

PARKS FOR ALL SEASONS

A PARKS STRATEGY FOR MANCHESTER



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FOREWORD



**Foreword by Leader of the Council,
Councillor Richard Leese**

I am delighted to present and endorse Manchester Leisure's Parks Strategy which provides an exciting vision and framework for well managed Parks and open spaces well into the next century. Parks have an important part to play in the continuing regeneration of Manchester as a City of national and international importance, as well as making the city an attractive place to live and work. Parks have a significant role to play in delivering health, educational, cultural and environmental benefits. This Strategy consolidates the City Council's ongoing commitment to the provision of Parks and to improving the quality of life for all Manchester's citizens.



**Foreword by the Executive Member for
Culture & Leisure
Councillor Glynn Evans**

Manchester Leisure have developed this "Parks for All Seasons" Parks Strategy through close

consultation with residents and stakeholders at all levels. The main aim of the Strategy is to provide access for everyone to well maintained and safe parks, play areas, woodlands and natural areas, close to where they live and work. Everyone recognises that parks are an important leisure, educational, historical and tourism asset to the City and provide opportunities for social interaction. Manchester Leisure's Parks Strategy recognises this need and has developed a number of priority actions within the key issues which are set to regenerate parks and open spaces into the 21st century and beyond.



**Foreword by Head of Leisure
Jim Byrne**

This Strategy document has been developed after City wide consultation with residents and stakeholder groups and organisations. The community is seen as a key partner in how the Parks service continues to be developed and this document aims to reflect the aspirations of Manchester's residents. Manchester Leisure will ensure that all future developments in Parks reflect the needs of the community within the framework of the strategy and will strive to deliver services and facilities which represent Best Value.

Our thanks to all who contributed their help and support during the completion of this document.

We hope you will find it both helpful and informative.



INTRODUCTION



Manchester has a multiplicity of outdoor leisure provision which has assumed a configuration including Urban Parks, playing fields, allotments and open space, river valleys, and small detached playgrounds and kickabout areas. The open spaces in Manchester include; Heaton Park which, at over 240 hectares in size, is one of the largest Urban Parks in Europe; and over 100 other designated parks, recreation grounds and recreational open spaces maintained by the City Council.

Manchester City Council has sought to continually improve parks despite the national trend of deteriorating standards during the last 30 years. The real impetus for change occurred in 1993 when there was a key Members Conference which discussed many issues in parks. As a result, in addition to implementing the action plans which evolved, strategic policy for parks has been determined through a series of reports and studies. These strategic policies have enabled key developments such as:

- a) Creation, in 1992, of a dedicated Parks Management Staffing Structure as part of the Manchester Leisure Division.
- b) Transfer of Client responsibility and budget, in 1996, for grounds maintenance from the City Engineer's Department to Manchester Leisure management.
- c) The production of a Park Development Plan which created a policy of prioritised improvements to designated Principal Parks in the first period, linked to a specific programme for Community parks.

- d) The creation of Friends and Joint User Groups with residents for specific parks, through a city wide strategy.
- e) The adoption of a Principal Park Strategy which allowed staffing to go back into some parks in increased numbers, which restored the confidence of the public to use parks in greater numbers.

There are now an emerging range of challenges to be addressed and the parks strategy establishes a response to these challenges and seeks to provide solutions to key issues including:

- Urban Countryside, Sustainability, Environmental Impact.
- Grounds Maintenance and Estate Management.
- Management and Partnerships.
- Security.
- Social Regeneration.
- Capital & Revenue Funding.
- Education.
- Health.
- Warden Service.
- Children's Play.
- Equality of Access.
- Dogs.
- Sports.
- Mapping Databases/Research/ Performance Monitoring.
- Tourism.
- Catering.
- Events.
- Marketing.
- Heritage.

By rising to these challenges the City's Parks will be able to fully meet the needs of Manchester and its community, both at present and into the new millennium, so that they continue to fulfil their traditional roles providing economic, environmental, recreational and social benefits, as well as capitalising upon and offering new opportunities for both the physical and social regeneration of the area.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

A comprehensive research programme was implemented throughout the course of the strategy formulation. This process was developed to ensure that the future progress and development in parks across Manchester is based in collaboration with, and agreement between all parties, thus ensuring acceptance and ownership.

The focus of the research concentrated on a high level of participation and interaction between all stakeholders, in a three stage process that involved primary (field) research and secondary (desk) research.

Stage 1:

Consisted of data collection, market research, consultations, reviews and analysis of supply and demand, facility audits, reviews of other strategies (internal and external), demographic and socio-economic trends analysis, and a funding appraisal. In addition, the processes and conclusions of the Best Value Fundamental Review of parks have been utilised.

Stage 2:

Was concerned with making policy recommendations from the research findings, and Best Value Fundamental Review, for the provision of new or modified services, activities or facilities, and identifying priority actions for the Council and other providers. At the completion of this stage there were consultations and presentations internally.

Stage 3:

A draft strategy was produced and made available to all members, as well as being distributed to over 200 interested stakeholders (internal and external), for comment. At the end of Stage 3 this final strategy, which has been amended to incorporate feedback received through the consultation, and has Committee approval, has been produced.

From the results of both the quantitative and qualitative research studies it emerged that, of all the issues (listed in the introduction), the starting point for parks' regeneration should be to establish a parks configuration framework, rather than a hierarchical structure. This configuration should recognise that parks and

play areas, regardless of size, are important to every community in Manchester for different reasons, each providing a range of roles and functions.

Therefore, the original 1995 Principal Park hierarchy has been adapted into a configuration which is summarised below, with examples.

Regional Parks

Sites which provide a range of facilities and visitor attractions (including major events) that attract users from a wider catchment area than Manchester, as well as residents from across the City.

Regional Parks:

Heaton Park, Wythenshawe Park

District Parks

These parks are the predominant areas of open space in the North, Central and South of the City which have a combination of attributes including diversity of facility and use, but have a more limited catchment population than regional parks.

District Parks:

Platt Fields Park, Boggart Hole Clough, Debdale Park & Alexandra Park, Queens Park

Community Parks

Defined as local parks with more than a single leisure use and are the next, after Regional or District parks, major park in a Management Area. The parks will have significant throughputs and be capable of accommodating formal or informal recreation and smaller community events.

Community Parks:

Chorlton Park, Fog Lane Park, Fletcher Moss Gardens, Crumpsall, Crowcroft, Brookdale, Birchfields Park

Small Local Parks and Recreation Grounds

These small parks provide a focal point for the immediate community and may include one, or a combination of, some of the following; a play area, sports facilities, seating/picnic tables, grassed areas, flowerbeds.

Small Local Parks:

Didsbury Park, Clayton Park, Smedley Fields



DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

Playing Fields

Specialist in their provision and are solely provided for the purpose of sport.

Playing Fields:

Hough End Playing Fields, Greenbank Playing Fields

Urban Countryside and River Valleys

The main purpose of these areas are environmental, education, and to knit greenspace together through the provision of trails, cycle routes and walks thus providing access to the urban countryside to large numbers of users from Manchester and beyond.

Urban Countryside:

Clayton Vale, Mersey Valley, Irk Valley, Highfield Country Park

City Centre

City Centre parks offer areas of greenspace or gardens that provide an area to relax at the heart of Manchester.

City Centre:

St John's Gardens, Whitworth Park

Open Spaces

A large group of parcels of land with a diversity of quality and use.

Open Spaces:

Willert Street Recreation Ground

The purpose of the configuration will be to allow the development of management plans for each facility which encompass the principles and policies contained within the parks strategy. It is intended that through this configuration sites are promoted as valuable greenspaces capable of delivering a range of social benefits contributing to fulfilling the corporate aims and objectives of the City Council.

With reference to the other outcomes of the consultation exercise the general synopsis is that users, and potential users, want well maintained, clean, safe, secure parks which offer a wide range of accessible facilities. In response, the strategy recommendations are contained in the following sections.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

URBAN COUNTRYSIDE, SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The value of accessible greenspace, managed in a more informal naturalistic way, within and around towns and cities, has long been recognised both for people and wildlife. The city has pioneered nationally recognised joint-management schemes such as the Mersey Valley, and has established accepted principles of landscape and visitor management through its warden service.

On a national scale the Community Forests Initiative and the Countryside Agency has recognised that urban countryside principles, native tree planting and habitat creation can be appropriate anywhere throughout the City, at relevant sites. Many of the City's larger parks have such areas, some of which have been designated Sites of Biological Importance.

Habitat creation and landscape management for urban countryside needs an understanding of ecological principles and careful planning to integrate properly with the other park functions. Manchester Leisure is involved in, and will seek, when appropriate, to become included in a number of partnerships to achieve this.

These partnerships will enable future consideration to be given to the development of an "Urban Countryside" strategy for the city. This will look at linking naturalistic landscapes within parks with nearby informal areas where possible, and also the creation of a network of routes and trails for walking, cycling or riding access throughout the city and beyond, linking areas of greenspace to each other and to open countryside outside the city fringe. This will have implications for tourism, elements of the Local Agenda 21 strategy for the city, and the various health initiatives being developed at present.

Priority Actions

- In partnerships with appropriate agencies, review systems for recording wildlife in Manchester and develop a wildlife and conservation strategy.
- Within the context of the Conservation Strategy, develop Habitat Management Plans for relevant parks and open spaces.

- Adopt Local Authority Eco-Management and Audit Scheme, and evaluate against national and local sustainable development indicators
- Develop links with appropriate voluntary groups and investigate accessing environmental grants.
- Develop a strategy for the interpretation and education use of the environmental resource. Create an 'ongoing' green issues group, meeting quarterly to review Manchester Leisure's performance and to work on policies and projects.
- Incorporate the principles, policies and guidelines of the Woodland Strategy into a parks management plan.
- Produce biomass use audit and improvement plan.
- Produce a Pesticide Policy.
- Develop close working partnerships with other Council Departments, and integrate with other environmental strategies and policies.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS



GROUND'S MAINTENANCE AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT

In the 1990's, as more competition for the population's leisure time has developed, expectations of standards of service delivery have increased. To retain their popularity and market share, and to maintain the value of the City's recreational land asset, Manchester Leisure is striving to discard the image of parks being a decaying resource, which has developed over recent years, and promote the perception that they are vibrant venues that deliver modern day needs within a quality environment.

In this context, Manchester Leisure is making every effort to retain the 'old' horticultural values while balancing new environmental, landscaping, and facility development techniques. This will mean challenging current grounds maintenance regimes and assessing the inclusion of building maintenance, playground maintenance/ inspection etc., and evaluating maintenance budgets against the real recreational value of parks.

Priority Actions

- Introduce dedicated grounds maintenance teams in parks.
 - Examine options for attracting further funding to complete the survey of trees and woodland.
 - Investigate use and costs of environmentally safe and sustainable grounds maintenance at pilot sites.
 - Standardise level of provision in designated Visitor/HQ centres.
 - Implement a strategy of shared use with Manchester Youth Services and Early Years and Play for bowling pavilions and beehives.
 - Formulate a standard contract for buildings self management arrangements
 - Review the condition of all parks buildings as part of an Asset Management Plan.
- Introduce Management Plans that consider zoning of landscape types and associated maintenance regimes.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

For the last four years Manchester Leisure has systematically been establishing each park as an individual cost centre and as a result, whilst there are insufficient funds for major capital works improvements, the City Council can now maintain parks to a much higher standard. With a new flatter management structure, improving grounds maintenance regimes and increased investment, noticeable advances are taking place in the development of parks.

The aim of park management in Manchester is to create a greener and more attractive city which is better able to attract new investment and tourism, protect parks and open spaces, enhance wildlife and secure a better quality of life for residents.

The recently adopted park management structure will allow the number of front line staff in parks to be increased. In addition, different models of management agreements are being adopted, work continues towards achieving Quality Standards such as the Green Flag, and site management plans will be developed for all parks.

Manchester Leisure recognises that it needs to take a proactive stance in relation to its greenspace if it is to restore parks to their former glories. Manchester Leisure also acknowledges that this challenge cannot be met alone and advocates extending existing, and the creation of new public, private and voluntary partnerships, to enable the development of proposals for the protection and enhancement of urban parks and ensure quality and consistency of parks management.

Priority Actions

- Investigate partnerships and agencies as options for management models (e.g., Trusts, community groups, selected contractors, joint ventures, service level agreements).
 - Adopt the principles of a recognised 'quality system' and work towards accreditation.
 - Review and define the bye-laws for each individual park and clearly define a Warden's enforcement role.
 - Develop and enhance links with Greater Manchester Police and respond to the crime and disorder Act.
 - Utilise the Investors In People Process and Manchester Leisure's Employee Development Plan.
 - Extend existing management arrangements with community, sports and voluntary groups.
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- Introduce a new park management structure to increase the number of front line staff in parks and decrease the requirement for contract management.
 - Establish a cross-departmental forum for all service providers in parks.
 - Develop management plans for Regional, District Parks, and Community Parks, and site management plans for natural green space.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

SECURITY

Consultation with Manchester 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.

In recognition of this Manchester Leisure are striving to create safe and secure parks through a combination of design, review of bye-laws, management (raised profile and presence of wardens) and increased use (through sports activities, events etc.). The overall design principles have been generally adopted into the City Council's 'A Guide to Development in Manchester' document and this will be used as one tool in the future changes and developments implemented in parks. In brief, the Guide recommends open spaces which:

- Have a good visual accessibility to and from local buildings, footpaths and roads,
- Have good linkages to make them as busy and as well used as possible.
- Foster a sense of ownership by the local community.
- Are attractive and well maintained with prompt attention given to vandalism, graffiti, and 'fly' tipping and, overcome the 'siege mentality' by encouraging more positive approaches such as, increasing the number of events and activities which brings natural "policing" by more visitors.

With regards to staffing in parks, Manchester Leisure will ensure that all staff working in parks are aware of their security responsibilities and will reflect this in a park's normal operating procedure. Furthermore, there is a real commitment from Manchester Leisure to review security arrangements in parks and to allocate a dedicated and static presence to sites.

Consultation and recent experience has shown that the local community is a vital partner in the management of safety and security, and is a good vehicle for implementing a positive change in the local perception of the park by involvement in the established Park Watch Schemes.



Priority Actions

- Implement a review of security arrangements in parks and let a competitive tender for dedicated and static presence to sites.
- Examine the security role of the Park Warden as part of the Wardens Review.
- "Friends Of...." Groups to be encouraged to establish "Park Watch" Schemes.
- Review current standards of buildings and equipment and introduce a rolling programme of improvements working on the premise that improved environments deter crime and vandalism.
- Utilise the individual park management planning process to identify elements to improve safety and security.
- Review and redefine the bye-laws for each individual park and clearly define a Warden's enforcement role.
- Develop and enhance links with Greater Manchester Police and respond to the Crime and Disorder Act.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS



SOCIAL REGENERATION

Manchester's City Pride initiative set out broad and ambitious plans for transforming particularly deprived areas of the City into pleasant, self-sustaining neighbourhoods.

The principles and initiatives outlined in this strategy have taken into consideration the objectives, and the outputs, that the SRB partnerships are striving to achieve, and will become a starting point for making parks a central focus of the renewal strategy.

This strategy will enable park management in these areas to concentrate on establishing the needs and aspirations of local people within the overall aims of the Strategy - to provide both improved infrastructure, increased variety of activities and maximum access to opportunities - while at the same time operating within the management parameters of the Leisure Department.

Manchester Leisure has implemented models of good practice regarding park development in partnership with SRB agencies, the Community Sports Development Officers, Early Years and Play and the community in Alexandra and Crowcroft Parks, as well as Smedley Fields. It is anticipated that, with further assistance from SRB agencies, these models can be replicated elsewhere.

Priority Actions

- Where possible, act as a consultee and joint client in the formulation of any open spaces strategy undertaken by social regeneration agencies in the City.
- Devise schemes and capital and revenue funding packages able to deliver SRB aims and objectives, strategies and priorities identified by the stakeholder groups within the partnership.
- Develop a Parks Regeneration Programme in partnership with key agencies.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

CAPITAL AND REVENUE FUNDING

Many of Manchester's parks and open spaces are over 75 years old and many have listed buildings dating back to original estates and therefore require substantial sinking funds for a higher quality maintenance and renewal of their infrastructure. Monies are also needed to adapt to the changing use of, and demands upon, open spaces and their associated buildings.

Significant advances have been made in recent years regarding capital and revenue budget allocation and development. However, for continued growth a review of spending on capital and revenue projects is required to establish long term funding, including external funding wherever possible.

At present there is little scope for manoeuvre within the current budget as regards real physical investment within parks and, the only ways to increase investment in the short and long term, are to consider (after appropriate consultation with key stakeholders);

- seeking external capital and revenue investment.
- increasing income into outdoor leisure e.g., sponsorship, major events etc.
- developing funding packages interdepartmentally with Early Years and Play, Museums and Galleries, Planning, Housing, Sports Development,
- reallocating existing resources,
- raising capital receipts for reinvestment in parks through the disposal of non-park open space. Before this is considered, full public consultation will take place as will reference to the U.D.P.
- reduce costs e.g., lower cost forms of maintenance.

Priority Actions

- Use individual Park Management Plans to identify funding required and potential packages that could be established.
- Ensure parks are at the centre of Social Regeneration Strategies.
- Accord high priority to exploring National Lottery opportunities especially Heritage Fund and NOF applications.
- Develop private and voluntary sector partnerships to allow increased opportunities to access external grant aid.
- Develop sponsorship packages for individual projects and events.
- Carry out a positive assessment of budgets with the aim of redistributing cost more effectively and set expenditure against clear objectives.
- Develop schemes and obtain external funding for projects which carry low, or even negative revenue implications.
- Divert in-house resources from grounds maintenance to be used as matching funding.
- Establish funding packages and sources through interdepartmental working.
- Examine and test the opportunities for commercial investment and franchises with regard to sports, catering, event and horticultural facilities.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS



EDUCATION

The implementation of the National Curriculum is well advanced in Manchester and the strategy outlines the methods by which parks can be developed as a vital educational resource to support the delivery of the Curriculum.

Using parks as an educational resource assumes greater importance when considering the emphasis stated within Agenda 21, on: "Empowering communities to care for the environment and the need to educate and inform future generations in ways which will help to sustain and value the greenspace into the future. Parks and open spaces with their capacity and closeness to where people live

should be made more attractive to, and provide for, educational and community development".

As well as providing activities for educational benefit it is anticipated that the additional affect will be to teach children to respect the needs of other park users.

To encourage schools to use parks in order for them to deliver educational benefits, Manchester Leisure will strive to overcome those obstacles which, at present, prevent schools from indulging in park activities. In order to achieve this, Manchester Leisure will examine the possibilities of synergy with the Outdoor Education Policy and the school grounds development work carried out through Groundwork Trust, as well as considering the extent to which parks and river valleys can support grounds/environmental projects in schools. In addition, Manchester Leisure will encourage the integration of schools with other park user groups. Important groups that have been recognised are existing sports clubs, conservation, environmental and wildlife agencies in the park as well as the warden service and the Community Sports Development Officer.

Priority Actions

- Appoint a Parks Educational Liaison Co-ordinator.
- Audit schools within each park area to establish current use and possible projects.
- Commence and extend links and initiatives with schools, colleges, adult education etc.
- Alleviate transport problems by developing and extending partnerships between educational establishments and parks on a locality basis.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

HEALTH

In the interests of fulfilling the corporate aims and objectives for Health and, against the background of social, ethnic and income disparity, parks and open spaces can make a contribution to the improvement of the quality of life by providing free, accessible, good quality leisure provision at a local level.

Parks offer all the community the opportunity to walk, jog, relax and play casual games thus enabling residents the chance to exercise the large muscle groups for the recommended time each week. Manchester has acknowledged this through activity programming in 'Fun and Fitness Week', provision of graded walks, and the construction of 'Sports Zones', and will seek to enhance these programmes of development.

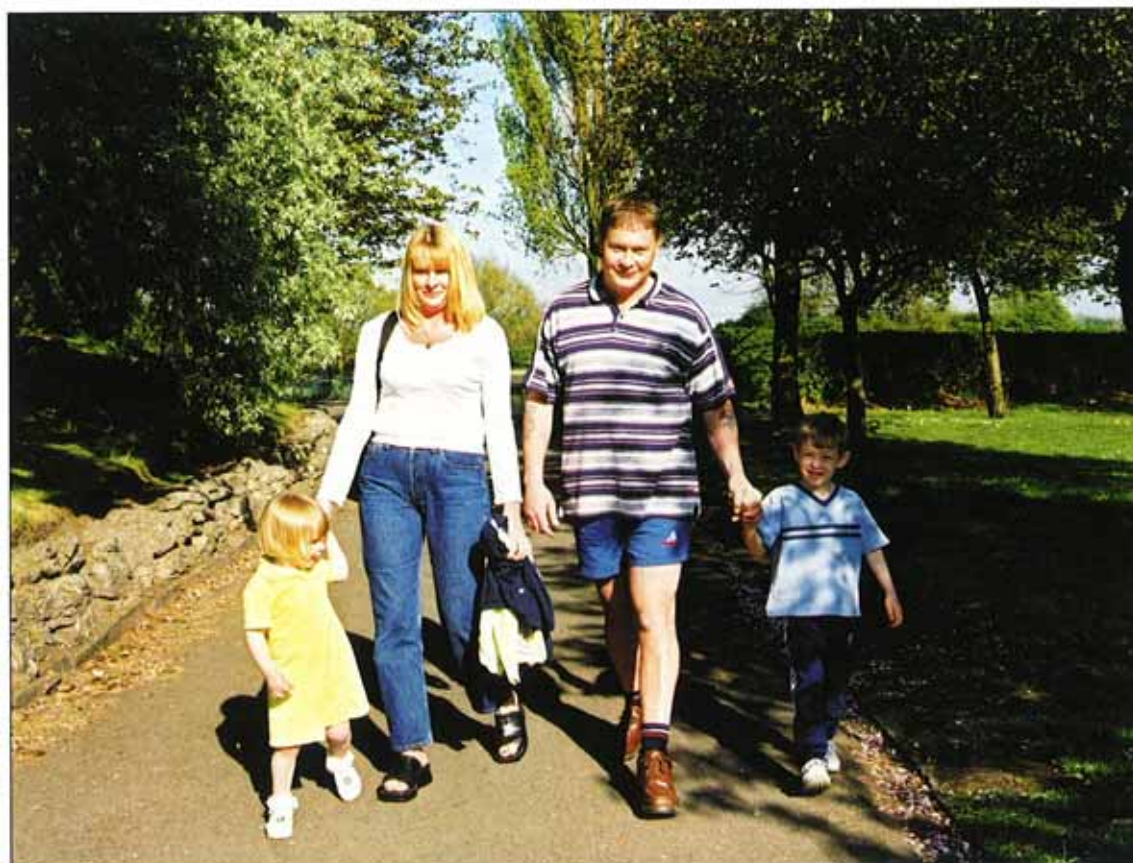
An ever increasing body of research is recognising that the sights, smells and touch of the natural environment can significantly improve mental well-being and relieve the symptoms of stress. Recent studies in America

have highlighted that the presence of visible green space can accelerate the period of recovery for those recuperating from illness.

Equally, it is well acknowledged that regular physical activity suited to the individual is a preventative measure against many health problems. By promoting green spaces for health promotion Manchester Leisure will ensure that there are many opportunities and benefits for the people of the City to improve their 'wellness'.

Priority Actions

- Appoint an officer to act as health co-ordinator for parks.
- Implement park initiatives which will contribute to Manchester Leisure's Health Strategy e.g., fun and fitness week, graded walks, sports events etc.
- Implement park initiatives which will contribute to the City's health initiatives and partnerships e.g., Health Action Zones, Healthy Living Centres, SRB projects.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS



WARDEN SERVICE

As Manchester moves towards a more customer and visitor focused parks provision, wardens will be expected to provide a multidisciplinary service with a remit ranging from community consultation, environmental education, running events and playground inspection, to patrolling, nature conservation and heritage interpretation and promotion.

Manchester Leisure recognise the value of a Parks Warden service that embraces the issues and principles outlined above. A framework consisting of four all encompassing categories will be used by Manchester Leisure to develop the Park Warden Service as well as consolidating and stimulating action on the already agreed aims and objectives. The categories are:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| i) Outreach | education work, work with external agencies. |
| ii) Safety | increased security in parks. |
| iii) Community | consultation and community participation in park activities. |
| iv) Conflict | resolving issues between different user groups. |

To allow Park Wardens to expand their remit

revenue budgets need to be re-evaluated, grant opportunities explored, and the possibilities for increasing numbers investigated. At the same time it is necessary to create more time and flexible working patterns, as well as identifying, and raising the levels of skills and expertise required.

Priority Actions

- Review the aims and objectives of the warden service to enable more of their time to be spent promoting the community use of parks.
- Introduce Park Development Officers in addition to Park Wardens to concentrate on Area specific development work and act as a link between all community groups and park stakeholders.
- Address current warden rotas and evaluate shift patterns and task allocation in line with usage patterns of the park and community work required.
- Implement a training programme to enable wardens to deliver a wider range of services.
- Pilot use of mobile telephones as Park Warden's communication medium.
- Information signs in parks to give relevant numbers.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

CHILDREN'S PLAY

Public consultation reveals that a large percentage of visits to parks are directly related to children's' play. Recent design thinking for parks has identified the provision of large, well-designed playgrounds as having real potential to greatly increase the popularity of a park. The combination of formal play provision with nearby informal landscapes planted to encourage adventurous activity, with trees and logs for climbing on, thornless and non-poisonous shrubs to hide in, and long grass and wildflowers to run through and lie in, has been used by some local authorities bringing an enthusiastic response from parents and their children.

The opportunities for urban children to play safely in such natural environments can be rare, the benefits are enormous including; getting their first taste of freedom, first experience of civic space, learning to use open spaces positively and, encouraging children to gain confidence in

their understanding and use of the natural environment so that they are better positioned to become guardians of it in the future.

Manchester Leisure recognise that the provision of a range of imaginative, stimulating and challenging environments for children's play is a major function of parks, and acknowledges the important contribution which playgrounds makes towards the rejuvenation of parks, especially when part of a wider provision including sports facilities and seating areas for those in an older age group.

Park managers will continue to liaise closely with Early Years and Play, Youth Services, the local communities, and other key organisations such as Manchester Adventure Play, to ensure that play provision in parks, and activities such as the Warden led annual summer holiday programme, remain appropriate, stimulating challenging and flexible to respond to changing fads and fashions. Through these partnerships it is also the aim to examine and maximise sources of public, community and private investment.

Priority Actions

- Continue a monitoring process to ensure all equipment remains safe and secure.
- Use community consultation process to establish need for new equipment and sites and establish formal monitoring system for usage of playgrounds.
- Work in partnership with other key agencies to establish funding for new play facilities.
- Concentrate resources on a fewer number but more expensive high quality play areas that are exciting and stimulating.
- Develop fully integrated play, sports area and teenage facilities at strategic sites.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS



EQUALITY OF ACCESS

One of the Corporate aims of Manchester City Council is to put equality of opportunity at the heart of everything it does. Manchester Leisure has endorsed the aim, and will continue to incorporate it into the department's policies and practices. This philosophy manifests itself in parks management through:

Providing facilities and activities that serve the whole community irrespective of age, ethnic origin, disability, sexuality, or poverty so that each person has equal opportunity and choice to enjoy leisure provision of high quality e.g., an events programme that includes Eid celebrations, a Caribbean Carnival, International Women's Week activity.

Being aware of the needs of disadvantaged groups is crucial to provide full opportunities for the community. A disabled access audit of parks has been carried out in line with the 1996 Disability Discrimination Act.

Striving to increase participation in leisure activities by women, ethnic minorities, older age people and disabled people, and placing emphasis on other groups which currently have low rates of participation e.g., bowling competitions, organised walks and talks, and horticultural centre events.

Promoting integration for all sections of the community through participation in all park activities, and programming and promoting activities to attract recreationally disadvantaged

groups e.g., Direct mailing to promote events to target groups, and information in Braille, large print on tape and various community languages.

By addressing the physical and psychological barriers and constraints imposed by planning, design and management, this strategy aims to attract and encourage greater participation in parks activities by target groups.

Priority Actions

- Establish consultation group of professionals and representatives from disadvantaged groups and begin a process of developing strategies to improve the built environment and communication with target groups.
- Use established groups to begin a programme of evaluating existing park services and facilities
- Undertake a programme of staff training to increase awareness of the needs of disadvantaged groups.
- Consult with National Access Organisations to establish needs, e.g., RNIB, RNID, MIND, RADAR, and locally with MDPAG.
- Develop activities, programmes, and events, aimed at target groups, involving groups in the process where possible e.g., ethnic minorities.
- Continue to ensure that new developments and improvements in parks are accessible to people with disabilities.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

DOGS

An observation exercise carried out in a London Park registered one dog for every eight visitors. Relate this to the fact that the nuisance caused by dogs is, on consultation with the public, one of the largest single inhibitors of visitors' use and enjoyment of parks, and it is no surprise that, for many local authorities, it is a major source of complaint and in Manchester the trend is the same.

To tackle the issues Manchester Leisure has tried schemes involving dog-wardens in parks, zoning areas, the installation of dog toilets and 'poop scoop' schemes. One of the most successful projects has been the 'traffic light' system in Crumpsall Park which was developed in close consultation with the local community.

In Crumpsall Park a fenced dog exercise area has been created, with signs and leaflets to explain the scheme. The park is zoned into red (no dogs allowed), amber (dogs allowed on leads) and green (dogs off leads) areas. The project has worked well, with a positive local community helping to spread the message and enforce the scheme.

It is therefore proposed that the way forward for Manchester is to adopt the 'traffic light' principles in appropriate parks, and to use an amalgam of other good practice in the city (e.g., placing of dog proof fences around children's playgrounds) where the traffic light system is not possible.

To enforce dog policies Manchester Leisure will seek to establish positive links with the City Council's Dog Warden Service and, where possible, embrace practices established by this

Service. A specific area where clearer guidelines are required, and need to be established in partnership, is enforcement of the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996.

Manchester Leisure will also strive to raise the awareness of dog owners to their responsibilities and do this through forging harmonious partnership with dog walking groups and provide dog obedience courses.

Priority Actions

- Expand the 'Traffic Light' dog control system to all parks in which it is possible to implement it.
- Establish dog proof fencing around all play and multi-sport areas.
- Utilise dog owners as a key consultation group.
- Utilise the Park Warden Service to promote and implement responsibility among dog owners.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

SPORT

The English Sports Council (ESC) believes that every local authority should seriously address the issues of planning strategically for the sport and recreation needs of its population. Therefore sports in Manchester's parks and playing fields will be developed within the context of seven principles, which reflect the ESC's objectives for the development of sport and recreation, as well as being within the sports policies for the city. The principles are:

- Sustainable Development
- Commitment to Land Use Planning System
- A Planned and Strategic Approach to Provision
- To Protect Existing Resources and Promote New Opportunities for sport
- Sports Equity and Accessibility
- A Management Approach to Conflicting Uses
- A Partnership Approach

In facility terms the prime focus of sports provision tends to be the indoor environment, however there is outdoor provision that takes place in Manchester's parks and open spaces e.g., Community Tennis Partnership at Wythenshawe; cycling in Boggart Hole Clough; athletics at Wythenshawe; football at Hough End; roller hockey at Platt Fields, Outdoor Basketball Initiative at a number of sites; golf in Heaton Park; and bowling greens across the City.

By embracing the planning policies and initiatives of the ESC, adopting the principles of

the UDP, locking into the energy generated by the 2002 Commonwealth Games, and working in partnership with existing sporting groups, organisations and commercial operators to create a strategy for sports development in parks, a sustainable structure will be created which can be further strengthened and expanded in the legacy period beyond the Games. Initially this energy will be directed at the key Focus Sports.

Priority Actions

- In partnership with Sports Development, identify Community Clubs which may wish to develop use of their local parks.
- Identify local sports clubs/groups involved in sports not included in Manchester Leisure's Sports Policy, (e.g., Roller Hockey, Archery, Pentanque) and provide facilities to encourage participation.
- Incorporate sports facility needs determined by audit of local and Sports Development opportunities, into park development plans.
- Provide sports facilities and/or sports programmes, informal and formal, within easy reach of every member of the community e.g., 'Off the Street Soccer'.
- Continue and extend management partnerships with groups such as the Manchester Bowls Council.
- Implement an audit of use and condition of sports pitches.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS



MAPPING, DATABASES, RESEARCH, MONITORING

Manchester Leisure currently owns and manages a vast amount of greenspace. However, currently, there is no central information point to help with the analysis and mapping of parks and open spaces.

Two issues are prevalent:

- Which information system is most appropriate for the needs of the Division?
- How should the data gathered be analysed and used?

A Geographical Information System (GIS) for Manchester City Council is in the process of being developed by the Chief Executive's Department. Manchester Leisure Division are currently seeking to be at the forefront of the work and ensure that it feeds directly in to the Corporate GIS project to enable the department to visualise and analyse local trends and match them to fixed situations such as historic sites.

Pockets of research are currently carried out with varying degrees of success e.g., consultation exercises with 'Friends Of' groups, and public meetings e.g., The Parks Forum. However, Manchester Leisure recognise that it needs a more extensive coherent programme of market research to underpin the success of its

operations, ensure 'Best Value', and implement a process of 'benchmarking' and continual improvement.

A combination of research approaches are required for individual parks and projects, however there needs to be a consistency of delivery and results obtained to enable measurement and benchmarking. The results of consumer consultation should be part of the management process, and be part of the feedback loop to the decision makers i.e., the Parks Management Team, the Leisure Management Team and the Committee responsible for the service.

Priority Actions

- Develop a GIS system and I.T. system for the collection, analysis and presentation of information.
- Develop monitoring system to measure park use, visitor attitudes etc.
- Establish a park user database and update annually.
- Develop a rolling programme of research that utilises a range of internal and external agencies to ensure a representative sample of opinion is obtained.
- Develop performance indicators.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

TOURISM

Famous for its proud industrial heritage, high profile music scene, world class football, prestigious theatres, historic architecture and influential artistic community, Manchester has entered the new millennium with vitality and confidence. One of the City Council's seven corporate objectives is to improve the image of Manchester as a city which is attractive as a place in which to live, to invest in and to visit.

Manchester's parks are a vital part of the city's growing tourist industry. Heaton and Wythenshawe Parks are both capable of sustaining day-visit interest on a regional basis, especially when events are being held.

The Manchester Show at Platt Fields attracts visitors from all over Greater Manchester, and the renowned gardens at Fletcher Moss also draw people from a wide area.

City Centre Parks and open spaces create a framework for events and relaxation, whereas Manchester's well developed river valley urban countryside schemes offer pleasant walks and incorporate a link to the Trans-Pennine cycling trail.

Parks also adorn major entrance routes and gateways to the city and it is important that they convey good initial impressions to tourists.

Manchester Leisure recognise the tourist value of its parks and will work with other key agencies

to make them attractive visitor destinations, and to be included in an overall city-wide Tourism Strategy.

Priority Actions

- Develop links and a promotional strategy with key tourism organisations and other visitor attractions within Manchester.
- Audit current marketing procedures for parks.
- Use link organisations and audit to develop a tourism plan for parks.

CATERING

One of the criticisms of Manchester's parks is the lack of provision of adequate, affordable or suitable catering facilities. At present, many of Manchester's parks operate Catering Concessions and these consist mostly of ice cream units with burger units in some of the larger parks, and to date, although it can be unsightly, this has been the most practical arrangement for many locations which either do not have a building in which to provide catering or, do not have sufficient users to justify permanent facilities.

Hospitality and Trading Services (HATS - formerly City Catering) act as Client for Manchester Leisure in letting these facilities. The Contracts are let for one year and the operator is monitored throughout the year by HATS.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

Currently only two parks have permanent cafe-type outlets, Heaton Park and Fletcher Moss Gardens. Heaton Park cafe is managed by HATS and an independent franchise operates Fletcher Moss Gardens Cafe on a seasonal/ad-hoc basis. It is very difficult to provide permanent catering facilities as they are costly and find it hard to break-even.

With regard to formal or conference catering, there are two locations - Wythenshawe Hall and Heaton Park Orangery - which provide a high quality service. In both cases this is managed by HATS and the agreement with Manchester Leisure differs in both locations. In Wythenshawe Hall, catering is operated as a completely separate business from the Park, with little interaction between the Management of both and no financial returns to the Park. Whilst in Heaton Park Orangery there is a strong link between the Management of Manchester Leisure and HATS, with substantial returns to the Park budget.

In light of this information it is evident that there are a myriad of issues that need to be resolved with regards to catering and these include:

- Contractual arrangements including length of lets and the increased returns that this may bring including opportunities for reinvestment in the parks.
- The possibility of writing policies, on litter management around the concession sites, into future contracts.
- The possibility of providing mobile kiosks in the larger parks which would improve the overall appearance and could increase investment from franchise operators.
- The potential to expand and develop formal/conference catering and the possibilities of franchising these operations to commercial operators with a greater return for Manchester Leisure.
- Bringing the current operation of formal/conference catering more under the control of Manchester Leisure.
- The possibility of providing more cafe facilities in key parks for key times, and

packaging these and letting these operations, as part of other contracts, to either private or commercial operators or HATS.

Priority Actions

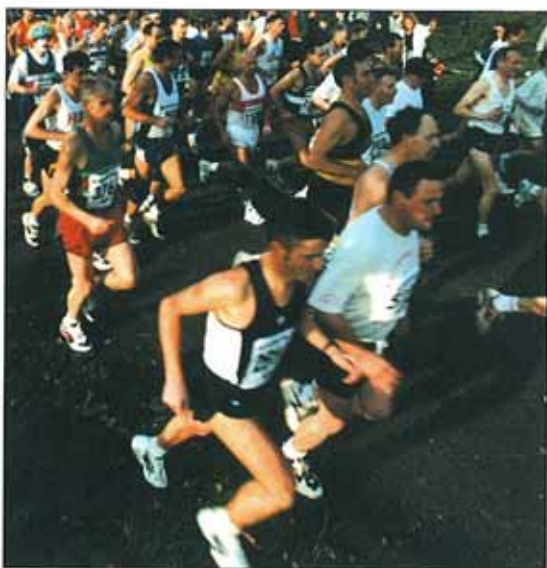
- Review current catering provision and determine catering demand for individual parks through assessment of usage trends and market research.
- Identify the benefits of letting catering contracts (ice cream and burger units) for longer periods.
- Ensure that returns to Manchester Leisure from letting of such facilities by Hospitality and Trading Services is maximised and there is potential to reinvest in park facilities.
- Examine the possibility of providing cafe facilities in key parks for key seasons by offering the franchise as part of a catering package with investment from an operator.
- Establish a stronger link between Hall and Park at Wythenshawe. Negotiate a financial arrangement for Wythenshawe, with profits from Hall activities being invested in the Park, similar to Heaton's arrangements.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

EVENTS

Manchester Leisure is committed to providing events in parks. There is a wide programme of both council organised and community organised events including, bonfire displays. The Manchester Show (Platt Fields Park), and special events such as the 'Pepsi' Max Extreme Sports Day' at Heaton Park (which attracted over 65,000 spectators).



Events of every type bring communities together, and if a wide variety of programmes are provided, publicised and targeted, it provides greater opportunities for the widest section of the community to find a recreational opportunity that suits them, that they enjoy, and that will encourage them to become regular users of the parks.



Furthermore, the recreational worth to residents of events being held in parks is increased by promoting events that support fund raising for charities and those that include communities in their organising rather than just attendance.



The public has become far more sophisticated in its taste when it comes to the organisation, management and quality of events. Manchester Leisure therefore recognises that it is imperative that events are perceived to be safe, capture the imagination, involve the community, increase awareness of environmental issues and help improve the image of the organisation.

Priority Actions

- Develop 5 year events and sponsorship strategy for the City's Parks designating specific parks for specific types of events, and retaining flexibility to incorporate 'one off' national and community events.
- Implement an events programme including sports, arts and cultural activities that celebrate the diversity of the local population.
- Examine the possibility of employing an Events Programme Officer to work with the Marketing Officer.
- Develop partnerships with key agencies e.g., Marketing Manchester, Tourist Information Board, Manchester 2002 Ltd. etc.
- Evaluate the size of site, access issues, training issues, nuisance issues, and match events type to venue.
- Instigate an investigation into the legality of the Showman's Guild's restrictive procedures and operations.
- Terminate the 1956 Manchester Agreement and draw up a new contract with the Showmen's Guild to incorporate the relevant issues, including 'rights' to sites. Produce an improved licence.



KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS

MARKETING

As Manchester moves towards a 'people focused' parks provision philosophy for the 21st Century, it will be necessary to present a positive image of park facilities, to the targeted communities within the City, through a combination of innovative marketing and use of sensitive promotional communications focusing on attracting new users to, and retaining existing users of, parks.

To date Manchester Leisure has adopted a marketing approach that utilises various mediums of the communication mix, i.e., posters, brochures (general and site specific) and newspaper advertisements, and has a marketing group responsible for the production of marketing material. However, although the research results indicate that marketing has had some effect to date, with 'word of mouth' being most successful, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that a more targeted approach, with a specific communication strategy could be devised.

It is important that marketing of parks sells both the physical and facility attributes as well as the benefits (e.g., Health etc.) It is essential that there is a City Wide Marketing Strategy for parks that synergises with Manchester City Council's Corporate Strategy and other departmental Strategies thus ensuring efficient and effective mass coverage. Each park should also have an overall strategy into which marketing strategies for individual departments can feed.

Priority Actions

- Develop a co-ordinated rolling programme of market research for all parks.
- Use data from market research to inform a Pilot Marketing Action Plan for one Principal park.
- Develop marketing and site-based publicity to a consistently good standard, which is accessible to all groups e.g., disabled, ethnic groups etc.
- Identify an individual manager to co-ordinate all marketing, create brand image and identify all potential opportunities for increasing, customer base.
- Ensure that all agencies in parks are aware of each others publicity, marketing strategies and market research programmes, and marketing monitoring, and develop joint initiatives.

KEY ISSUES & PRIORITY ACTIONS



HERITAGE

With specific reference to Heritage, Manchester Leisure is committed to restoration and development of parks in a historic context. Manchester Leisure are committed to supporting those current funding applications to external agencies that have been submitted in relation to parks and, will in future, utilise and act in a central advocacy/co-ordinator's role, or if not possible, as a key consultee in the submission of any Heritage Lottery Fund applications concerning parks and open spaces. This role will be set against the following parks heritage structure, highlighting the priorities for Heritage Lottery Fund consideration.

1: Applications Already Submitted

Heaton

2: Feasibility Studies Completed

(Listed in Register of Historic Parks and Gardens)
Alexandra, Wythenshawe

3: Potential For Feasibility and Developments -
(English Heritage Register Review Programme -
Recommended for further consideration for
registration)

Boggart Hole Clough, Platt Fields

4: Significant Heritage Merit

(English Heritage have stated that Queens and
Philips will be looked at with regard to listing
them on the Register as part of a thematic
review of public parks to be completed in 2002)
Philips, Queens

5: Parks of Local Heritage Interest

(Individual aspects of heritage merit e.g.
buildings, statues, fountains, burial sites etc.)
Clayton Park

However, it is recognised that this prioritisation method cannot be 'set in stone' and that other influences may require a readjustment to the list e.g., Philips Park will assume increased importance due to the Commonwealth Games. If reprioritisation is required this will be achieved through extensive consultation to ensure that the reasons are appropriate, robust and understood by all interested stakeholders.

While the 'priority ladder' allows Manchester to categorise its major bids, it also recognises the plethora of parks on the bottom rung that may accommodate a building, statue, fountain etc., of heritage importance. Individual masterplans will therefore need to be formulated as guides to the restoration of these elements of parks.

Priority Actions

- Create a "Heritage Task Force" to formulate a local list of historic parks and open spaces within the Authority.
- Incorporate local lists into the local plan to be subject of Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- Strengthen links with the Local Plans Section and City Architects Landscape Department.
- Where possible promote those parks on the English Heritage Register Review to the full Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.
- Formulate Management Plans for Heritage Parks.
- Submit relevant funding applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund in accordance with the priorities established.



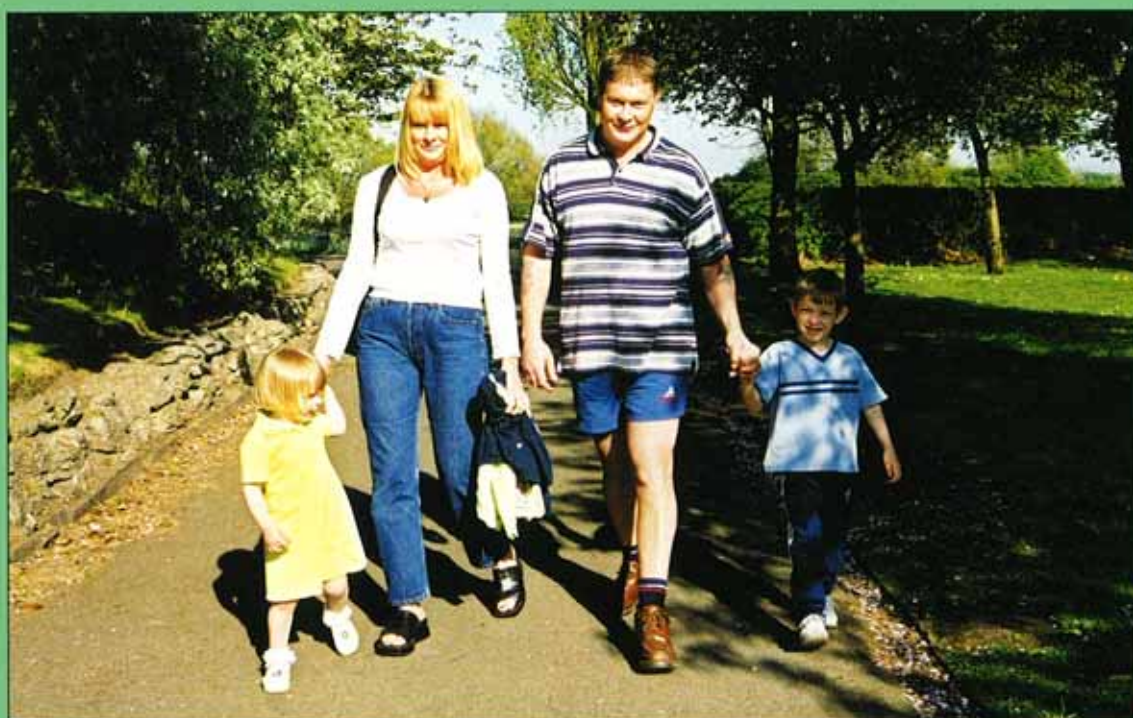
CONCLUSION

Public parks are a long-term environmental and leisure asset and Manchester Leisure are committed to developing parks and open spaces, and protecting historic assets, 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 Manchester, thus enabling the continual regeneration of the City throughout the next Century and beyond.

This strategy recognises the key issues affecting Manchester's parks today and presents a set of planned and co-ordinated actions designed to achieve the delivery of the highest standard of

park service, achieving best value through proactive management, and a partnership approach with stakeholders, such as existing user groups, English Heritage, Council departments, Urban Parks Forum, the Countryside Agency 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 Manchester. This strategy seeks to maximise the potential for the public to enjoy public parks and to contribute to Manchester being recognised as the most dynamic city, in which to live and work, in England.



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