

## 3.1.2 Meeting community needs

- Everyone should have access to good green spaces. It is often the least advantaged who are worst served by a standard service.
- A cross-section of community members, representing a range of particular groups, should be involved in the design, planning and care of green spaces, so that new facilities cater for their needs.
- Local authorities have an obligation to assess their policies and practices against the requirements of the Local Government Equality Standard.

People want to live in attractive places that are clean and safe, with good parks, play areas and green spaces. The Government believes everyone should have access to quality green spaces. However, it is often the least advantaged who are worst served by a 'standard' service.

Providers and managers should pay attention to how green spaces can be best delivered to often excluded people, including children and young people, ethnic minority groups, those with poor basic skills or with health and disability issues and those living in the most deprived communities or rural areas.

Quality green spaces can provide unique opportunities for all members of the community to come together and to help build tolerance and understanding within communities. Green space managers need to consider the following in meeting community needs.

- Opportunities – which interest groups might be approached to spearhead new activities in green spaces?
- Partnerships – which representative groups may provide a forum for identifying the concerns, needs and aspirations of other groups?

- Tensions – what local tensions might exist between different age groups or between people of different ethnic backgrounds?
- Barriers – what might be the physical, social and logistical barriers preventing some people from using green space?
- Needs and aspirations – what do people actually want from their green spaces?

These questions will help address provision for all members of the community. A cross-section of community members, representing a range of interests, should be involved in the design, planning and care of green spaces, so that facilities meet their aspirations.

### Providing for children

Parks and green spaces provide a wealth of opportunities for improving the quality of life for children and young people. Good quality spaces can provide opportunities for formal and informal play, exercise and learning. For the child this can help them to make new friends, improve their self-esteem and behaviour, keep them fit and healthy and encourage creative thinking and learning. It can also help to achieve wider social objectives to tackle childhood

obesity, reduce health inequalities for those in the poorest communities, and encourage social interaction between children. As well as enclosed play areas, the range of green spaces – from parks and gardens to woodlands and city farms – provide creative play spaces for children and young people to explore and discover.

Children's and young people's needs have often been neglected. For example, some green spaces and play areas are poorly maintained, some have insufficient play equipment, and some spaces are unsafe or inaccessible because of increasing amounts of traffic.

What is critical is that children are involved in the decision-making process about the design and care of spaces they use – where this has been tried it has been a resounding success. It both ensures that appropriate provision is made for different ages, abilities and interests of children and young people in the area, and that they have a stake in and respect the space they have helped to shape.

Schools, youth groups, children's services, outreach play, youth workers and other youth-based organisations have a key role to play alongside the local authority and other green space providers, in identifying children's needs and facilitating engagement. The Every Child Matters Inspection Framework and the new Children's and Young People's Plans guidance recognises the role of green spaces in delivering benefits for children. The current capital renewal programme for schools also presents

excellent opportunities to improve the environment around many schools.

### Checklist for sustainable outdoor play spaces<sup>9</sup>

- Provide a varied, creative and stimulating environment.
- Provide what children and young people actually want (have you asked them?).
- Located within reach of home and local transport, where there is natural surveillance.
- Easily accessible and attractive to children of all abilities.
- Feel safe and secure – whilst allowing for freedom and imagination.
- Flexible enough to accommodate changing fashions and interests.
- Clean and well-maintained (see Green Flag Award criteria too).

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from 'More than Swings and Roundabouts: planning for outdoor play', Children's Play Council.



### What is play?

The Children's Play Council (2002) defines play as what children and young people do when not being directed by adults. However, a broader definition would include activities for children that are supervised by adults, and organised group activities at dedicated facilities such as playgrounds and sports pitches. Sometimes play is informal, taking place, for example, in parkland, woods or streets.

Green spaces can support these activities, and practitioners need to decide what roles their space can occupy.

include addressing local racism, providing specific activities for women, and providing staff or volunteers who reflect local ethnic diversity.

- Encouraging culturally relevant events and providing targeted activities for different ethnic groups.
- Supporting diversity within decision-making structures, and creating a positive climate for ethnic inclusion.
- Using appropriate terminology by finding out from different communities how they prefer to be addressed.
- Using translated materials where necessary.

### Providing for ethnic communities

To ensure that people from different ethnic groups can and want to use green spaces, some basic principles should be considered.

- Creating a sense of belonging, so that everyone feels part of the community. This can be achieved through outreach programmes, through appropriate information and support, and by activities that recognise cultural diversity and build community cohesion.
- A commitment to cultural equality, developing the right skills and resources to engage effectively.
- Consulting with the whole community and informing people about what facilities and activities are available.
- Tackling issues of safety, conflict and anti-social behaviour. Actions might

### Providing inclusive environments

Green space managers have a responsibility to ensure that services and facilities are inclusive and disabled people are able to access services. Applying the Local Government Equality Standard to the design and management of green spaces can help ensure that they are accessible.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995:

- since **December 1996** it has been **unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably** than other people for a reason related to their disability
- since **October 1999** service providers (e.g. businesses, local authorities etc.) have had to make **reasonable adjustments** for disabled people, such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their services

- since **October 2004** service providers have had to make reasonable adjustments to the **physical features** of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access.

The Act requires green space providers to make changes that are “reasonable”. There is no rulebook and the duties are evolving so managers will need to continue to consider if their service is accessible. It makes sense to think ahead and incorporate changes and inclusive design principles into any other refurbishments or new provisions that may be planned.

### Examples of reasonable changes

- Relaxing a ban on animals so that an assistance-dog user can make use of services.
- Providing adequate seating for those with impaired mobility.
- Installing a ramp and a handrail for wheelchair users where there are steps or in new builds, providing level access.
- Replacing a gate handle with one that is easier to reach and grip, for those with arthritis.
- Using colour contrast to ensure that entrances and exits are easier to identify for visually impaired people.
- Information might need to be provided in accessible formats such as large print, resizeable websites or formats, such as “Easy Read”, for learning-disabled people.

- Conducting disability-awareness training so that staff understand and can respond to the needs of disabled people.

Particular attention should be paid to providing opportunities for children with disabilities. Until recently there has been little recognition of the entitlement of disabled children to the same opportunities for development through play as other children. Developing an accessible play space is about enabling all children to be with and learn from each other. Moreover, enabling disabled children to access all potential formal and informal play spaces helps to promote their health as well as their play opportunities. It also builds relationships and neighbourhood networks that can bind communities and promote social inclusion. Each child is different – not every piece of equipment in a play space needs to be accessible to every child, but access to the social experience of play is essential.



### Complying with the Disability Discrimination Act

Complying with the DDA involves four stages.

1. Improving access to green spaces, by removing the barriers that prevent people getting the most benefit.
2. Developing an access policy – a top-level document that shows a commitment to the principles of improving access.
3. Developing an access plan to show how the policy will be put into action.
4. Carrying out an access audit – a detailed examination of the access arrangements to a physical site, including buildings, structures and landscape.

### Tools for success

#### Providing for children and young people

- **Involving Young People in the Design and Care of Urban Spaces** – This report, published in May 2004 by CABE, provides principles and practical guidance on the involvement of children and young people in the design, development and management of public spaces.  
[www.cabespace.org.uk/publications](http://www.cabespace.org.uk/publications)
- **More than Swings and Roundabouts: planning for outdoor play** provides guidance to local authorities, and all those involved in providing outdoor play. Includes principles on creating

sustainable, exciting, attractive places to play for children and young people.  
[www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

- **Learning through Landscapes** provides a ‘one stop shop’ for any issue relating to school grounds. They give children and young people a say in the way their school grounds are used and improved. LTL works with companies and organisations to help develop their ideas and aspirations for investing in schools and turn these into practical programmes. [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)
- **Delivering Play Spaces in NDC Areas** provides important lessons for creating and delivering children’s play spaces and discusses wider issues about community participation, particularly in deprived areas.  
<http://ndcevaluation.adc.shu.ac.uk/ndcevaluation/reports.asp>
- **The Children’s Play Council** has a range of additional information and advice that may be useful to green space practitioners. [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

#### Providing for ethnic minorities

- **Ethnic Communities and Green Spaces: Guidance for Green Space Managers** – published by the Black Environment Network (BEN), this sets out principles and practical guidance for creating green spaces for all members of the community, especially those from black and minority ethnic groups.  
[www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk)

- **www.renewal.net** – This website provides case studies and guidance on community participation, including how to tackle exclusion and how to get the community involved in improving the local environment. Although aimed at neighbourhood renewal areas, the principles are generally applicable.
- **The Commission for Racial Equality** is a publicly funded, independent organisation that exists to tackle racial discrimination and promote racial equality. They provide a range of advice and support on ensuring racial equality. [www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)

### Providing inclusive environments

- **Developing Accessible Play Space – A Good Practice Guide** helps play-space providers understand the issues that disabled children and their families face. It contains examples of how to improve existing spaces, as well as issues to consider when creating new ones. E-mail [odpm@twoten.press.net](mailto:odpm@twoten.press.net)
- **A Guide to Accessible Green Space** from the Sensory Trust helps green space designers and managers find effective ways of opening up their sites to a wider audience. It covers issues such as site layout, the best ways to provide information and interpretation, what motivates people to visit sites, how people can be encouraged to use and get involved in sites, and relevant legislation and policy. [www.sensorytrust.org.uk](http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk)

- **The Disability Rights Commission** can provide information and advice on the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and providing inclusive environments. [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org) Disabled people can find out about their rights and the legislation that exists to enforce them, by visiting: [www.disability.gov.uk](http://www.disability.gov.uk)
- **The National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC)** is an independent register of accredited Access Auditors and Access Consultants who meet professional standards and criteria established by a peer review system. It is the only UK-wide accreditation service for individuals who undertake access auditing and access consultancy. [www.nrac.org.uk](http://www.nrac.org.uk)

### In practice

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#### Involving the community to create an award-winning park

In its heyday families had flocked to Lister Park in Bradford to go boating on the lake and picnic on the grassy hills overlooking



the city. However, when the park became run-down with overgrown shrubs and gangs of youths hanging around, people stopped using it.

When Bradford City Council put together a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1997, it wanted to make sure that local people were properly involved and that the regeneration of the park would provide real benefits for the local community.

More than 3,000 people were consulted by visiting local organisations, including neighbourhood and women-only forums, and sending out questionnaires. The Council made an effort to involve both schoolchildren and young people as the programme progressed, taking a positive and inclusive approach.

Many locals saw the groups of young people who used the park as a problem, but councillors realised that excluding them from the regeneration process or from the park was not a solution. Instead, workers spent time in the park talking with the children and young people, individually, and through youth groups and schools, on their own ground, listening to their views and finding out what they wanted from the regeneration process.

As a result, six under-used tennis courts have been turned into multi-use games areas, and each of them has been fitted with four entrance/exit points in response to young people's worries about getting trapped on courts with only one exit. Other facilities include a new playground with equipment chosen by schoolchildren, and new boats on the lake, which again draw children and families to the park all summer.



The physical regeneration of Lister Park has proved to be just the starting point in reviving the park. There has been a huge increase in visitor numbers, including children and members of the local Asian community. Last year, over fifty different schools visited the park to plant bulbs and follow the geological trail in the botanical gardens. Vandalism has fallen and children now feel safe enough to use the whole park.

The park has been awarded the Green Flag Award for three years running. In an area suffering from high levels of deprivation and very little green space, the park has become a real resource for local people – young and old – in a place that really needs it.

### Creating spaces for all children

Schools can play an important role in helping identify play needs for disabled and able-bodied children alike.

Plymouth City Council held a competition inviting schools and local groups to send in designs and paintings about a play area that everyone could use. The winner of the competition was helped to produce a design

brief that was sent out to a range of play manufacturers and landscape design firms who came up with schemes which were assessed on how closely they met the child's brief. This play space is now widely enjoyed by disabled children in Plymouth. Taking display buses out to schools has also been found to work well in involving children in consultation. Photos of equipment, layouts and landscapes are displayed to allow children to wander around them and mark their preferences with stars. Once the new play space has been developed, the council staff then visit the playground and speak to the children to find out their views, and speak to parents of children waiting to collect their children after school.

### **Gardening helps people with learning disabilities**

Growing Places was awarded £2,180 to help local people with learning difficulties improve biodiversity in the Maiden Erlegh nature reserve near Reading. There, native plants grown from seed and woodland bulbs have been planted to create a wealth of wildflowers for local people to enjoy.

Margaret Larby, a horticultural therapist at Growing Places, says: "Living Spaces has helped us to get some decent gardening tools. Instead of sharing tools we can all have our own trowels, which make our work with learning difficulties clients much easier. Gardening alongside professionals helps build our clients' confidence and self esteem and talking to the public about the wild flowers they have planted benefits everyone."

