

# **PARKS STRATEGY – CABINET REPORT 2 JUNE 2009**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** Parks are for people. They should be an integral part of community life, owned and valued because they meet people's needs and aspirations. They have the potential to be a healing, restoring, calming, delighting, learning, health giving, socially inclusive experience within the local community and by changing to meet the changing needs of that community, can retain their relevance over successive generations.
- 1.2** Most people recognise that our green open spaces are an essential "quality of life" resource and a vital component of a balanced urban environment. Derby's parks and open spaces are wildlife havens and act as a focal point for play, healthy exercise and community interaction. They also make a key contribution to the image, identity and status of our City. Parks surveys show that over 90% of Derby's population visit the parks and open spaces at least once every year and 64% visit at least once a month. The survey results indicate that derby's residents make over 12,000,000 visits to parks in each year. The survey results clearly indicate that Derby's residents really do value their green spaces and care about what happens to them. The same surveys showed strong support for more community involvement in parks and open spaces. This is reflected in the growing number of Friends Groups and Local Nature Reserve Management Advisory groups.
- 1.3** Derby City Council has a long history of commitment to top quality park and open space maintenance and management. This is reflected in the on-going popularity of the parks and regular East Midlands in Bloom awards. We want to continue this commitment by introducing a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy which will set clear objectives for our parks and open spaces over the next five years. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is a statement by Derby City Council of the overall aims together with the medium term objectives and key park and open space issues which it plans to address over the next five years.
- 1.4** The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has been developed in the context of the City Council's priorities for the years 2008-2011 - namely:
- Creating a 21<sup>st</sup> Century City Centre
  - Leading Derby towards a better Environment
  - Making us proud of our Neighbourhoods
  - Supporting Everyone in Learning and Achieving
  - Helping us all to be Healthy, Active and Independent
  - Giving you Excellent Services and Value for Money.
- 1.5** The City Council's overall aims for parks and open spaces will contribute towards the achievement of all six priorities set by the Council. The overall aims for parks open spaces are to:
- Provide parks which are accessible, well maintained, and functionally appropriate to their location and local community
  - Plan, develop and promote diverse and balanced recreational use of parks

- Achieve best use and maximum benefit for park and open space users with resources available
- Take account of the sustainable needs of the environment and wider community.

**1.6** The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will also help to deliver several ambitions and aims of Derby's Sustainable Community Strategy. These include in particular, the following:

- By 2020 more people will be satisfied with public spaces, parks and play areas, as these will be more attractive and better maintained
- By 2020 all children and young people will be doing well in the key areas identified under the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes including 'Be Healthy' - enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle
- By 2020 Derby will have achieved its aim of becoming the country's most active city, improving the health and well being of Derby.

**1.7** Within Derby City Council's Local Area Agreement (LAA), which is a contract between the Government and Derby City Partnership, there are four themes to measure our progress towards achieving the ambitions of the Sustainable Community Strategy:

- Children and Young People
- Economic Development and Enterprise
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Safer and Stronger Communities

Within these four themes the implementation of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will directly assist delivery of the following LAA outcomes:

- To provide safe environments for children and younger people
- To improve the health of children and young people
- Greater involvement and inclusion of children and young people
- To improve the attractiveness of Derby to investors
- To reduce crime, the harm caused by illegal drugs and to reassure the public, reducing the fear of anti-social behaviour
- To empower local people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision making and delivery of services
- To have cleaner, greener and safer public spaces
- To improve the quality of life in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and ensure service providers are more responsive to neighbourhood needs and improve delivery.

**1.8** From consultations with local residents there have emerged a range of challenges to be addressed and in its response to these challenges, the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy includes clear commitment to:

- Open consultation about development and change
- Ranger Service/ Security
- Keeping heritage landscapes
- Equality of Access
- Children's Play
- Sports provision
- Maintaining high standards of Grounds Maintenance
- Wildlife protection
- Community involvement in planning and managing our parks and open spaces
- Dealing with issues such as litter, dog fouling and vandalism
- Improved attractions, visitor information and events.

**1.9** By rising to these challenges, the city's parks will be able to fully meet the needs of Derby and its communities. They must also continue to fulfil their traditional roles providing economic, environmental, recreational and social benefits, as well as capitalising upon and offering new opportunities for both physical and social regeneration.

## **2.0 WHY HAVE A PARKS AND OPEN SPACES STRATEGY?**

### **2.1 Best Value**

It is common sense to target resources to where they are most needed. One of the greatest benefits the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will bring is to establish openly what the important parks issues are for people living in and visiting Derby. The public consultations and parks surveys have already brought valuable results. Once we know what is wanted, we can carry on with work we know is publicly supported and which focuses on the needs of park and open space users.

### **2.2 Strategic Planning**

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will enable longer term strategic and structured planning and management of parks. This will involve agreeing the strategic role and intended use of parks and open spaces, taking into account the needs of organised and informal leisure activities, environment, heritage and the needs of different groups in society. An important part of this is the staged introduction of Park Management Plans for individual parks and open spaces which are agreed with nearby communities and appropriate external agencies.

## **2.3 Corporate Commitment**

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy makes a commitment to clear, corporate goals and provides a framework for action which will enable other Council departments to understand and integrate their policies, procedures and activities with those of the Parks.

At present relevant Council policies include:

- The Local Plan which will be gradually replaced by the Derby Local Development Framework
- Local Agenda 21
- The Woodland Strategy
- The Nature Conservation Strategy
- The Play Strategy
- The Community Safety Strategy
- The Corporate Asset Management Plan
- The Customer Service Charter
- The Sports Strategy
- Getting Derby Active.

There is plenty of scope for strengthening links with health and education as well.

## **2.4 Partnership Working**

In a similar way, the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will help to encourage a range of different partners from the wider community to work on planned improvements in Derby's parks and open spaces. The City Council is already working with bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, the Football Foundation, Big Lottery Fund, Derby City Partnership, Derby Homes, Derby Community Safety Partnership, East Midlands Development Association, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers as well as local voluntary and residents' groups on park and open space improvements. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will play an increasingly important role in justifying and supporting external funding bids.

## **2.5 Public Accountability**

The City Council is accountable to its local community and the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will provide a baseline for evaluating progress and achievement against stated objectives.

## **3.0 DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY**

**3.1** A comprehensive research programme that involved primary (field) research and secondary (desk) research was implemented throughout the course of the Strategy formulation. This process was used to ensure that the future development of parks in Derby is based on collaboration with, and agreement between all stakeholders ensuring acceptance and ownership.

**3.2** The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy was developed in a two stage process:

### **Stage 1:**

Consisted of data collection, market research, consultations, facility audits, reviews of other strategies (internal and external), demographic trends, funding appraisal and partnership potential. In addition, the processes and conclusions of the Best Value Review of Parks have been utilised. From the research a draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy was produced.

### **Stage 2:**

The draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy was distributed internally within the Council, as well as being made available to interested external stakeholders for comment. At the end of Stage 2 the draft Strategy was amended to incorporate feedback received through the consultation. This revised strategy is now being presented to Cabinet for approval.

**3.3** The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will be reviewed annually so that it responds to changing situations, new legislation and important issues as they arise.

## **4.0. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is defined by the seven key aims set out below. Each aim reflects a principle or standard of public service which the Council commits to with regard to parks and open spaces. Each aim includes a set of objectives and a statement of the priority actions that will be taken to achieve these objectives.

### **4.1 QUALITY**

If parks are to provide maximum benefits to local communities they must be intrinsically attractive. They must therefore be well maintained in all respects – trees, shrubs, flowers, grass, buildings, hard surfaces, boundaries, play equipment, sports pitches and lighting. They must also provide the recreational opportunities which are wanted by the local community and these will change over the years. Additionally they must be safe places and perceived to be safe places if people are to use them.

## **Aim**

- To improve the quality of parks

## **Objectives**

- Set specific aims and objectives for individual parks and open spaces including improving the quality of facilities
- Have regard for the environmental and historic character of parks and open spaces
- Channel limited maintenance resources to ensure the greatest impact
- Improve parks and open space management and maintenance
- Reduce dog fouling and litter on parks and open spaces
- To have appropriately trained staff working on parks.

## **Priority Actions**

- Produce an action plan for the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy
- Develop and implement new Park Management Plans for City and District Parks
- Review budgets annually through the business planning process to target priorities
- Review park and open space management and maintenance arrangements
- Maintain accreditation to ISO9001 and ISO14001 Quality Management Systems
- Support and implement initiatives to control litter and dog fouling.
- Ensure that staff training needs are included in the Workforce Development Plan

## **4.2 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Parks are for people to enjoy and benefit from. Primarily this means the community living around the park and to get them involved will require working in partnership with the local community and local organisations. It is important that the local community see the park as their park and have a sense of ownership because they are involved in how the park is managed, maintained and used.

## **Aim**

- To encourage community use of parks and their involvement and participation in planning and managing parks

## **Objectives**

- Develop park support partnerships with private, voluntary and public organisations.
- Work with Friends Groups and other community groups on the planning and management of parks and open spaces
- Identify local opinion and ideas when drawing up Management Plans

- Carry out public consultation on proposed changes significantly affecting parks and open spaces
- Find new uses for redundant buildings in parks and open spaces and remove the ones that are not needed
- Support voluntary projects including delegated management of facilities
- Improve access for members of the community with particular needs
- Ensure that the policy for the hire of parks and open spaces is appropriate.

### **Priority Actions**

- Continue working on projects with the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Big Lottery Fund, Derby Homes and with local volunteer and residents groups
- Use site-based opinion surveys, local consultations and focus groups to establish community views on significant new proposals
- Investigate the establishment of a scheme providing NVQ/City and Guilds training opportunities for volunteers in parks
- Carry out Equality Impact Assessments beginning with the Ranger Service and Markeaton Park
- Conduct research to identify best practice and ways to improve access
- Review the Hire of Open Spaces policy
- Continue to review public conveniences' provision in parks
- Continue to review the condition of all parks' buildings as part of the Corporate Asset Management Plan
- Ensure Parks involvement in the ongoing development of Neighbourhood Forums and Boards.

## **4.3 SECURITY**

Consultation with Derby residents reveals that safety and security in parks ranks as one of the most important issues. The sense of entering a safe, managed open space is a prime requisite before people will visit and enjoy a park. If a park is perceived to be safe and people are therefore attracted to it, the presence of those people increases the sense of security. Conversely a park which is perceived to not be safe will have few visitors and the lack of people around adds to the perception that it is not a safe place. For parks to be well used and therefore of real benefit to local residents it is essential that they are perceived as safe places.

## **Aim**

- To understand and respond to issues of public safety and community concern that relate to parks.

## **Objectives**

- Identify and respond to specific issues of public concern
- Update the byelaws for parks and open spaces
- Implement the Community Safety Strategy in parks and open spaces
- Promote positive use of parks and open spaces and community-based self-policing
- Increase partnership working which will enhance security and the public perception of security in parks.

## **Priority Actions**

- Review and respond to park and open space security issues
- Review and update byelaws
- Support and implement safety initiatives in accordance with the Community Safety Strategy
- Develop and support Park Watch Schemes
- Develop and enhance links with Police and Anti-Social Behaviour Team
- Extend existing management arrangements with community, sports and voluntary groups
- Review the Ranger Service
- Ensure staff understand and implement the Customer Service Charter
- Ensure all managers and supervisors attend appropriate Health and Safety Training.

## **4.4 PROFILE**

As Derby moves towards a more people focused parks provision, it is important to present a positive image of park facilities to communities within the city and the surrounding areas. This can be achieved through a combination of innovative marketing and sensitive promotional communications focusing on attracting new users to, and retaining existing users of, parks.

It is important that marketing of parks sells both the physical and facility attributes as well as the benefits (such as health).

It is essential that the marketing strategy for parks synergises with the City Council's Corporate Strategy and other departmental strategies thus ensuring efficient and effective mass coverage.



## **Aim**

- To increase significantly public awareness of the value of parks.

## **Objectives**

- Publicly promote Derby's parks and open spaces
- Promote the environmental and heritage aspects of parks and open spaces
- Promote the health benefits of parks and open spaces
- Encourage education visits and foster National Curriculum projects
- Provide easily accessible public information on facilities, events and developments.

## **Priority Actions**

- Review current promotional material
- Develop and implement a Promotion Plan for Derby's parks and open spaces
- Strengthen links with the local media
- Promote parks and open spaces in regular articles in Council Life
- Develop links and initiatives with the Primary Care Trust, schools, colleges, adult education centres and the University.
- Regularly review and update the Parks web pages.

## **4.5 ENVIRONMENT**

The value for people and wildlife, of accessible naturalistic greenspace within and around towns and cities has long been recognised. As climate change becomes an increasing challenge, the cooling effect of greenspace and large trees becomes an increasingly essential part of the urban scene.

Native tree planting and wildlife habitat creation can be appropriate anywhere in the city at relevant sites. All of Derby's larger parks have such areas, some of which have been designated as Nature Conservation Areas in the Local Plan.

Habitat creation and management needs an understanding of ecological principles and careful planning to integrate properly with the other park functions. Park's Officers are involved in, and will seek, when appropriate, to become included in a number of partnerships to achieve this.

## **Aim**

To conserve and enhance the natural environment and ecological balance in parks.

## **Objectives**

- Implement the relevant parts of the Nature Conservation Strategy, Woodlands Strategy, Biodiversity Action Plan and the East Midlands Green Infrastructure Plans
- Seek to increase and protect the diversity and quantity of flora and fauna
- To establish a local nature reserve in each major community in the city
- Encourage and support voluntary conservation schemes
- Respond to environmental threats.

## **Priority Actions**

- Ensure individual Park Management Plans incorporate proposals in line with the Lowland Derbyshire Biodiversity Action Plan
- Endeavour to undertake an annual programme of tree-planting in parks and open spaces
- Identify and establish a new local nature reserve site each year for three years
- Support the Pond Wardens scheme
- Foster community involvement in conservation projects
- Look at linking naturalistic landscapes within parks with nearby informal green areas where possible, to create or strengthen wildlife corridors and improve the local green infrastructure
- Identify beneficial changes and developments to mitigate the effects of climate change such as planting schemes with low water demand or using sustainable, locally sourced compost and bark and producing information to encourage public awareness of beneficial changes that can be made in private as well as public gardens.

## **4.6 DEVELOPMENTS**

### **Aim**

- To provide new parks and open spaces to serve new housing developments and areas of the city which are deficient in open space and to make existing parks more attractive so that existing users have an enhanced experience and more people use them.

### **Objectives**

- To maximise support for parks development and maintenance through external funding opportunities and ensure that new resources are directed to benefit customers using parks
- Identify opportunities and work with Planners to meet targets for open space provision set in the Local Plan and to ensure that the importance of Parks and Open spaces is reflected in the Local Development Framework
- Work proactively on development projects designed to meet today's community needs
- Work with Friends Groups to develop schemes and attract additional funding

- Support joint ventures with other partners to increase funding and sponsorship opportunities
- Identify and develop revenue-generating projects.

### **Priority Actions**

- Proactively seek out creative partnerships and new opportunities for funding
- Develop sponsorship packages for projects
- Continue to maximise park and open space improvements for Derby through work on capital projects including the following:
  - Markeaton Park Project
  - Racecourse Project
  - Millennium Park Project
  - Playground Renovation Programme
  - New open space/playground projects (resulting from Planning Agreements)
  - City Centre Skateboard Project.
- Examine and test the opportunities for commercial sponsorship and franchises with regard to sports, catering, horticultural features and events
- Investigate capital investment opportunities for the golf courses.

## **4.7 HEALTH**

Parks and open spaces significantly contribute to the fulfilment of:

- The Corporate Priority 'Helping us all to be Healthy, Active and Independent
- The recommendations of 'Getting Derby Active'.

Parks and open spaces can make a significant impact on social, ethnic and income disparity. They can improving health and quality of life by providing free, accessible, high quality opportunities to exercise for the recommended time each week through such activities as:

- Walking
- Jogging
- Wheeled sports
- Playing casual games
- Organised sport
- Playing on play equipment.

An ever increasing body of research is recognising that the sights, smells and touch of the natural environment can significantly improve mental well-being, relieve the symptoms of stress and have positive impacts for people with impaired vision and other disabilities. Recent studies in America have also highlighted that the presence of visible green space can accelerate the period of recovery for those recuperating from illness.

By promoting green spaces for health benefits, the City Council will ensure that the people of Derby are aware of the many opportunities to improve their health in local parks.

### **Aim**

- To increase the activity levels of people of all ages through their use of parks.

### **Objectives**

- To create routes and trails for walking, cycling or riding, throughout the city and beyond, linking areas of greenspace to each other and to open countryside on the city fringe.
- Increase the variety of opportunities for sport and other active uses of parks and their facilities and for holding events on parks.

### **Priority Actions**

- Identify and work with partners to implement those cycling and walking routes identified in the Local Plan and in the Derby Cycling Strategy
- Develop publicity material with 'Getting Derby Active' to promote healthy activities in parks
- Support the existing green gyms based in Osmaston Park and at Little Chester Allotments
- Work with the 'British Trust for Conservation Volunteers' to set up another green gym
- Ensure that park developments encourage active use of parks
- Work with Friends Groups to organise activities in Parks.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

Public parks and open spaces are long-term environmental, recreational and historic assets and Derby City Council is committed to their protection and development. As a major city-wide resource that can be accessed by all members of the community, providing facilities and activities that complement other significant developments and policy initiatives in Derby, Parks and Open Spaces support the ongoing regeneration of the city.

This strategy recognises the key issues affecting Derby's parks today and presents a set of planned and coordinated actions designed to achieve the delivery of the highest standard of park service, achieving best value through pro-active management, and a partnership approach with stakeholders including user groups, English Heritage, Council Departments, Greenspace, Friends Groups and regeneration agencies.

It is the community's use and enjoyment of public parks which will ensure their future success and their contribution to the success of Derby. This Strategy seeks to maximise the public enjoyment of parks and thereby to contribute to Derby being recognised as a highly desirable city, in which to live and work.