for Public Land (*The Trust for Public Land's Center for City Park Excellence 2008. How much value does the city of Philadelphia receive from its park and recreation system? www.tpl.org/philaparkvalue*) has just produced the world's first equation from which a local authority can estimate:

- the income its parks and open spaces generate
- the savings its parks and open spaces make for other budget areas
- the economic, environmental, health and social benefits contributed by its parks and open spaces

The areas they included in the formula in the pilot city of Philadelphia (pop: 1.4million, 10,000 acres of open space) were:

- removal of air pollution by vegetation
- reducing the cost of managing urban storm water
- property values and higher income from property taxes
- direct use value – what you have to pay to use the facilities elsewhere if they were not free or cheaper in your park
- promoting human health
- income from tourist visits
- community cohesion benefits

9.2.5 All of these factors are relevant to Birmingham. In Philadelphia this equated to:

- \$23m in city revenue
- \$16m in municipal savings costs
- \$729m generated in wealth for residents



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- \$1.1billion in cost savings for citizens

Their value in health promotion – the effect of the exposure to natural environments on health inequalities

- 9.2.6 November 2008 saw the publication of a report in *The Lancet* (Mitchell R and Popham F 2008 *Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study. The Lancet, 372 (9650); 1655-1660*) that showed that just living near a good quality open space (you don't even have to visit it) reduced the health inequalities between rich and poor in all causes of mortality, except lung cancer.

What Friends Groups Can Contribute – Tangibles and Intangibles

- 9.2.7 Birmingham's open spaces users and Friends Groups know that even with all the evidence in the world, no local authority can invest sufficiently in its natural environment.

The tangibles – cash and labour

- 9.2.8 For many years Friends Groups have been plugging the gaps – providing cash and labour. Much private and public sector funding – through the lottery and trusts etc - is not available to local authorities and in the few cases where it is, there usually has to be a demonstrable input from local community organisations. In 2006 BOSF undertook a brief piece of internal research to find out what a Friends Group was worth in cash terms. The research, which was very limited in scale, showed that, on average, an open space with a Friends Group received an additional £20,000 in funding per year.

Case Study 1 – Putting in the hours in Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Kings Norton Nature Reserve Friends Group was set up in 2004. It is an informal pressure group that lobbies for environmental improvements in the area and acts as a focal point for local consultations on future developments. The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve (FKNNR) have strong links to Birmingham City Council and other bodies prepared to give financial support to their activities.

FKNNR organises regular work parties, some as part of the Green Gym scheme. In the last year FKNNR volunteers have contributed:-

- 3,300 hours = 412 days of work = approx. 1.7 additional members of grounds maintenance staff
- At the national minimum wage (£5.73) that is a financial contribution of £18,909
- FKNNR also contributes the insurance costs plus tools and equipment.

If this activity was repeated by only some of the other BOSF member organisations, this would represent an enormously valuable contribution to the maintenance of Birmingham's parks and open spaces.

Figure 9: Case Study 1 – Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Case Study 2 – Raising Money for Cotteridge Park

Cotteridge Park in south west Birmingham has had a Friends group for 11 years (FoCP). They undertake a mix of environmental and social projects using the park as a focus for community activity. All funding raised is used to make improvements to the park's infrastructure or to organise events and activities for local residents. As you can see from the table below, funding comes from a variety of sources. Funding comes from private trusts and national bodies, but also once the group gets active and known in their community funding comes from local residents and businesses who appreciate the positive impact a Friends group has on their local environment. For 2009, FoCP have already raised £40,000 towards the costs of refurbishing the tennis and basketball courts - £30k from trusts (money not available to the local authority) and £10k from the Community Chest in Bournville Ward. If the amounts raised by the Friends of Cotteridge Park are replicated across the 100 BOSF member groups that would represent a huge injection of cash into the City of Birmingham's parks and open spaces.

Figure 10: Case Study 2 – Cotteridge Park

Income Generated by Friends of Cotteridge Park				
	2005	2006	2007	2008
Sponsorship from local businesses	1245	1858	2990	3565
Income from activities eg sales	1288	1683	1724	1791
Donations from local residents	*4619	411	854	764.72
BCC Community Chest and Arts and Communities	1200	1000	2500	4250
National Funding schemes e.g. Lottery and Arts Council			7000	5000
Other Trusts/Funders	*3000		1400	17,004
* for the purchase of land for a community orchard				
Totals	11,352	4,952	16,468	32,374.72

Figure 11: Income Generated by Friends of Cotteridge Park

Case Study 3 – Support from a development worker – Nechells and Ladywood

It is not easy for small community groups with limited experience to access the substantial amounts of funding that is available with no support. Friends of Cotteridge Park have 11 years of experience and spend approximately 30 days a year applying for funding. They have ready access to the internet and other resources. For newer groups in the city, less well versed in the intricacies of private and public funding, support through the maze is an absolute necessity if **ALL** open spaces are to have equal access to the funds available. Until March 2008, when funding was withdrawn by the Constituency, Nechells and Ladywood had access to a dedicated Parks and Green Space Manager from CSV Environment. Her role was to start up, support and move forward park Friends Groups, carry out community consultations, organise events and park improvement projects. A key part of her role was to support these groups raise funds for their activities and site improvements. The salary for this post was £22,550 a year - a total of £112,750 over the 5 years of the project. During that time the parks and open spaces covered by the project benefited from £576,000 of additional funding.

Figure 12: Case Study 3 – Nechells and Ladywood



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The Intangibles

9.2.9 Beyond sweat and cash, Friends Groups add to the value of Birmingham's parks and open spaces in a number of ways:

- By being regularly and physically present on the site, they contribute to how safe people feel using a park or open space
- The existence of a Friends Group raises the profile of a site – events and activities lead to positive press coverage
- Friends Groups facilitate good relationships between agencies including the schools, police, health and local authorities.
- Friends Groups are a key vehicle to nurture and develop social capital – “the acts of improving, renewing or even saving a park can build extraordinary levels of social capital in a neighbourhood that may well be suffering from fear and alienation partially due to the lack of safe public spaces” (*Source: How Much Value Does the City of Philadelphia Receive from its Park and Recreation System?*)

What BOSF Contributes to the Value of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

9.2.10 Many of Birmingham's Friends Groups pre-date the establishment of BOSF and they were successful in raising funding, recruiting volunteers and building on social capital – so what does BOSF add?

- The first point to make would be that users of parks and open spaces would be unlikely to be at this Scrutiny session without a network like BOSF acting as a contact point for officers and a collective voice for those groups.
- Our main aim, having seen how effective Friends Groups are raising finance and developing services using volunteers, is to support the work of existing groups and to help new groups get started. We want all open spaces to benefit from the resources available. BOSF now represents about 100 Friends Groups across the city, with new groups setting up and joining each year.
- In the 4 years since BOSF was set up, we have been working closely with Parks and other Council officers to develop positive partnerships – leading to innovations in service delivery and additional funding. We have been positively involved as the users' voice in the procurement of the grounds maintenance contracts.
- BOSF has stimulated the setting up of 3 specific funding streams to member groups that would have not been distributed without us.



- BOSF is a founder member of a national network of Friends Groups – the National Open Spaces Forum (NOSF) - putting Birmingham at the forefront of national policy making and community development.
- BOSF was set up because those of us in established groups knew we had experience and knowledge that we could share – we improve our effectiveness through meetings and using the internet and newsletters.

9.2.11 The organisation is currently run entirely by volunteers and needs to identify funding to allow it to continue to offer support and services to communities in Birmingham.

9.3 The Conclusions of Birmingham Open Spaces Forum

9.3.1 BOSF suggest the following actions:

- Given the value of Birmingham's open spaces to users, we would like BOSF to be involved in all decisions about the future of sites being considered for removal.
- We would like to suggest that a more thorough, independent survey is undertaken to find out the cash and sweat equity contribution made by Friends Groups in the city.
- If Birmingham is to get its fair share of the funding available nationally and locally, we recommend that more, not fewer, open spaces community development workers are employed – they more than earn their wages.
- To support BOSF to identify funding to enable the establishment of more, effective Friends Groups"

9.4 Members Views Raised in Discussion

9.4.1 At the meeting of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 12th November 2008, Members thanked BOSF for their hard work and praised the contribution of the Friends Groups to improving parks and open spaces in the city. They thought sources of additional funds were needed to support the work. Questions were raised about whether there were areas of the city which had fewer Friends Groups. BOSF reported that the gaps across the city varied, but the east of the city struggled the most. A list of Friends Groups was subsequently added to this report as Appendix 3.

9.4.2 One Member stressed the economic value of green space and said that although the health benefits were very important, the economic impact had been well documented in the work done on Philadelphia. He queried whether similar work could be done for Birmingham.



9.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

9.5.1 The voluntary and community sector has a vital role to play in the delivery and management of good quality, well designed and safe public spaces. The involvement of Friends of Parks not only accesses local skills but also facilitates community engagement. Much private and public sector funding is not available to local authorities but can be accessed by local community organisations. The case studies presented by BOSF confirm that income generated by Friends is very significant to achieving quality parks; however it is not easy for small community groups with limited experience to access funds. If all areas of the city are to benefit from the funds available, then more support for less experienced Friends of Parks is needed. In addition, there are some parts of the city with few Friends groups. Support to BOSF could be a very cost effective way of increasing funding for parks.

Recommendation 8:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture considers grant-aiding BOSF to enable more support to be given to Friends of Parks, in particular support in accessing funding sources.

9.5.2 It has been a longstanding aspiration of the Council and BOSF to increase the number of Friends of Parks. Twice a year the Friends get together at their spring AGM and an autumn conference. The valuable work of the Friends needs more publicity if the number of groups is to be increased. There are some areas of the city where, for a variety of reasons, there are few groups. This means that parks in these areas are less likely to benefit from local fundraising and the enthusiastic presence of volunteers on site. Local Members will already be aware of the groups in their Wards, but a higher profile for the Friends would increase their success in improving parks.

Recommendation 9:

That a named officer in the Directorate of Environment and Culture be identified as the first contact for BOSF and that a joint report be produced on the Friends of Parks groups in the city, including their distribution across the city by Constituency within a year of the publication of this report.



10 Findings – The Birmingham Environmental Partnership

10.1 Introduction

- 10.1.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 14 January 2009, the Nature Conservation and Sustainability Manager gave a presentation on the role of the Partnership's plans to deliver the environmental targets of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). His edited presentation is included here:
- 10.1.2 "The Birmingham Environmental Partnership (BEP) is one of the seven thematic partnerships within the framework of Be-Birmingham, the Local Strategic Partnership. It is a multi-agency grouping, receiving £3million pounds of working neighbourhoods funds over three years from Be-Birmingham 2008-2011 to deliver agreed targets of both National and Local Indicators. The BEP was established in 2002/03 from a broad church of partners across national agencies, branches of the City Council and a wide representation of the environmental voluntary and NGO sector from Birmingham. It has now been re-constituted to deliver the Sustainable Community Strategy for Birmingham 2026 and its first three year delivery plan of the local area agreement.
- 10.1.3 Under this new constitution the partnership's new chairman is to be Councillor Len Gregory, Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services. This Partnership has produced a 3 year Working Neighbourhoods Fund Business Plan and four delivery plans, one for each of the four sub-groups, which have been all signed-off by the Be Birmingham Board. There are four sub-partnerships under the BEP umbrella pursuing their inter-related topics and tackling their specific indicators:
- Low Waste Partnership
 - Clean City Partnership
 - Climate Change Partnership
 - Climate Change Adaptation Partnership
- 10.1.4 The four sub partnerships report back to a BEP Executive on a monthly basis and to the full BEP board quarterly. The BEP secretariat is responsible for monitoring and reporting back to Be Birmingham Strategic Partnership, against these targets."

10.2 Action to Improve Parks – Green Infrastructure Planning

- 10.2.1 "The Action Plans to implement the policies set out by Be Birmingham are based on the Government's National Performance Indicators. However there is no National Indicator for Parks



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in the Government's Performance Framework with its 198 Indicators. Therefore parks do not feature prominently in the LAA Action Plans.

- 10.2.2 Improvements to parks are subsumed within the 'Adaptation to Climate Change' sub-partnership. One action that the Environmental Partnership is pledged to implement within this programme is Green Infrastructure Planning.
- 10.2.3 Lobbying has taken place at a national level through the Core Cities Parks Group to introduce a National Indicator on Parks in order to raise the profile of the importance of parks and release more resources. A pilot indicator has been developed and trialled by Leeds City Council, based on the criteria from the Green Flag assessment. Other Core Cities are now trialling this system. "

10.3 Challenges Affecting Parks

- 10.3.1 "The Parks revenue budget is totally stretched; it can only barely cope with the increasing demands of maintaining the city's parks. All possible synergies and service improvements have been built into the new grounds maintenance contracts as from April 2009. This is without producing significant additional savings. The over-stretched Parks revenue budget cannot possibly address the capital infrastructure repairs and maintenance. Parks own over 300 buildings, and miles of pathways and driveways that were never built to withstand regular motorised vehicle traffic. Many structures are still the original Victorian or Edwardian, at best.
- 10.3.2 A new national demand upon parks is that of flood risk management and flood prevention, as detailed in the *Pitt Review 2008*, with its 94 recommendations for Local Authorities.
- 10.3.3 There is currently no permanent capital fund for the maintenance and repair of parks pools, eleven of which are registered as structural dams under the 1974 Reservoirs Act, under which we have a statutory duty to maintain them. Following the 2007 floods, their overspill structures are now required to cope with a ten fold increased rainfall event, for which there is no adequate budget.
- 10.3.4 The work programme for parks contained in this report, under the National Indicator 188, adapting to climate change, is illustrating the need to re-position parks in the city's thinking and long-term planning. Parks if invested in, can provide some of the long-term solutions, this city needs to become more sustainable.
- 10.3.5 Two recent reports published in the *Lancet*, (the Medical Journal) cited new compelling evidence of the current health benefits of parks, that are disproportionately felt by those suffering greatest multiple levels of deprivation. All the predicted climatic changes will impair peoples' quality of life in big cities, affecting the local economy and peoples' health and well being; if preventative action is not taken from now on.
- 10.3.6 A city with global aspirations, like Birmingham, must take the best practice in adaptation from other cities around the world and seek to implement them where affordable in every one of the city's neighbourhoods, starting with those most at risk.



10.3.7 It is now internationally recognised that parks hold a vital key to these future citywide sustainable solutions particularly through the introduction of Green Infrastructure Planning, and managing on a landscape scale. Also understanding the dependencies between our use of the city's natural resources and eco-system services."

10.4 Members Views Raised in Discussion

10.4.1 At the meeting of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 14th January 2009, one of the Members who is currently the Chair of the Nature Conservation Policy Group said that a Blue Strategy was needed in Birmingham, as the city is in a unique position of having many brooks and that the natural watercourses could hold the key to reducing urban flooding. Another Member commented on the rise in water table levels and referred to the potential to create wetland areas, promoting wildlife – demonstration projects in several parks were suggested.

10.4.2 Members discussed the potential of woodlands to supply woodchip bio fuel and heard that a Woodland Team was being created within the new Grounds Maintenance Contract arrangements. A study of the potential sites for woodlands for bio fuel is being carried out with Advantage West Midlands. The Chairman raised the question of the role of trees in offsetting carbon emissions.

10.5 Further Research on the Birmingham Environmental Partnership

10.5.1 Following the O&S Committee meeting on 14th January 2009, further research was carried out by the Scrutiny Office on the Environmental Partnership amid concerns by the Chairman of the Committee that the importance of parks was insufficiently recognised within the new management structure of the Partnership. These concerns had been raised in a number of discussions including those with Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF).

10.5.2 The Birmingham Environmental Partnership Annual Report for 2007/08 shows the results of the Green City Core Priority Group. The targets were:

- To increase the number of parks in the city that have Green Flag awards by one additional park – Handsworth Park achieved green flag.
- To increase the number of city parks that are assisted by 'Friends of Parks' groups by 5 a year – achieved.
- To achieve an increase in residents' satisfaction levels with parks and open spaces to 67% from 64% satisfaction.
- To achieve one additional Local Nature Reserve - Balaam's Wood gained LNR status.
- To address the city's obligation for achieving 95% of Sites of Scientific Interest (SSI) in favourable condition by 2012- on track.



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10.5.3 Membership of the Green City Core Priority Group included:

- Birmingham City Council
- Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust
- CSV Environment
- Groundwork Birmingham & Solihull
- Birmingham Open Spaces Forum

10.5.4 However as from October 2008 the Environmental Partnership has a refreshed structure comprising a strategic board (meeting 3-4 times per annum) an Executive (meeting monthly) and four delivery partnerships (to implement the Local Area Agreement targets):

- Low Waste
- Clean City
- Adaptation Partnership (i.e. climate change readiness)
- Low Carbon

10.5.5 Parks and open spaces are included in the Adaptation Partnership group. The Delivery Plan for this group includes the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy. The national indicator that drives the work of the group is N188 which measures the city's readiness to deal with climate change. There are no national indicators to measure parks.

10.5.6 Climate Change and Adaptation to Climate Change are corporate Strategic issues which need a single central lead.

10.6 Comments by Birmingham Open Space Forum on the Birmingham Environmental Partnership (BEP)

10.6.1 The Birmingham Open Spaces Forum was invited to comment on the draft report of this review and made the following written representations:

10.6.2 "As far as we are aware, we (BOSF) now have no input into the BEP and BEP is not interested in parks and open spaces. We were involved before and it was very useful for us and our groups (the Friends of Parks). However as parks are no longer in the LAA targets they seem to be being ignored. We did try to show them how important parks are and how they do fit in with current targets, but nothing seems to have happened. We made a submission to Be Birmingham last year to point out why parks are so important to the current targets and why they need to be included."



10.7 Further Research About the Inclusion of the Importance of Parks Within Be Birmingham and Possible Funding Streams

10.7.1 Discussions between the Scrutiny Office and officers of the Be Birmingham partnership revealed that parks could be relevant to four other areas of Be Birmingham activity:

- Residents 'satisfaction' with the quality of parks, could be considered within the Cultural Partnership alongside measures of satisfaction with services such as libraries. This could be taken forward within the Delivery Plan for Neighbourhoods as part of the Neighbourhood Board's work to address NI 5.
- Achieving quality in parks could be measured by an indicator to measure the number of Green Flag parks within the Environmental Partnership - this is not yet an indicator.
- The role of parks as public spaces, the greater use of which could strengthen community cohesion and integration between residents of different backgrounds. This could be taken forward within the Delivery Plan for Community Cohesion as part of the Be Birmingham's executive Board's work to address NI 1.
- The importance of 'Friends of Parks' groups in encouraging more active participation in the management and enjoyment of neighbourhood parks. This could be taken forward within the Community Empowerment Plan as part of the Neighbourhood Board's work to address NI 4.

10.7.2 The resources supporting the implementation of the Delivery Plans will be drawn from a number of sources including Area Based Grant. This pulls together a number of funding streams that in the past were provided to the City Council and other public sector organisations to support specific interventions. These are being pooled into one single fund in 2009/10 to be focussed on LAA priorities. The Working Neighbourhoods Fund forms one element of the Area Based Grant. A number of Delivery Plans will need to call upon WNF resources to support specific interventions. Where this is the case, the relevant partnerships have been asked to submit to Be Birmingham a business plan scheduling all the proposed interventions requiring WNF support.

10.7.3 Resources have been allocated to each of the thematic partnerships (e.g. Environment, Culture etc) on the basis of £3m to each and £18m to the Economic Partnership. The Neighbourhoods Board have an allocation of £4m. The WNF resources are for three financial years from April 2008 – March 2011.

10.8 Conclusions and Recommendations

10.8.1 It appears that the profile of parks within the Environmental Partnership has never been very prominent due to the emphasis in the past on the 'clean and green' neighbourhood agenda. From October, 2008 the new structure appears to relegate parks even further down the agenda. Parks are considered within the climate change readiness group, the Adaptation Partnership. Whilst the



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Delivery Plan for this group includes the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy, there is concern that this will emphasise the importance of river corridors as flood plains, rather than urban parks being important places for local residents.

- 10.8.2 Evidence suggests that the revised structure also appears to give less chance for voluntary groups such as BOSF to be involved.
- 10.8.3 It is possible that the importance of parks could be emphasised in other areas of Be Birmingham activity, so that they are included in a number of different Delivery Plans. In particular the importance of parks as places to strengthen community cohesion and empowerment could be emphasised. Delivery Plans will generate business plans in order to bid for Area Based Grant including Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

Recommendations 10 and 11:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture considers putting his name forward as the Vice-Chairman of the Birmingham Environmental Partnership, in order to ensure that the importance of parks and open spaces is recognised.

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture examines the Be Birmingham Delivery Plans, seeks opportunities to bid for Area Based Grant and works to include targets to promote the importance of Birmingham Parks.

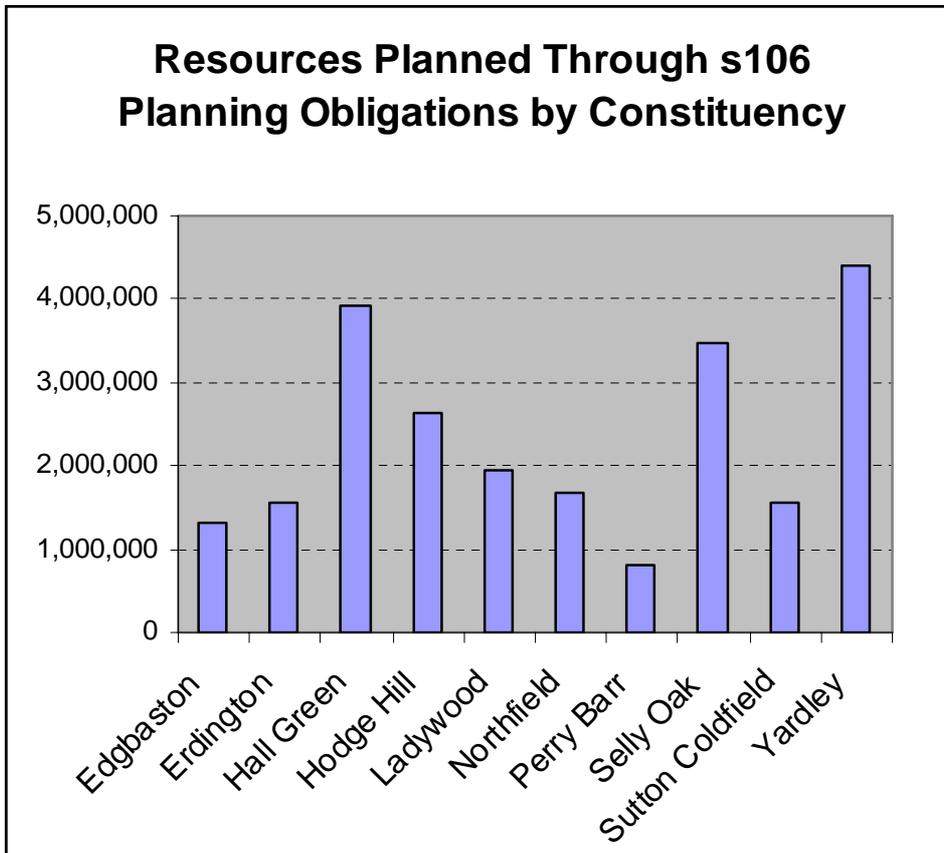


Appendix 1 – Live Section 106 Agreements for Parks and Open Spaces Since 2000 by Constituency

	Value £ of Completed since 2000	£ Rec'd and not committed	£ Rec'd and committed	£ due (not guaranteed)	TOTAL £
Edgbaston	201,624	0	833,400	276,859	1,311,883
Erdington	83,600	231,600	886,570	356,130	1,557,900
Hall Green	827	76,595	2,364,900	1,488,240	3,930,562
Hodge Hill	0	200,000	1,102,758	1,324,300	2,627,058
Ladywood	117,400	262,900	391,100	1,186,374	1,957,774
Northfield	579,867	216,806	725,400	142,000	1,664,073
Perry Barr	0	193,400	52,500	565,825	811,725
Selly Oak	734,041	171,226	1,298,397	1,265,578	3,469,242
Sutton Coldfield	231,925	406,780	120,600	786,200	1,545,505
Yardley	258,400	232,888	462,780	3,444,549	4,398,617
TOTAL	2,207,684	1,992,195	8,238,405	10,836,055	23,274,339



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Appendix 2 – Meetings with Constituencies

Constituency	Local Structure to address Parks and Playing Pitch issues	Reviewed Parks and Playing Pitches Action Plans	Date of Meeting with Constituency Director (or their representative*)
Edgbaston	No – uses BOSF to discuss priorities	Yes	5/09/07
Erdington	Yes – Open Space Group	Yes	11/09/07*
Hall Green	Yes - Moseley and Kings Heath Environment Group	Yes	21/09/07
Hodge Hill	Yes – Open Space Forum group	Yes	18/09/07
Ladywood	Yes – Environment Sub Group	Yes	04/04/08*
Northfield	Yes - Intention to form sub group to Environment Group	Yes	04/02/08
Perry Barr	Yes – No Open Space forum. Approach is to advise Ward Advisory Boards	Yes	01/02/08
Selly Oak	Yes – Open Space Group established	Yes	08/11/07
Sutton Coldfield	Yes – Local Delivery Group and Cleaner, Greener Safer Group	Yes	01/02/08
Yardley	Yes - Cleaner, Greener Safer Group	Yes	12/05/08*



Appendix 3 – Friends and Neighbourhood Group Members of BOSF at November 2008

3 Estates Community Forum
Balsall Heath Forum
Bark for the Park
Birmingham Wheels Park
Black Patch Park Friends of
Bordesley Green Leisure Gardens Residents Association
Brook Area Residents and Shopkeepers Group
Burbury Brickworks Community Conservation Project
Cannon Hill Forum
Cannon Hill Park Friends
Castle Vale Community Environmental Trust
Central Ladywood Neighbourhood Forum
Court Lane Allotments
Deers Leap Wood
Edgbaston Guinea Gardens
Elm Farm Residents Association
Erdington CAN
FLEAG - Middlemore Rd Flood and Environmental Action Group
Friends of Arrow Walk Park
Friends of Balaams Wood
Friends of Balsall Heath Park
Friends of Brandwood End Cemetery
Friends of Brandwood Pool
Friends of Brookvale Park
Friends of Cotteridge Park
Friends of Daisy Farm Park
Friends of Edgbaston Reservoir
Friends of Fladbury Crescent
Friends of Harborne Walkway
Friends of Key Hill Cemetery
Friends of Kingfisher Country Park
Hill Hook Nature Reserve
Kings Heath Community Playgroup
Kings Heath Neighbourhood Forum
Friends of Kings Heath Park
Friends of Kings Norton LNR
Friends of Kings Norton Park
Friends of Ley Hill Park
Friends of Lifford Lake
Friends of Manor Farm Park
Friends of Oaklands
Friends of Pitts Wood
Friends of Project Kingfisher
Friends of Pype Hayes Park
Friends of Queslett Nature Reserve
Friends of Raddlebarn and Muntz Parks
Friends of Ravenhurst Playing Fields
Friends of Rectory Park
Friends of Sara Park
Friends of Selly Oak Park
Friends of Selly Park Rec
Friends of Small Heath Park
Friends of Sutton Park
Friends of Ward End Park
Friends of Westhill Rec
Friends of Winterbourne Gardens
Friends of Witton Cemetery
Friends of Wychall Reservoir
Grove Residents Association
Hamstead Hall Neighbourhood Forum
Handsworth Park Association
Harborne Society
Highbury Park Friends
Highgate HLB
Saint Mark's Community Developments
Springfield Neighbourhood Forum
Stechford Youth Network
Stockfield Community Association



Lickey Hills Consultative Committee
Masefield Forum
Matthew Boulton Neighbourhood Forum
Metamorphosis @ Martineau Gardens
Moorpool Recreation Area Focus Group
Moorpool Regeneration Group

Moseley Bog
Moseley in Bloom
New Hall Valley Country Park Steering Group
North Aston Neighbourhood Ctte
North Edgbaston Residents Assoc
North Nechells Friends of Parks
Old Yardley Forum
Parks for Play and Dens of Equality
Plantsbrook Community Nature Park Advisory Ctte
Priory Gate Community Association
Rea Valley Conservation Group
Rookery House and Park Friends of
Rotton Park Action Group

Summerfield/Rotton Park Friends
Sutton Coldfield Central Neighbourhood Froum
The Fields Millennium Green
The Lickey Hills Society
Trafalgar Pocket Park
Valley Riverside Project
Walmley Residents Asso and Neighbourhood
Forum
Walsall Road Allotments
Westley Vale Millennium Green
Witton Lodge Community Association
Woodgate Valley Country Park Consultative Ctte
Woodside and Selly Park Allotments Assoc
Sutton Park Advisory Ctte
Wylde Green Neighbourhood Forum

Appendix 4 – Example of Constituency Action Plan

PERRY BARR CONSTITUENCY OPEN SPACES ACTION PLAN as at February 2009



Site	Ward	Action Initiated	Promoter	Action Initiated 2005/6	Action Update 2007/8	Action Update 2008/9	Action Status	PI-Needs Play Investment C-Capital bid HLF Potential Bid
Aldridge Road Allotments	Oscott	2008	Allotments Officer			Capital bid security works	Seeking funding	C
Aldridge Road Recreation Ground	Oscott	2005	CPM Peter Short	Seek funding eg Section 106 agreement	NRF bid has been approved for fencing works. Deed of covenant to provide secure boundaries. Completed 2007 CPM		Achieved	
Booths Farm Recreation Ground	Perry Barr	2005	CPM Peter Short/Ward	Improve Access	Possible site for MUGA or goal end. Ward have had costings		Awaiting ward response	
Booths Farm Recreation Ground	Perry Barr	2008	Constituency			Capital bid for security and drainage works	Seeking funding	C
Bridgelands Way Play area	Lozells and E Handsworth	2009	Nigel Cartwright			Play area substandard. Query refurb. proposals. Possible nominate Playbuilder funding. Site in HMRA area	Seeking funding	PI
Carlyle Road Play Area	Lozells and E Handsworth	2009	LPG			Play area substandard - check refurb. proposals. Possible nominate Playbuilder funding. Site in HMRA area	Seeking funding	PI
Finch Road Park	Lozells and East Handsworth	2006	Groundwork/L PG/CPM Peter Short		Works to construct new site in hand. 2 MUGAs and play area, site furniture, fencing etc. Funded SRB6, city capital, NRF and S106. Completion due June 2007 Groundwork.	Complete 2007. No further work planned. Site in HMRA area	Achieved	
George's Park	Lozells and East Handsworth	2008	Mark English Housing/LPG Rupi Chawlis			Scheme to be managed by LPG to fence off eastern section of park for housing development (Grant works £54K Urban Living). Tree and shrub work completed Dec 2008 on western boundary. Site in HMRA area	In hand	

Site	Ward	Action Initiated	Promoter	Action Initiated 2005/6	Action Update 2007/8	Action Update 2008/9	Action Status	PI-Needs Play Investment C-Capital bid HLF Potential Bid
Graham Street	Lozells and East Handsworth	2005	LPG	New play area within year 1. S106 funded	Play area and MUGA completed	Site in HMRA area	Achieved	
Handsworth Park	Lozells and East Handsworth	2005	CPM Lee Southall/Parents for Play	Park refurbishment ongoing. Heritage Lottery, ERDF, S106 and SRB6 funded	Park refurbishment complete. Possible extension to existing play area to be agreed with Handsworth Parents for Play. Start on site March 2008.	Additional play area achieved 2008. LPG has designed extension to existing play area which is awaiting Constituency approval and funding. Possible nominate Playbuilder funding. Site in HMRA area.	Achieved	
Handsworth Park	Lozells and East Handsworth	2008	Constituency			Capital bid for pool island works and wall works. Site in HMRA area	Seeking funding	C
Handsworth Triangle	Lozells and East Handsworth	2005	Groundwork	Proposed Public Open Space	Major improvement works undertaken by Groundwork. Mosaic feature installed July 2007	Site in HMRA area	Seeking funding	
Hill Top and Manwoods	Handsworth Wood	2005	Mike Dickenson/Parks/Nortoft Consultants	Possible location for staffing base to link to Perry Hall and Perry Parks, and Queslett. Feasibility study. Funding to be confirmed	No action on staffing base. Minor works and signage to enhance entrance from Oxhill Rd completed. Fire break and desire line mowing programme now implemented. Consultants involved - possible cycling facility to be developed	No change	Negotiations ongoing	
Laurel Road Sports Ground	Handsworth Wood	2005	LPG	New pavilion and facilities. SRB6 funding	Pavillion, MUGA, climbing wall, play area and all weather pitch completed 2005	Site in HMRA area	Achieved	
Narnia Organic Gardening Project Albert Road. Qry	Lozells and East Handsworth	2005	Groundwork	Residents' organic gardening project	Completed 2006 and operating successfully. ERDF funded.	Site in HMRA area	Seeking funding	
Old Walsall Road POS	Perry Barr	2005	CPM Peter Short	Access Issues - needs higher profile	NRF funded trip rail to secure boundary	Play area substandard - query refurb plans. Possible nominate Playbuilder funding.	Seeking funding	PI/C
Old Walsall Road POS	Perry Barr	2005	CPM Peter Short	Access Issues - needs higher profile	NRF funded trip rail to secure boundary	Achieved	Achieved	
Old Walsall Road POS	Perry Barr	2008	Constituency			Capital bid for security works	Seeking funding	C



Site	Ward	Action Initiated	Promoter	Action Initiated 2005/6	Action Update 2007/8	Action Update 2008/9	Action Status	PI-Needs Play Investment C-Capital bid HLF Potential Bid
Perry Hall Playing Fields	Perry Barr	2005	CPM Peter Short	Changing facilities, toilets, access concerns, wild life features. SMURF FUNDING	Sustainable Management of Urban Rivers and Floodplains works complete funded by Environment Agency. New Park keeper employed autumn 2006. Birmingham Trees for Life site completed Feb 2007	Achieved	Achieved	
Perry Hall Playing Fields	Perry Barr	2008	Constituency			Capital bid for path works.	Seeking funding	C
Perry Park and Alexander Stadium	Perry Barr	2005	Lee Southall/Gary Peal Sports	Traffic management issues	Traffic management work ongoing - NRF funded - awaiting funding to complete. Tree planting ceremony for European Games 55 oaks completed Feb 2007. GMAC Construction to commence on site June 2007. Part of transfer of Birmingham Sports Centre facilities. On site Jan 2008 (CPM)	GMAC Centre complete but ongoing issues with contractor ref poor reinstatement. BMX track in design (JW - LPG). Cross country cycle course through derelict tree nursery proposed	Ongoing	
Perry Park and Alexander Stadium	Perry Barr	2008	Constituency			Capital bid for footpath and safety works. Potential S106 earmarked as of March 2009 LS935 £10,000 Perry Hall Playing Fields Feasibility study, LS018 £3,080 Enhancement of Cycle Speedway facilities. PEP 30,000 Perry Hall Playing Fields - toilet block- Total £43,080. £5k to be used to resurface the bridge entrance from Cherry Orchard Road to the playing fields. The intention is to provide new public toilets/messroom accommodation within one portacabin type unit. Old toilet block needs to be demolished.	Seeking funding?	C



Site	Ward	Action Initiated	Promoter	Action Initiated 2005/6	Action Update 2007/8	Action Update 2008/9	Action Status	PI-Needs Play Investment C-Capital bid HLF Potential Bid
Queslett Road and Nature Reserve	Oscott	2005	LPG Iggy Smith	Fencing and environmental enhancement. LA I smith. Need to establish Friends Group and resolve landownership/management issues.	Friends of Group established 2006. S106 funded works on site May 2007 to secure boundaries, enhance entrance features etc. Fencing completed - some planting to follow 2008 (CPM)	Achieved	Achieved	
Radnor Road Secure Garden. Qry exact location	Lozells and East Handsworth	2005	Groundwork	Secure garden and allotments with focus on women's use	Project had to be abandoned due to land ownership difficulties	Site in HMRA area	Seeking funding	
Sandwell Recreation Ground	Handsworth Wood	2005	LDO Tom Woollard/CPM Lee Southall			Approx £105k S106 available for possible infrastructure and/or play improvements. Capital bid for path works. Play area needs refurbishment. Possible nominate Playbuilder funding	Seeking funding	PI/C
Sandwell Recreation Ground	Handsworth Wood	2005	Lee Southall	Anti-social behaviour issues	Works completed on fencing funded by NRF. Consultative Group set up (to be named) with a view to becoming 'Friends of' asap	Removed toilet base and services remnants made safe.	Hard works achieved	
St Mary's Churchyard	Lozells and East Handsworth	2005	Lee Southall	Site of historic importance, general restoration scheme to be funded from Section 106 agreement, NRF, Countryside Agency, Landfill Tax Credit	Works to boundaries, footpath and monuments to commence May 2007 funded by SRB6, HLF and NRF. Probation service ongoing works to clear overgrown areas.	Works complete. Probation work to be replaced by other voluntary groups. Maintenance schedule to be reworked to match site conditions. Site in HMRA area	Achieved	HLF
Trehurst Avenue	Perry Barr	2005	LPG?	New lighting columns on the site. Improve access.	No action		Shelved	
Wilson Road POS	Lozells and East Handsworth	2005	Groundwork	Small nursery, children's garden	Groundwork project funded by ERDF; completed 2005	Site in HMRA area	Achieved	

