

3.2.2 Managing sites for biodiversity and heritage

- Green spaces provide one of the best opportunities for experiencing the natural world that people have.
- They protect and enhance the biodiversity in built environments, particularly as part of strategic networks.
- They also enhance the local distinctiveness of an area and build on the cultural and heritage value inherent in such spaces.

Biodiversity in towns and cities can depend on the quality of green spaces. The grassland, shrubs, trees, open water, and even bare ground of these spaces provide a habitat that is vital to sustaining many plants and animals. And because the majority of people live in towns and cities, green spaces provide one of the best opportunities that they have for experiencing the natural world.

For these reasons biodiversity should now be a part of local authorities' key strategic plans, and they should incorporate biodiversity within their Community Strategy. Green space managers should seek to maximise the opportunities for biodiversity in the planning, design, management and maintenance of green spaces.

Different sites will offer different degrees of biodiversity. For example, a formal park will offer a different experience of nature than a designated nature reserve or wilderness area. Sometimes providing a site managed for wildlife, such as wildflower meadows, can be cheaper than a high-maintenance large area of grass, and indeed more attractive. Buildings in green spaces might incorporate green roofs too.

Principles for managing biodiversity

- Know the economic, environmental and social benefits of biodiversity, and how changes can disrupt or enhance them.
- Set out the techniques and long-term resources required to achieve healthy ecosystems in a management plan.
- Establish the role of each site in the wider green infrastructure of an area.
- Identify the distinctiveness and character of the landscape – its geology, hydrology, landscape design and use of man-made structures.
- Protect habitats and species. These require consideration during the construction process and may benefit from the expertise of an ecological clerk of works.
- Recognise the heritage of a park or urban space. This can include historic buildings; records and collections held in museums, archives and libraries; and objects and sites linked to the UK's industrial, maritime and transport history.

Green spaces, with their landscape design, buildings and structures, often reflect the history of communities and add to their local distinctiveness. This is not just relevant to historic Victorian parks. Cemeteries and burial grounds, for example, often present special heritage and biodiversity opportunities for the local community. Every effort should be made to continue the public use of green spaces of historic importance.

Principles for managing heritage

- Act as responsible stewards of council-owned property by setting an example for other owners.
- Make the most of heritage assets, including promoting better access for all the community.
- Develop a good understanding of heritage significance in order to make informed decisions about change.
- Ensure high-quality and co-ordinated management.
- Ensure good management planning, including full and up-to-date information on the extent, nature and physical condition of historic green spaces, and a council-wide strategy.
- Plan maintenance and repair programmes.

Tools for success

Biodiversity

- **Planning Policy Guidance 9: Nature conservation** – shows how the Government’s policies for the conservation of our natural heritage are to be reflected in land-use planning. It embodies the Government’s commitment to sustainable development and to conserving the diversity of our wildlife. PPS 9 Biodiversity & Geological Conservation is expected to be published in summer 2005 and will replace PPG9. www.planningportal.gov.uk
- **Biodiversity by Design: A Guide for Sustainable Communities** This TCPA guide shows how to maximise the opportunities for biodiversity in the planning and design of sustainable communities. www.tcpa.org.uk
- **National Urban Forestry Unit** – this website provides information about the National Urban Forestry Unit and its work. It provides an online



forum for discussion about the many issues concerning trees and woods in towns, and case studies on urban and community forestry projects throughout the UK. www.nufu.org.uk

- **Guidance on biodiversity in Community Strategies** – shows how the objectives of the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) preparing the Community Strategies can benefit from local biodiversity. www.defra.gov.uk

Heritage

- **Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment** – sets out Government policies for the identification and protection of historic buildings, conservation areas, and other elements of the historic environment. It explains the role played by the planning system in their protection. It complements the guidance on archaeology and planning given in PPG 16. www.planningportal.gov.uk
- **Paradise Preserved: An Introduction to the Assessment, Evaluation, Conservation and Management of Historic Cemeteries** This was published by English Heritage and English Nature in 2002. It is available from English Heritage's website. www.english-heritage.org.uk.
- **English Heritage (2003) Managing Local Authority Heritage Assets** – Some Guiding Principles for Decision-Makers. Guidance to help promote and encourage appropriate standards in the management of heritage assets and

high-quality design in new work related to them, including public spaces.

www.helm.org.uk

Guidance notes published by the Heritage Lottery Fund

www.hlf.org.uk

- **National register of parks and gardens of special historic interest** – Local authorities can register parks or gardens of special historic interest on the English Heritage register. Assessed by English heritage advisors, a registered site must be of particular historic interest, and may also be of note for other reasons, such as their amenity value, or nature conservation. Registration can be a material consideration in planning decisions and so can help safeguard special sites. www.english-heritage.org.uk

In practice

Biodiversity, the route to a Green Flag

When it comes to conservation of natural features, wild fauna and flora, Trafford Ecology Park, within one of Europe's largest industrial estates in Manchester, has excelled.

Green Flag Award judges praised the 4.5-hectare site for making "outstanding use of a former derelict site in an unpromising industrial location" with "outstanding conservation policies and practices."

Since opening to the public in 1990, the park has become a haven for visitors, comprising a broad range of habitats in a relatively small area. Part of the park is a designated Site

of Biological Importance, and the site as a whole boasts an outstanding array of flora and fauna species.

The site's aquatic life is its most remarkable feature. All three species of British newts – the smooth, palmate and great crested – were introduced in 1989. Management of the site ensures undisturbed breeding, foraging and hibernation areas to complete their full lifecycle. Ecology staff constructed three of the ponds using different lining material, which are important for newt colonisation. One of the ponds was enlarged to provide a more useful habitat for aquatic invertebrates. Pioneer plant species found in this pond include water mint, water forget-me-not and yellow iris.

A sensory garden comprising raised beds located near a sun-gazing machine are planted with herbs. Lavender and buddleia have also been planted, attracting a plethora of butterflies and insects.

Green Flag judges said Trafford Ecology Park was successful by a “significantly large margin”, gaining exceptionally high marks for its clear and positive management plan which details the area, sets out aims and determines how they are to be achieved over a five-year period. The park achieved top marks for its excellent provision and conservation of heritage and nature.

Derby Arboretum Smiles Again

The Derby 'Arboretum Smiles Again Project' aims to restore the oldest surviving public park in England. Originally designed for public recreation and education, this Grade II* listed park had fallen into disrepair and was poorly used by the local community. The advent of the Heritage Lottery Fund provided

the opportunity to turn around the parks fortunes.

The on-going restoration project aims to restore the historic landscape and buildings and to provide community facilities, and so encourage greater use of the park. The historic features have been renovated mainly for passive educational use. In tandem the recreational facilities have been improved, in line with established community aspirations, to take the pressure off the historic landscape. A new building 'Heart of the Park' provides the link between the different elements of the park and provides accommodation for the on-site staff and the local beat officer, a café, toilets, community rooms and changing facilities.

To complement the physical improvements, a new approach to encouraging people to use the park has been adopted including providing a 'site explainer' to lead groups; offering a varied events programme, and providing new signs and panels to welcome visitors. A security strategy has also been implemented, providing better lighting and CCTV coverage, increased on-site staffing, including the local beat officer.



The results? In the last three years: play area users have increased from 20 to 50-100 per day; bank holiday users have increased from 100 to 500-1000; there are now 8 annual events rather than 1; daily drug dealing has become an occasional incident, with discarded needles down from 300 to 5 per week; weekly graffiti has also reduced, and park users complaints about personal safety reduced from daily to only occasional.

The success of this restoration has been achieved by the collaboration of over 20 different groups – ranging from the parks, youth services, sports, ASB, drug and alcohol teams at Derby City Council, to the Arboretum Smiles Again Project, the local constabulary, local schools and community groups, BTCV, Sure Start and of course, the local residents. Heritage Lottery Funding of over £4million has been complemented by substantial resources from SRB, Derby City Council and the Home Office. The new ‘Heart of the Park’ building and café also received funding from the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership to create facilities for a social enterprise. This should create a revenue stream from lease and profit income, to help fund social aims for the park.

In the words of local resident, whose enthusiasm led her to become the Project Manager and now Park Manager, Karin Alberg, “The park itself is, once again, a focal point for the local community, and by working in partnership with other local agencies, often an activator for regeneration and problem-solving in our area. The overall feeling from all those involved is that this restoration scheme is very much the start of the park’s regeneration.”