

First draft

Cambridge City Council Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2009 to 2013



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1. Foreword

The Executive Councillor for Arts & Recreation

To be completed at final draft stage.

2. Executive Summary

There are 88 parks and open spaces owned and managed by the council in Cambridge. These cover more than 315 hectares and range from the larger parks in the central area to small pocket parks in the suburbs. These areas are highly valued by residents for recreational, amenity and other purposes.

Parks and open spaces have never been more important than today, in the face of new environmental, social and economic challenges. Climate change and the growth of the City require us to understand the vital role our parks and open spaces provide, such as flood protection and urban cooling, and environmental protection of wildlife.

The creation, protection and improvement of high quality open spaces are detailed in our vision for Parks and Open Spaces in Cambridge.

'Cambridge Parks and Open Spaces will protect and provide attractive and diverse environments that enhance the quality of life for new and existing communities, workers and visitors and will provide opportunities for people to participate in activities in pursuit of a more healthy lifestyle, to socialise or relax and enjoy green spaces in safety.'

Parks and open spaces play an important role in helping Cambridge City Council achieve its Medium Term Objectives:

- Promote Cambridge as a sustainable city, in particular by reducing carbon dioxide emissions and the amount of waste going into landfill in the City and sub-region;
- Ensure that residents and other service users have an entirely positive experience of dealing with the Council;
- Maintain a healthy, safe and enjoyable city for all, with thriving and viable neighbourhoods;
- Lead the growth of Cambridge to achieve attractive, sustainable new neighbourhoods, including affordable housing, close to a good range of facilities, and supported by transport networks so that people can opt not to use the car.

Using the objectives of the Council's Cultural Framework, it is possible to identify issues emerging from the strategy to that highlight **focus** for 22 actions:

Existing and future investment is targeted on addressing local need.

- a) Address localised concerns about standards of provision and maintenance;
- b) Provide a shared and systematic approach to the monitoring, evaluation and management of grounds maintenance that involves and responds to the needs of local people;
- c) Establish a broad range of opportunities for encouraging feedback on parks and open spaces by all users;
- d) Develop an assessment process and toolkit to identify requirements for play that offers systematic engagement with children and young people;
- e) Revise conservation and management plans of key parks and open spaces;
- f) Consider opportunities for external investment where the need for improvement has been identified.

Inequalities of provision and access are addressed.

- g) Consider ways to improve the quality, quantity and range of parks and open spaces in Cambridge;
- h) Consider improvements in the quality of maintenance of neighbourhood parks and open spaces to encourage people to use more local facilities rather than travel to 'destination' parks;
- i) Use a systematic approach to identifying areas for investment.
- j) Explore further the views of BME residents who wish to use parks and opens spaces; also that a range of methods of engagement and communication should be offered.

Sub regional and cross boundary issues are considered and addressed.

- k) Contribute towards an updated open space and recreation strategy for the Council to include standards for informal and formal open space;
- l) Develop a benchmarking programme to ascertain the extent to which cost effectiveness and best value are achieved.

Partnership working is fostered to achieve shared outcomes.

- m) Raise the profile, understanding and value of parks and open spaces in Cambridge;
- n) Engage systematically with local people to identify aspirations and opportunities for involvement;
- o) Encourage 'ownership' by the local community through Friends groups and opportunities for volunteering;
- p) Consider proactive ways to 'design out' crime with techniques such as natural surveillance and encourage positive approaches such as increasing activities that bring natural policing by visitors;
- q) Consider and consult on the introduction and updating of bye laws where this is appropriate;
- r) Develop conservation, habitat and management plans for parks and open spaces;
- s) Review methods of working to ensure that they have as little environmental impact as possible;
- t) Develop more Integrated internal working relationships to address environmental work ;

- u) Utilise the emerging events framework to balance the increased use of parks and open spaces for events against realistic capacity and impact.
- v) Use 'Be Active, Be Healthy' to guide partnership approaches to increase opportunity for improvement to health and well being by the use of parks and open spaces

3 National, regional and local context

3.1 National Policy Background

The Government's approach to Parks and Open Spaces has evolved significantly in recent years, beginning with the Urban White Paper but moving forward substantially since. The increasing importance of open spaces led to the establishment of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force and a review of planning policy; more recently it has led to a requirement to assess parks and open spaces against criteria of quality, quantity and accessibility, and to the obligation to develop locally-based and evidenced standards of provision.

Parks and open spaces are among the community's most valued features. The Government's expectation is that parks, play areas and open spaces will contribute to the 'cross cutting' issues of health, social inclusion, regeneration, community safety, and urban regeneration, and that they also have a part to play in life long learning, the 'liveability' of built up areas and wider sustainability.

a) The Urban White Paper

The main thrust of the Urban White Paper is the need for an approach to design and development, which encourages well laid out urban areas with good quality buildings, well designed streets, and good quality public open spaces.

Well-managed public open spaces such as greens, squares, parks and children's play areas improve the attractiveness of urban areas and help promote a healthier lifestyle through positive influence on people's physical and mental health and well-being. They are therefore vital to enhancing the quality of urban environments and the quality of life of those who live in them.

b) Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)17 – Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

PPG17 sets out the ways in which open spaces, sport and recreation contribute to broader Government objectives, including below.

Supporting an urban renaissance – networks of high quality open spaces help create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe.

Promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion – open space can play a major part in improving people's sense of well being in the place they live.

Health and well-being – open spaces help to promote healthy living and the social development of children of all ages through play, sporting activities and interaction with others.

Promoting more sustainable development – by ensuring that open space, sports and recreational facilities are easily accessible by walking and cycling.

The Guidance emphasises the requirement for assessments of need that encompass the differing and distinctive needs of the population for open space, sport and recreation. Specifically the assessment should:-

- Include an audit of existing open space covering both the quantitative and the qualitative elements of open space;
- Identify specific needs, and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space;
- Be used to set locally derived standards for the provision of open space including:-
 - Quantitative elements (how much new provision may be needed)
 - A qualitative component (against which to measure the need for enhancement of existing facilities)
 - Accessibility (including distance thresholds and consideration of the cost of using a facility).

c) Living Places – Cleaner, Safer, Greener

This Government document recognises that good parks and green spaces bring many benefits that make places more liveable and sustainable and enrich the quality of peoples' lives and communities. The overall objectives are to:-

- Provide good parks and green spaces close to people's home or place of work;
- Meet the needs of all people, especially children and young people, older people, those with disabilities, minorities and people in disadvantaged areas;
- Provide a more diverse range of green spaces that cater for people's social, educational and physical needs and changing lifestyles. This includes city farms and community gardens, wildlife areas and woodlands, allotments and tree-lined streets, as well as parks, sports grounds and play areas;
- Create networks of accessible, high quality parks and diverse green spaces in all our towns and cities.

d) Fair Play – the national play strategy

Strong, vibrant communities should offer a variety of places for children to play, places in which children have a stake and that they can help shape through their active involvement in design and decision making. All children and young people should be able to find places, near their homes, where they can play freely and meet their friends. They should feel confident and safe to play, both indoors and out, and in a manner that is appropriate to their needs and interests. Play will support community cohesion and help keep children healthy.

Government's aim is that:-

- In every residential area, there is a variety of places for play, free of charge, supervised and unsupervised;
- Local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play;
- Routes to children's play space are safe and accessible for all children and young people;
- Parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well-maintained and well-used;
- Children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours;
- Children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property;
- Children, young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces; and play places are attractive welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including

disabled children, children of both genders, and children from minority groups in the community.

e) Accessible Natural Greenspace in Towns and Cities

Natural England has developed a standard for natural greenspace, which it defines as “land, water and geological features which have been naturally colonised by plants and animals and which are accessible on foot to large numbers of residents”.

Natural England 's Accessible Natural Greenspace standard (ANGSt) provides a set of benchmarks for ensuring access to places of wildlife interest. These standards recommend that people living in towns and cities should have:-

- An accessible natural greenspace less than 300 metres (5 minutes walk) from home;
- Statutory Local Nature Reserves at a minimum level of one hectare per thousand population;
- At least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometres of home;
- One accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home;
- One accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home;

If accessible natural spaces in urban areas are also to be perceived as safe places size and distance criteria need to be supplemented by location, design and managerial criteria.

To be accessible, natural spaces have to be in the right place - within five minutes walking distance of the home - and they have to be places where individuals feel they are in control rather than feeling vulnerable. When people feel in control there is a sense that sites are ‘communally owned’.

3.2 Local Policy Background

a) The Strategy must consider how to deliver its vision within the context of Medium Term Objectives, the Sustainable Community Strategy and strategic corporate priorities in the following areas:-

- Climate Change & reducing the City’s carbon footprint;
- Growth, with reference to the Local Development Framework and the Cambridge Local Plan (2006);
- Community Safety;
- Culture (including Sports Services and Events);
- Children & Young People’s Services;
- Conservation and Biodiversity;
- Community Inclusion and partnerships;
- Arboricultural Strategy;
- Sustainable Drainage;
- Moorings Policy;
- Community engagement & partnerships;
- Performance Framework for Grounds Maintenance;
- Open Space and Recreation Section 106 Investment programme;
- Cycling & Walking Strategy.

b) Growth of the City

The Cambridge Local Plan 2006 sets out how growth in the city will be managed. The plan has the number of components, all of which contribute to sustainability, and in turn provide guidance relevant to parks and opens spaces.

The City Council is able to provide facilities that meet the needs of new and growing communities through its Planning Obligation Strategy Supplementary Planning Guidance and successor documents. This requires that all residential development will provide public open space and sports facilities, in accordance with the City Council's open space and recreation standards, which are based upon a range of best evidence and practice and provide detailed requirements for different types of facilities. Provision should be onsite as appropriate to the nature and location of development, or whether the scale of development and/or local circumstances indicate otherwise. The standards make provision for children and teenagers, playing fields, natural areas and formal indoor sports provision. Further guidance is also available in the master plans produced for the major sites.

Table 1 shows the effect on levels of provision should there be no increase in the current amount of City Council owned and managed open space. There is a projected population increase up to 2021 is 35,500 people or 31.2%. Table 1 shows a gradually deteriorating level of provision and a corresponding increase in the future requirement of space to meet the City Council's open space standards. The level of provision of formal open space falls from the current level of 0.32 hectares per 1000 population to 0.24 hectares per 1000 population. Informal open space falls from 1.28 to 0.98 hectares per 1000 population and children's play no longer meets the standard of provision after 2016.

Table 1 Future Growth

	2006		2011		2016		2012	
Population	113900		131800		147600		149400	
Type	Current level of provision (Hectares per 1000)	Minimum Amount of Open Space required to meet standard	Current level of provision (Hectares per 1000)	Minimum Amount of Open Space required to meet standard	Current level of provision (Hectares per 1000)	Minimum Amount of Open Space required to meet standard	Current level of provision (Hectares per 1000)	Minimum Amount of Open Space required to meet standard
Formal Open Space	0.32	182.24	0.28	210.88	0.25	236.16	0.24	239.04
Informal Open Space	1.28	170.85	1.11	197.70	0.99	221.40	0.98	224.10
Children's Play	0.23	22.78	0.20	26.36	0.18	29.52	0.18	29.88

3.3 Citizens' survey feedback

The Citizens Survey conducted for the City Council in 2007 showed that since the previous parks strategy was approved in 2004, the perceived importance, of the Council's parks and open spaces had remained static at 95%; usage had decreased slight by 3% to 62% and satisfaction had risen significantly from 61% to 80%. It is possible that the increased availability of section 106 funding to improve and enhance parks and open spaces is a factor in rising levels of satisfaction.

The Council also commissioned a booster survey in 2007 to compare the views of black and minority ethnic (BME) residents with the main survey. This highlighted that

BME respondents place a similar degree of importance on the provision of parks and open spaces, but were 20% less likely to be satisfied with them and 10% less likely to use them. More generally, the BME respondents were more likely than those in the main survey to know nothing about the Council and over half the BME respondents said the Council was poor at keeping residents informed about the decisions it makes. Only 1 in 8 reported use of the Council website and none had received information by personal contact with elected members or through Council or public meetings.

3.4 Local Area Agreement

The Local Area Agreement includes a number of National Indicators (NIs) that the management of parks and open spaces can contribute to delivering:

- NI 197 - Improved local bio diversity
- NI 56 - Obesity among primary school children in year 6
- NI 110 - Young People's participation in positive activities
- NI 8 - Adult participation in sport

The proposed contribution to these is drawn out in the strategy and can be included in more detailed reports for the LAA at a later stage

Key Issues

The analysis of information gathered of national, regional and local policies, has identified the following key objectives

- The need to improve the quality and range of parks and open spaces in Cambridge;
- The need to protect, conserve and enhance the environment of the parks and commons with the use of conservation and management plans;
- The need to engage with local people to Identify aspirations and opportunities for wider use
- The need to raise the profile, understanding and value of parks and open spaces in Cambridge
- Explore further the views of BME residents who wish to use parks and open spaces; also consider a range of methods of engagement and communication that could be offered.

4. Understanding supply

A full analysis of existing open space has been completed, to support the strategy. This analysis:-

- Identifies all open space;
- Categorises open space by function and size;
- Details an on-site audit of open space;
- Produces datasets and key information.

4.1 Typology of Open Space

The typology for the Cambridge Parks and Open Space Strategy largely follows that set out in PPG17¹ and the Companion Guide. The typology used for this study is shown Table 2.

Table 2: Typology of Open Spaces

Type of Open Space	Description	Purpose
Urban Parks and Gardens	Areas of land managed and maintained as a public park or garden.	Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events.
Amenity Greenspace	Landscaped areas providing visual amenity or separating different buildings or land uses for environmental, visual or safety reasons. Areas of grass within housing areas that are used for a variety of informal or social activities such as informal play.	Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.
Playspace for children and teenagers	Areas providing safe and accessible opportunities for children's play, usually linked to housing areas.	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, ball courts, skateboard areas and teenage shelters.
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Used primarily for designated sports i.e. playing fields, tennis courts, bowling greens.	Participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics.
Natural/semi-natural Spaces	Areas of undeveloped or previously developed land with residual natural habitats or which have been planted or colonised by vegetation and wildlife, including woodland and wetland areas.	Wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.
Allotments	Areas of land in or just outside a town that a person rents for growing vegetables, fruits or flowers. Allotments can be temporary or statutory.	Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion.
Churchyards and Cemeteries	Cemeteries, disused churchyards and other burial grounds.	Quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

This strategy is solely concerned with open space provision managed and usually owned by the City Council. The assessment undertaken seeks to evaluate the contribution made by open spaces managed by the Council in meeting the overall need for open space. This analysis will feed into any revised Open Space and Recreation Strategy to be prepared by Environment and Planning.

¹ Planning Policy Guidance (PPG17) – Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

4.2 Standards of Provision

The adopted standards for the quantity of open space required are set out in the Cambridge Local Plan 2006. These are shown in Table 3 below.

The types of open space differ slightly from the typology identified by PPG17. Formal Open Space equates to Outdoor Sports; whilst Informal Open Space is an amalgamation of Urban Parks and Gardens and Amenity Greenspace; however, Children's Play Areas is identical to playspace for children and teenagers.

Table 3: The City Council's Open Space Standards

Type of Open Space	Local Plan Standard
Formal Open Space Playing pitches, courts and greens	1.2 hectares per thousand population,
Informal Open Space Recreation grounds, parks and common land, excluding equipped play areas.	1.8 hectares per thousand population
Children's Play Areas Equipped play areas	0.3 hectares per thousand population

4.3 Assessing Quantity

A full audit of all the open spaces sites within the identified settlements was undertaken of all spaces over a minimum size of 0.02 hectares. A total of 88 spaces were visited and individually assessed for quantity, quality, accessibility and value using assessment sheets with individual criteria reflecting the essential characteristics of each different type of space. The full audit is available as a background paper to this strategy.

The Cambridge City population based on the 2006 mid year estimates is 113,900. The assessment of city - wide provision has been based on this figure.

The City Council's contribution to formal open space provision is 36.57 hectares. A total of 182.24 hectares of formal open space to meet the Council's minimum standard of provision would be required. There are however a number of privately owned and education sites where there is secured community use that contributes further to meeting the standard.

It is likely that the City Council is the only provider of Informal open space and the current level of provision is 1.28 hectares per 1000 population compared to the minimum standard of 1.8 hectares per 1000 population. Current provision amounts to 145.71 hectares compared to a requirement for 171.85 hectares so the shortfall is 25.14 hectares.

The total provision of equipped children's play space is 26.75 hectares, which is more than adequate to meet the council's minimum standard of provision but falls short of the maximum requirement for 34.17 hectares.

The amount of Natural and Semi Natural Greenspace managed by the council in Cambridge falls well short of the provision required by Natural England's ANGSt standard.

The council provides 32.6 hectares of allotments, which exceeds both the 1969 Thorpe Report recommended minimum standard and the more recent National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners target for provision. In addition, there are a number of private sites in the city, which will make a further contribution to total provision.

There appears to be sufficient provision of allotments in relation to acknowledged standards of provision. There are however waiting lists for allotment sites suggesting that there is unmet demand.

4.4 Assessing Quality

The assessment of the quality of open spaces is based on a scoring system for quality criteria for each type of open space. These criteria represent what people expect to find in a quality open space, whilst recognising the diversity and distinctive character of individual spaces. The aim is to be able to identify those open spaces, which need enhancement and relative priorities.

The Sport England Pitch Quality Assessment was used to assess the quality of playing pitches. The ratings range from an excellent pitch to a poor pitch.

The quality assessments that have been undertaken have revealed whilst some sites show increases or remain static, a number of sites are scoring less for quality than in 2003. This seems to be more prevalent in the South and West/Central areas.

Further text is to be included from the technical document that accompanies this report.

4.5 Assessing Value²

Value is an entirely different and separate concept from quality. It relates mainly to three things:

Context: an inaccessible space is almost irrelevant to potential users and therefore may be of little value, irrespective of its quality. Similarly, if there is significantly more high quality provision in an area than needed, some of it may well be of relatively little value – and conversely if there is very little provision in an area, even a space or facility of mediocre quality may well be valuable.

Level and type of use: poorly used spaces or facilities are likely to be of little value while well used spaces are always of high value.

The wider benefits generated for people, biodiversity and the wider environment that includes:

- Structural and landscape benefits: well-located, high quality green spaces help to define the identity and character of an area.
- Sustainability benefits: green spaces support biodiversity, provide habitats for wildlife and may serve broader functions in terms of reducing the impacts of air, water and noise pollution. In addition, the more that urban residents are

² This section closely follows the guidance in Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG17. September 2002 Kit Campbell Associates. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London.

able to use green spaces close to where they live, fewer car borne trips will be generated.

- **Social inclusion and health benefits:** high quality spaces and sport and recreation facilities promote a sense of belonging and can help to promote well-being. Green spaces are also one of the very few publicly accessible facilities that are equally available to everyone, irrespective of personal circumstances.
- **Amenity benefits and a 'sense of place':** green spaces and sport and recreation facilities help to make villages, towns and cities attractive places in which to live, provided local people perceive them as safe, well maintained and attractive. In addition, in a typical residential development composed of a limited number of house types, it is often the green spaces that make one area different from another, help to create specific neighbourhoods and provide important landmarks.
- **Education benefits:** green spaces offer opportunities for people to see nature at work, the integration of historic buildings and features in the landscape and the influence of people on the natural heritage.

Conclusion to be completed, prior to wider consultation

4.6 Accessibility

The consideration of accessibility needs to be undertaken in the context of a hierarchy of spaces. A three-level hierarchy in relation to open spaces is considered based on the three key characteristics of "size", "effective catchment"³ and "essential characteristics".

- **Citywide significance** - spaces that attract the highest number of users, from throughout Cambridge and probably wider a field, and therefore have a large effective catchment and high distance threshold. A high proportion of users are likely to travel to them by car. The size of these spaces is likely to be over 5 hectares although smaller spaces whose character makes them particularly attractive may be included within this level of the hierarchy. The effective catchment is 1.2 kilometres⁴. Essential characteristics could include formal bedding, some outdoor sports provision and a catering outlet.
- **Middle order significance** - spaces that will tend to attract a significant proportion of their users from neighbourhood in of Cambridge. Spaces at this level of the hierarchy are likely to be over 0.3 hectares in size and will have an effective catchment of 400 metres. Essential characteristics could include paths for dog walking, circular recreational walks and play provision.
- **Neighbourhood significance** - smaller spaces of 0.3 hectares or below which will tend to attract almost all of their users from neighbouring streets. Most users will walk to them. Spaces at this level in the hierarchy will have an effective catchment of about 200m.

³ The distance thresholds do not give an accurate indication of the "catchment" of a particular open space, but do provide an "effective catchment" i.e. the distance that is travelled by around 75% of users.

⁴ The determination of catchments has followed the guidance contained in Biodiversity by Design: A Guide for Sustainable Communities (TCPA. 2004)

Accessibility

Conclusions to be completed prior to wider consultation

Key Issues

Analysis of Quality, Quantity and Accessibility has identified the following objectives: -

- Consider ways to improve the quality, quantity and range of parks and open spaces in Cambridge;
- Contribute towards an updated open space and recreation strategy for the City Council to include standards for Informal and formal open space.
- Use a systematic approach to identifying areas for investment

5 Understanding demands and needs

5.1 A number of consultation exercises have been undertaken which provide a clear overview of local needs and demand for different types of open spaces. This provides a good evidence base for understanding the needs of local people. Response rates to all the consultation exercises cited have been high confirming that the findings provide a robust basis for developing this strategy. This section:

- Considers existing demographic and similar information
- Reviews existing consultation information and identifying existing consultative mechanisms.

5.2 Patterns of use in Cambridge parks

This analysis examines patterns of use reported in three surveys of Cambridge park users in 2002, 2004 and 2007. In each of these three surveys (two by post, one by phone with a limited sample size), users of parks were asked questions to explore aspects of the way they use parks. The answers are not necessarily comparable in pure statistical terms because of different methodologies, and slightly different wordings, but this analysis nevertheless paints a picture of patterns of use and changes in patterns of use over the past five years.

5.3 The nearest park/the park most visited

In 2004, residents were asked about their nearest park; in 2007, about the park they most visited. The 2002 results show around a quarter (28%) having a park within a short walk of under 200m, and a fifth (20%) having to travel twice that far, so that in all around half of the people surveyed had a park within a ten-minute journey time. In 2007, two thirds of people said they travel for 10 mins or less to get to their preferred park, which may indicate two things – an increased level of provision (unlikely, and certainly not on a scale to change this result so much) or a shortened journey time by virtue of travelling more by car or by cycle to get to the park.

Anecdotal evidence suggests the latter is the case and we found evidence in Section 106 work of people using cars to visit parks that were actually quite nearby; visiting the park in the course of a school run is not unusual, and many visits to Cherry Hinton Hall by local residents seem to involve use of a car.

There is also increased use of cycling to consider, and the combination of a cycle trip with a park visit, even a “just passing through” visit, is not unusual. Parks offer less threatening cycle routes than use of main roads and cyclists will often choose a route through a park. Levels of cycling in the city are high and may well be rising and this would impact on park visit levels.

5.4 Take up

In 2002, three in five people (61%) used local parks, and this was again the case in 2004 (62%). A different question in 2007 asked about use of all parks – not just the one local to them - and returned a result of 87%, suggesting that a large proportion of people use parks that are not their local one. The most popular parks for visiting in all three surveys were Cherry Hinton Hall, Jesus Green and Parkers Piece, and all have catchments well beyond their own localities. Over the three surveys, use of Cherry Hinton Hall has remained relatively static but the numbers visiting Jesus Green and Parkers Piece have risen sharply.

A quarter of people in the 2007 survey said that Jesus Green was their preferred park for a visit, whilst just 11% in 2002 said it was the local park they visit most. This suggests, and evidence confirms, that Jesus Green serves as a local park for a local community but also as a city park for a much wider catchment.

5.5 Time of visit

Parks are used at all times, weekday and weekend, morning and evening. The most popular times throughout the three surveys have been weekend afternoons, and weekday afternoons; usage in the evenings has always been the lowest, and weekend evening use is now very low – and apparently much lower than it was in 2002 and 2004. (The question is asked differently so direct comparison is not possible). Residents asked about this have cited issues such as lighting and safety fears for not using parks in the evenings; on some sites in suburban areas (Fison Road and Coleridge for instance) antisocial behaviour (or the perception of anti social behaviour) has been a major deterrent. This is seen to have worsened in recent years.

5.6 Frequency of visit

Frequency of visiting parks seems to be reducing, a result which is consistent with not walking to the local park but making a special trip in the car. In 2002, a third of people (34%) visited three or more times a week; in 2007, that figure had fallen to below 25%. In contrast, the proportions visiting two or three times a month rose from 14% in 2002 to 22% in 2007, suggesting that people still visit parks but do so less often than they used to.

5.7 Time spent on parks and open spaces

In 2002, three quarters (73%) of people spent less than an hour on a typical visit. In 2004, this figure fell to around 58%, indicating that people were tending to spend longer on a park visit (this was a small sample). In 2007, the proportion spending less than an hour was 64%, but the pattern was different from 2002, with fewer people spending less than half an hour and more people spending up to an hour on a visit. This is consistent with the more organised park trip and the increased use of the larger park sites that would tend to justify a longer dwell time and also provide more things to do in that timespan.

Based on the 2002 results, it is calculated that people were spending on average 52 minutes on a park visit. In 2004 this rose to 61 mins, and in 2007 it remained at 61 mins. Looking beneath the surface of these figures, the time spent on parks and open spaces in 2002 was most influenced by a large number of fairly short visits of less than 30 mins duration, whilst by 2007 the pattern had shifted towards a longer stay of up to an hour. It remains the case throughout the studies that relatively few people prolong their stay beyond an hour, and the reasons for this are usually connected to unattractive or nonexistent toilet facilities (a particular factor at both Jesus Green and Cherry Hinton Hall) and the absence of catering or adequate seating.

5.8 Geographical patterns

No geographical analysis was undertaken in 2002 or 2004, although some work was done on geographical key priorities as part of the Section 106 analysis.

The 2007 study looked at area breakdowns and found that:-

- Southern area residents visit parks less often;
- Northern area residents make shorter visits;
- Southern and northern area residents were tending to make longer journeys (perhaps indicating that local parks are less satisfactory in these areas);
- Southern area residents were more likely to visit on weekday afternoons;
- Northern area residents very rarely visit parks on weekend evenings.

The data suggests a change of patterns of use, away from the casual visit to the local park and towards a more planned visit to a larger site with more on offer. This is not a complete change, but rather an observed tendency, which results in slightly longer journey times, more traffic (car and cycle) related to parks, and slightly longer time spent in parks and open spaces – although even the primary parks in the city do not yet support a long stay. The larger sites are thus gaining visitors at the expense of local parks.

This may indicate a preference for larger, more varied sites, or may indicate boredom with what the local sites have to offer. Certainly several local parks are in a relatively poor state and in need of upgrading, or present social and behavioural problems that discourage visitors. Changing this perception is a process which is now under way and which may change results again when the next survey is undertaken.

In 2002 and 2004 data was analysed to produce a priorities list that was used to contribute the Section 106 scoring framework. At that time the key priorities were

- Safety
- Sports facilities
- Toilets
- Cycle security
- Lighting
- And less important priorities were
- Play spaces for children
- Teenage facilities
- Lighting and seating were localised issues in the east and north respectively.

Analysis In 2007 highlights concerns and priorities on:-

- Cleanliness;
- Dog mess;
- Safety;
- Bin provision;
- All of which are seen as high importance but moderate performance.

There are less prominent concerns around:-

- Accessibility;
- Lighting;
- Pathways;
- And localised less prominent concerns over;
- Play space (east, north and south only);
- Sports space (east north and south only).

The response rate to the 2007 survey also provided evidence of an significant desire to engage with the service which suggests that 'engagement' is an emerging priorities.

Key Issues

Analysis of Demands and Needs has identified the following objectives: -

- Consider improvements in the quality of maintenance of neighbourhood parks and open spaces to encourage people to use more local facilities rather than travel to 'destination' parks;
- Establish a broad range of opportunities for encouraging feedback on parks and open spaces by all users;
- Encourage 'ownership' by the local community through Friends Groups and opportunities for feedback;
- Engage systematically with local people to identify aspirations and opportunities for Involvement;
- Address localised concerns about standards of provision and maintenance;
- Provide a shared and systematic approach to monitoring, evaluation and management of grounds maintenance that Involves and responds to the needs of local people;
- Consider opportunities for external Investment where the need for improvement has been identified.

6 Delivery and Resources

6.1 Cambridge City Council manages parks and open spaces through a number of departments in the following way

- **Community Services** (via Active Communities) are responsible for coordinating strategic direction and development of the service; also the management of overall performance through an agreed performance management framework with City Services (available as a background document). Other sections such as Community Development and Arts & Entertainments provide and contribute to programmes of activities on open spaces.
- **Environment and Planning** provides a number of associated specialist service areas such as Planning Policy and Development Control, Arboriculture, Conservation and Landscape Design. These services work closely with Active Communities across a range of functions.
- **City Services** manage grounds maintenance operations with budgets devolved from Community Services and other departments. This work is generally carried out through the Streetscene Section and is jointly monitored and evaluated with Clients using the performance management framework.

6.2 Active Communities and Street Scene work within a Performance Management Framework which was agreed in May 2008 and is driven by the following four requirements:

- The need to ensure that green spaces are provided and maintained to standards which residents are satisfied with and that meet expectations.

- That resources allocated to green spaces can be shown to
 - Be efficient and
 - Provide value for money
- The need to have a partnership approach to delivering standards, satisfaction and improvement that covers citywide and local perspectives.
- The need to have a joined up approach to an asset management, improvement and investment programme of Green Spaces.

6.3 Performance management is seen an essential part of ensuring we deliver our priorities. It will demonstrate that we are able to achieve those things that are important to the service, deliver continuous improvements and are able to report these results to local people. The PMF will help the City Council to: -

Prioritise what gets done and ensure we are adequately resourced to do it

- Ensure we provide value for money
- Motivate and manage staff
- Identify and allow rectification of poor performance
- Learn from previous issues and improve future performance
- Increase user and public satisfaction.

6.4 Friends and Stakeholder Groups

Active Communities recognises the importance of the voluntary and community sector and its contribution to creating, enhancing and managing local open space. We actively provide information, consult, enable local decision-making, contributions to investment and improvement and encourage community ownership through Friends groups.

6.5 Improve Your Neighbourhood

Through the Improve Your Neighbourhood Scheme the Council actively encourages local residents and groups to propose projects. These projects are evaluated on criteria, which assesses the project against agreed priorities.

6.6 Events

The Council actively supports the use of parks and open space, encouraging people to think about how they might use their space. An Events Capacity Framework has been developed, to encourage new audiences into the Park, promoting greater use, positive behaviours and provide opportunities for a wide range of interests

Key Issues

Analysis has identified the following objectives

- Provide a shared and systematic approach to the monitoring, evaluation and management of grounds maintenance that involves and responds to the needs of local people
- Utilise the emerging events framework to balance the increased use of parks and open spaces for events against realistic capacity and impact.

Resources

Further work with City Services, Environment and Planning and Finance Services is required prior to wider consultation

7 Partnerships and thematic working

7.1 The Council should proactively develop and maintain relevant partnerships in order to achieve this strategy. There may be opportunities to identify new partnerships through involving partners in this open spaces strategy. It will be important to develop knowledge of local and other relevant partnerships and potential partners, e.g. strategic service delivery partnerships, county sports partnerships, health partnerships, education, police and businesses, community organisations

A closer working partnership between Active Communities and Streetscene is being developed to deliver the requirements of the new Performance Management Framework, namely:

- The need to ensure that green spaces are provided and maintained to standards which residents are satisfied with and that meet expectations.
- That resources allocated to green spaces can be shown to
 - Be efficient and
 - Provide value for money
- The need to have a partnership approach to delivering standards, satisfaction and improvement that covers citywide and local perspectives.
- The need to have a joined up approach to an asset management, improvement and investment programme of Green Spaces.

7.2 Community Safety

Consultation and research has highlighted a perception amongst residents that some open spaces, particularly smaller spaces, do not feel safe and this has been a deterrent to people using these sites. Residents responding to consultation exercises have cited lack of lighting and anti social behaviour as key reasons for not using parks and open spaces.

The Council should seek to address the issues of raised in the Cambridge City Community Safety Plan 2008-2011 by developing initiatives that provide opportunities for young people in the city to have constructive activities to take part in and making sure young people have a voice to influence the planning and improvement of parks and open spaces.

The Council will examine the potential to work organisations such as Crime Concern to work with local communities to address local crime problems. There may be opportunities to engage with initiatives such as the Community Space Challenge programme, which can break down barriers between generations and cultures as well as improving the chances for young people.

The potential presence of dedicated park staff in Cambridge parks has been identified as giving people greater confidence that they are visiting a safe environment and encourages people to make more use of parks and open spaces.

7.3 Sustainability

Research for this Strategy has revealed that people are walking to their local park less often and are more likely to make a special trip to a 'destination' park by car. This changing pattern of activity is considered to be a response to the declining quality of the smaller local parks and open spaces. This increase in car-borne trips

across the city runs counter to sustainability objectives. People living in the South and North sub areas in particular are tending to make longer journeys.

The Council can support the aims and objectives of the Cambridge Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan by delivering environmentally sensitive green spaces that can help to manage the effects of climate change, contribute to sustainable development and improve the local environment.

The network of green spaces have an important role in contributing to the sustainability of communities, for example in managing flood risk and urban drainage, and providing habitat for wildlife. Parks also have an important role to play in addressing climate change.

Sustainability is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Council's vision of sustainable development embraces commitments to improving the quality of life, promoting equality and tackling disadvantage and poverty.

7.4 Provision for children and teenagers

Having more high quality and safe places to play is a priority for both children and parents in Cambridge. At present there is a deficiency in challenging activities for older young children and teenagers.

In future local authorities will need to agree up to 35 targets with government as part of their LAA, drawn from a set of 198 indicators – the national indicator set (NIS). The Government has made it clear to local authorities that play is now a national priority by building it into the new performance framework an indicator that will measure what children think about the parks and play areas in their local area.

Following the Children's Act 2004 (Every Child Matters), 'Youth Matters' was produced by DfES in 2005 and highlighted the challenge to encourage and empower more young people to take part in positive activities.

In 2008 the Council adopted a Charter for Play. This establishes a set of guiding principles for the provision of play opportunities. The Charter will be developed with children and young people - supported by the development of Cambridge Play Partnership - and will be used to influence change and promote a right for every child to play. The priorities of the Charter are to:

- Develop a children and young people's play charter;
- To prove the development of a Cambridge Play Partnership;
- To approve the development of the Urban Adventure Play (UAP) programme, including for new play projects with funding from the big lottery. The council has been allocated £200,000 by this scheme, which aims to take play back to basics by promoting outdoor play, encouraging children to take more risks and find more challenging play environments.

Cambridgeshire Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is preparing to adopt its second county-wide three year plan for services for children and young people, known as 'Big Plan 2'. This will highlight priorities for a number of services delivered by the City Council.

7.5 Conserve and Protect Heritage

Community groups and participants in consultation workshops have expressed the view that parks in Cambridge are one of the principal reasons it attracts so many visitors. Concerns have been expressed about making unnecessary changes to parks. There is concern that intervention would affect the fabric and essence of parks and open spaces with a resulting loss of character and identity.

This approach contrasts with the views of those living outside the central area where many open spaces lack features of interest and are less valued by local people. There is therefore a tension between the need to conserve the historic open spaces in the city centre and the need to improve and enhance spaces in the residential suburban neighbourhoods.

7.6 Improvements in the standards of maintenance

The quality of people's experience of public spaces has a major impact on their quality of life, affecting their sense of well being and defining how they feel about the places where they live. It is important that the Council plans and manages service delivery to meet the needs and expectations of users.

The improvements that people want to see in urban green spaces are generally related to:

- Good design and management;
- Focused on meeting peoples needs, overcoming barriers to use;
- Inclusion and providing a high quality;
- And varied experience for the whole range of different groups in the community.

The Council should develop site management plans to help ensure the effective use of resources and activities. This will help to ensure that expectations of local people and the aspirations of the Strategy can be achieved

The Council should continue to use friends groups and other community groups to maintain a regular dialogue with users. Friends groups and other community groups should be asked to encourage the community to set local standards and become engaged in monitoring performance. Surveys, questionnaires, focus groups and e-focus groups will be used to measure user satisfaction and establish what is most important to the user and the required standards of service.

Poor quality in parks has been identified by the Department of Health⁵ as a barrier to increasing activity. Providing high quality environments are essential if parks and open spaces are to play a role in achieving health outcomes.

7.7 Health

The City's parks and opens spaces have an important contribution to both formal and informal sports provision. An assessment of quantity and quality of grass pitches will be undertaken as part of the parallel Open Space and Recreation Strategy process. Recent research published in The Lancet⁶ identifies that living in a green

⁵ Choosing health, choosing activity: A consultation on how to increase physical activity. Department of Health, 2004.

⁶ Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study; Mitchell & Popham (2008) [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(08\)61689-X/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(08)61689-X/fulltext)

area can lengthen life, improve health and well-being and that exercise in green spaces could have greater psychological and physiological benefits than exercise elsewhere. Researchers found that inequality in mortality from all causes relating to income deprivation was less in populations in the greenest areas compared with figures for people living in more built-up places. The study indicated that being active around green spaces could reduce blood pressure, stress levels and possibly help people heal faster after surgery. There is clearly a role for the Council to ensure that not only is there an adequate supply of green space, but that it is well maintained and encourages a variety of functions that attract usage.

The Council can provide safe and attractive opportunities for healthy activity, including walking, cycling, play, sport and other physical activity such as green gyms. A partnership with the Primary Care Trust will seek to promote and operate specific health-related activities. For example, healthy walks and green gyms aimed at encouraging more people to use the environment for healthier lifestyles.

The Council should seek to ensure that parks and open space provide opportunities for local people to building social networks, relax and have quiet time, have access to nature and have access to grow healthy food in a local allotment.

'Be Active, Be Healthy - a plan for getting the nation moving'⁷ was launched by the Government in February 2009 and establishes a new framework for the delivery of physical activity aligned with sport for the period leading up to the London 2012 Olympic Games and beyond. It also sets out ideas for local authorities and primary care trusts to help determine and respond to the needs of their local populations using cost effective and evidence-based initiatives. The Council should use this to guide partnership approaches to increase opportunity for improvement to health and well being by the use of parks and open spaces.

Key Issues

Analysis has identified the following objectives: -

- Develop an assessment process and toolkit to identify requirements for play that offers systematic engagement with children and young people
- Develop a benchmarking programme to ascertain the extent to which cost effectiveness and best value are achieved
- Consider proactive ways to 'design out' crime with techniques such as natural surveillance and encourage positive approaches such as increasing activities that bring natural policing by visitors.
- Consider and consult on the introduction and updating of bye laws where this is appropriate
- Develop conservation, habitat and management plans for parks and open spaces
- Review methods of working to ensure that they have as little environmental impact as possible
- Develop more Integrated internal working relationships to address environmental work
- Use 'Be Active, Be Healthy' to guide partnership approaches to increase opportunity for improvement to health and well being by the use of parks and open spaces

⁷ 'Be Active, Be Healthy: A Plan for getting the Nation Moving'; Department of Health (2009)

8 Summary of emerging issues

The Strategy process and analysis has revealed a number of emerging issues. It is proposed that these will form priorities for action by the Council and its partners over the next four years and that they will be reassessed mid way through the strategy period in 2011.

- a) Address localized concerns about standards of provision and maintenance
- b) Provide a shared and systematic approach to the monitoring, evaluation and management of grounds maintenance that involves and responds to the needs of local people
- c) Establish a broad range of opportunities for encouraging feedback on parks and open spaces by all users
- d) Develop an assessment process and toolkit to identify requirements for play that offers systematic engagement with children and young people
- e) Revise conservation and management plans of key parks and open spaces
- f) Consider opportunities for external investment where the need for improvement has been identified.
- g) Consider ways to improve the quality, quantity and range of parks and open spaces in Cambridge
- h) Consider improvements in the quality of maintenance of neighbourhood parks and open spaces to encourage people to use more local facilities rather than travel to 'destination' parks.
- i) Use a systematic approach to identifying areas for investment
- j) Explore further the views of BME residents who wish to use parks and open spaces; also that a range of methods of engagement and communication should be offered.
- k) Contribute towards an updated open space and recreation strategy for the Council to include standards for informal and formal open space
- l) Develop a benchmarking programme to ascertain the extent to which cost effectiveness and best value are achieved
- m) Raise the profile, understanding and value of parks and open spaces in Cambridge
- n) Engage systematically with local people to identify aspirations and opportunities for involvement
- o) Encourage 'ownership' by the local community through Friends groups and opportunities for volunteering
- p) Consider proactive ways to 'design out' crime with techniques such as natural surveillance and encourage positive approaches such as increasing activities that bring natural policing by visitors.
- q) Consider and consult on the introduction and updating of bye laws where this is appropriate
- r) Develop conservation, habitat and management plans for parks and open spaces
- s) Review methods of working to ensure that they have as little environmental impact as possible
- t) Develop more integrated internal working relationships to address environmental work
- u) Utilise the emerging events framework to balance the increased use of parks and open spaces for events against realistic capacity and impact.
- v) Use 'Be Active, Be Healthy' to guide partnership approaches to increase opportunity for improvement to health and well being by the use of parks and open spaces

9 Consultation

A wide range of stakeholders will be consulted. The following list is not exhaustive but illustrates the range of interested parties. It is anticipated stakeholders will be contacted in Spring 2009 and offered a focussed opportunity in which to participate

Stakeholders

Anglia Ruskin University
BRUNK
Camboaters
Cambridge Allotments Network
Cambridge Community Safety Partnership
Cambridge Cycling Campaign
Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum
Cambridge Fish Preservation & Angling Society
Cambridge Preservation Society
Cambridge University & Colleges
Cambridge Volunteer Centre
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership
Cambridgeshire County Council
Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust
Cambridgeshire Horizons
Cambridgeshire Rowing Association
Cambridgeshire University Combined Boat Club
Community Sport Network
Conservators of the River Cam
Countryside Agency
DHIVerse
English Heritage
Environment Agency
Executive Councillors
Friends of Histon Road Cemetery
Friends of Histon Road Recreation Ground
Friends of Midsummer Common
Friends of Mill Road Cemetery
Green Belt Project
Hobson's Conduit Trust
Internal service departments
Jesus Green Association
Major event providers
Natural England
NHS Cambridgeshire
Parent/ teacher Associations
Save Our Open Spaces Group
South Cambs District Council
The Wildlife Trust
Ward Councillors

Officers

Alastair Roberts
Alistair Wilson
Antoinette Jackson
Claire Rankin
Dave Coventry
Dave Prinsep
David Roberts.
Diana Oviatt Ham
Dinah Foley Norman
Emma Thornton
Glen Richardson
Ian Ross
Jas Lally
Joanna Gilbert-Wooldridge
John Preston
John Summers
Ken Hay
Liz Bisset
Nigel Cutting
Paula Bishop
Sally Stanhope
Sara Cass
Sharon Brown
Simon Chubb
Simon Payne
Toni Ainley
Trevor Woollams

10. Parks and Open Space Strategy Action Plan

An action plan will be drafted prior to consultation with stakeholders