

2.2 Assessing local needs and opportunities

- The local area approach to green spaces should be based on robust evidence of local needs – which means auditing local provision of green spaces and consulting local people on their aspirations.
- A green space strategy makes it easier for different organisations to commit themselves and to pool responsibility, objectives, resources and actions.
- A green space strategy should link to the local development framework and provide the basis with which to maximise the opportunities of new development.

In order to take effective action on green spaces, a local authority needs to understand what green spaces it has, what they are used for and by whom, and what condition they are in.

It then needs to find out what users – or potential users – of these spaces want and need, and what they think of the spaces they have now and need in the future. It can use this information to define a goal for the whole area, and for the different green spaces with it, along with a strategy for achieving that goal.

Developing the evidence base

The open spaces typology set out in *'Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Recreation and Sport'* (PPG17) should be used to define and audit open spaces. Guidance on undertaking the needs and opportunities assessment is set out in the accompanying PPG17 guidance.

The ODPM is currently developing a green space database for the whole of England, which will share data about the range of green spaces across the country. This is the first step towards a comprehensive and consistent baseline that can be used for green space audits and assessments and will maximise the use of national survey returns to aid local delivery.

Over time our aim is to include local PPG17 audit data and other locally held data sets, such as GIS databases, local biological records, community consultations and surveys of parks, into one central, widely available database.

It is also necessary to consider the wider availability of data held by other organisations which may help inform the approach. Sites experiencing anti-social behaviour, health inequalities between different areas or other seemingly unrelated issues can inform the strategy.

Developing a strategy

Most local authority departments deal with green space issues to some extent and the evidence base above will clarify the needs and opportunities in an area. A strategic approach should explain the links with other local objectives that green space provision can help to deliver, including health, recreation, planning, regeneration, transport, education, social services, and environment.

Green space managers need to consider what their space could do for other agendas. Understanding how green spaces can support wider objectives makes it easier to gain the support necessary for delivering actions that are mutually beneficial.

Developing a strategic approach to the planning, design, care and use of all types of green spaces is the first step on the way to doing this.

Taking a strategic approach to the planning and management of green spaces will help to³:

- generate political and inter-departmental support for green spaces
- develop a shared vision
- define the value and role of green spaces in meeting corporate and community aims
- create a comprehensive policy framework for protecting, enhancing and creating green spaces
- make sure that green spaces enhance the quality and diversity of the environment, as well as promoting civic pride and social inclusion
- ensure that the green space network meets local people's needs – now and in the future
- allocate resources in a way that maximises the value of capital investment and revenue expenditure
- involve voluntary and community groups in green space provision and management.

3 Green Space Strategies: a good practice guide, CABE Space 2004

Integrating with planning

A strategy for green spaces should link to local planning policies, and we expect local planning authorities to take a strategic approach to green spaces. PPG17 sets out the requirement that all planning authorities use a typology to audit their green and open spaces and as suggested above requires them to identify the community's social, environmental and economic needs for such spaces both now and in the future.

PPG17 does not prescribe national standards for quality, quantity and access to green spaces which should be determined locally based on the needs identified.

In considering quality standards, the Green Flag Award Scheme's criteria can be applied to most types of green space.

A quality green space – The Green Flag Awards

The Green Flag Awards Scheme is a voluntary peer review scheme, widely accepted as a measure of quality in the management, operation and improvement of green spaces. Green Flags have been awarded to country parks, ecology sites,



nature reserves, cemeteries and botanical gardens, as well as more traditional urban parks.

Based on the assessment criteria for the Awards, a quality space is:

1. welcoming and inviting
2. healthy, safe and secure
3. clean and well maintained
4. environmentally sound
5. sensitively conserved
6. inclusive of the whole community
7. well marketed and promoted
8. coherently planned.

The Government is supporting the award scheme, and working with a range of partners, to use it as a measure of progress in delivering quality green spaces across the country.

You can find out more about the Green Flag Awards at www.greenflagaward.org.uk

Other national statements of planning policy, such as PPG3 (housing) and the forthcoming PPS9 (nature conservation) provide further advice on the contribution green spaces can make towards creating sustainable communities. The planning system encourages green spaces to be used in many ways, for example providing good settings for housing as well as walking and cycling networks.

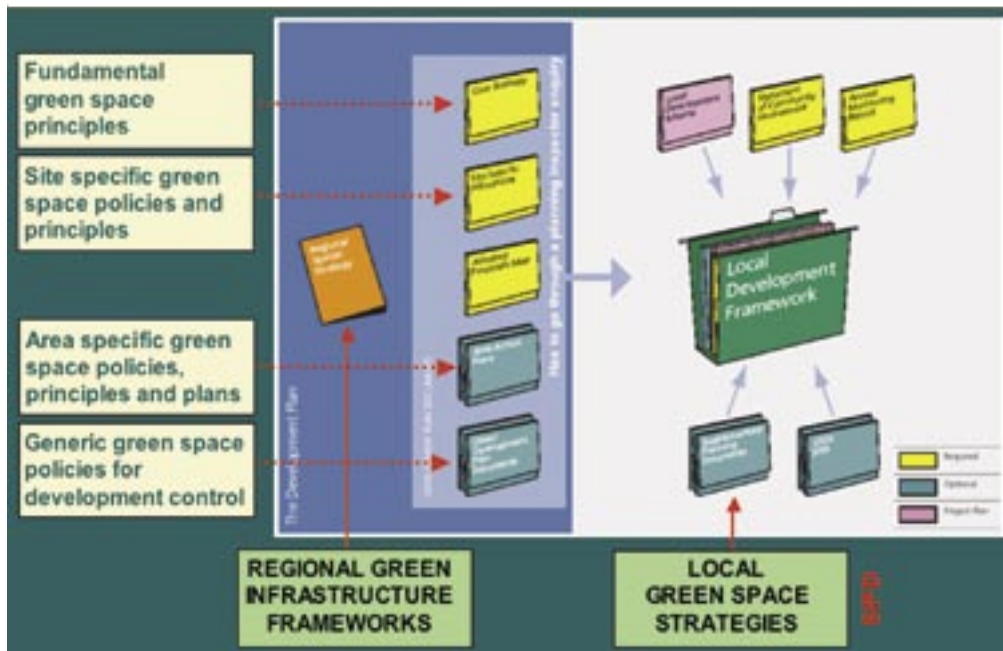
Playing fields, including those owned by schools, are subject to specific regulations designed to protect them, for children and the wider community. Local planning and

education authorities need to be aware of the regulations and processes governing the disposal and development of playing fields and work together to provide and protect playing fields. The regulations are set out in the 'Town and Country Planning (playing fields) (England) Direction 1998. Guidance is available from the ODPM.

Green spaces should be easy to reach for everyone, however they travel. Overcoming physical barriers to access should therefore be a local priority, including busy main roads or railway lines, poor public transport, poor quality walking or cycling infrastructure, as well as individuals' ability to travel. English Nature's access standards are a model that has been used locally.

In developing core strategies, as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) process, it is important to include key principles and objectives for green spaces. The LDF may also draw on green space strategies as 'supplementary planning documents'; this will allow developers and other green space providers to develop their approach to providing and managing their green spaces which are consistent. The annual reporting on LDF will also require local authorities to assess how their green spaces perform, against targets for Green Flag Awards and local satisfaction, as set out in Planning Policy Statement 12 guidance notes (PPS12). See diagram, LDFs and green space.

LDFs and green space⁴



When new developments are being considered, local authorities need to look at the way they affect existing green spaces, and how that fits in with their overall strategy. This is an opportunity to ensure new developments provide the right type of space in the right location. It is also necessary to ensure any spaces provided will be managed and maintained in the long term.

Tools for success

Developing the evidence

- The **Generalised Land Use Database (GLUD)** is now freely available as small-area statistics to all local authorities. This categorises every parcel of land in England into one of nine different land uses, including green space. Details are available at www.odpm.gov.uk/planning/statistics

- **Maps of GLUD** are available to authorities who have the appropriate Ordnance Survey MasterMap® licence. These are available from the Planning and Land Use Statistics Division at plus@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Developing green space strategies

- **CABE Space** have been advising local authorities developing green space strategies. Their work and the



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experience of their advisors has been pulled together in a guide designed to steer authorities through the process of drawing up effective strategies based on clear assessments of stakeholders' needs and wishes. Copies, together with additional publications like 'Start with the park' focusing more specifically on growth areas, are available free from www.cabespace.org.uk

Integrating with planning

- **Assessing Needs and Opportunities:** a companion guide to Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) explains how local authorities should carry out an audit of their open space and of their communities' need for it. In doing this, the authority should use the PPG17 typology that sets out what open space is. It promotes a consistent approach across a range of facilities, at different scales and in different local authority and geographical settings. It also provides a framework for determining the need for planning conditions and the negotiation of planning agreements.
- **The Planning Portal** is an effective way of staying up to date with planning information and guidance. It contains details of a range of other planning policy notes and guidance that are relevant for providing green spaces, including:
 - PPS1 Creating sustainable communities
 - PPS3 Housing
 - PPS9 Nature Conservation
 - PPS11 Regional Planning Guidance
 - PPS12 Local Development Frameworks and Local development framework guidance

The planning portal can be accessed at www.planningportal.gov.uk

- English Nature's **Providing Accessible Natural Green space in Towns and Cities:** A Practical Guide to Assessing the Resource and Implementing Local Standards for Provision guide suggests a methodology and gives advice on applying the advisory standards for accessing nature, which can be adapted to the local area. Copies are available from www.english-nature.org.uk
- **Moving Towards Excellence in Planning:** Public Places And Open Spaces provides a practical management tool for planners, helping them to achieve excellence in providing public and open spaces – regardless of location or type of authority. It sets out the characteristics of an excellent planning service and summarises features of policy and practice that can help achieve it. It draws on current good practice and a wide range of guidance and professional practice reports, and reflects the latest Government initiatives. Copies are available from www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk

In practice

Extra funding from a green space strategy

Doncaster Council's Green Space Strategy has helped attract millions of pounds of funding for the town's green areas. Before 2000 the town's various green space service areas had suffered from heavy budget cuts, leading to a decline in quality and reluctance to develop new green space. Doncaster was not unique; the Urban Parks Forum's Public Parks Assessment 2001 identified this as a national problem. In 2001, Doncaster Council's Best Value review of active recreation services, which included all green space services, found that budgets had been cut by more than £1 million (over 30 per cent) for the grounds maintenance, countryside and landscape teams. The audit results showed the service was below an acceptable standard. Using the audit and public consultation results, the Best Value review recommended extensive changes. The new approach to green space planning resulted in better local service delivery, the creation of Community First (matching the Government's agenda for Neighbourhood Renewal) and a budget increase of £850,000 thanks to the Fundamental Expenditure Review.

As a deprived area, Doncaster had access to extensive external funding. However, before the strategy, the Council sought designated funding, such as City Challenge and SRB, in a reactive way. Although substantial improvements were delivered in these areas, many parts of the Borough's green space were still neglected and improvements were seldom sustained in the long term. A planned approach to green space allowed the authority to identify and fund priority areas in

need of new or improved green space. So far, all priority projects have secured the funding they need.

Over the five years of the improvement plan, an estimated £65 million will be invested in green spaces by the Council or its partners, including s106 planning obligations.

Helping the community and the environment

Major improvements in Ashford's green infrastructure has been adopted as one approach to improving the quality of life for the whole community. It brings the currently inaccessible Willesborough Dykes into use as a public wetland wildlife park, making the approach to Ashford more inviting for visitors. The green corridors connect open spaces that had become broken up and isolated, and had passed out of public use. Restoring them introduces natural landscapes and wildlife habitats into an urban setting, managed in partnership with local community groups.

In consultations, local residents said that they wanted more open space and recreational facilities, and the green corridors are a result of the green space strategy. They provide the facilities residents asked for, while also



solving drainage problems. The project has brought private landowners, community groups and residents together with, in partnership, the five main organisations involved: Environment Agency, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kentish Stour Countryside Project, English Nature and Ashford's Future.

Most of the money has come from a £1.5 million grant from the ODPM, plus developers' contributions under s106 agreements. Success will be measured by comparing residents' satisfaction with their responses to surveys before the improvements were made. Site surveys will also be important, measuring the speed and diversity of the site's colonisation by wildlife.

