

3.3.2 Promoting positive behaviour in parks

- Parks provide safe environments that are used by an estimated 33 million people a year. However, the actions of a minority can fuel feelings that people don't care and perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Creating welcoming and well-used spaces, where the presence of people acts as a deterrent to bad behaviour, should be a key element of approaches to prevent anti-social behaviour.
- Providing positive activities for everyone, including perpetrators of anti-social behaviour is a vital part of the approach.
- Guidance and legislation, including model byelaws or 'code of conduct' can be adopted to prevent and tackle unsuitable behaviour and uses of green spaces.

Anti-social behaviour is estimated to cost the country £7.3 billion a year. Action over the last 18 months on tackling anti-social behaviour has seen concern fall.

However, neglected spaces can attract such behaviour, and this can make other users too afraid to use them – and because no one goes there, the space then becomes a magnet for further crimes. For this reason, it is vital to tackle even minor issues immediately – litter is often the first stage in a spiral of decline.

The presence of large numbers of people in a place is a deterrent to bad behaviour. Authorities responsible for green spaces should take a pro-active approach to preventing anti-social behaviour – a vital part of this approach should be ensuring that spaces are attractive, welcoming and well-used.

Principles to promote positive behaviour

- **Good design.** A well-designed park reduces the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, minimises the opportunities

for people to behave anti-socially, and creates places that people want to use.

- **Good management and maintenance regimes.** People are attracted to well-maintained places with staff providing a reassuring presence. Park managers should consider changing maintenance times so that they coincide with the times when vulnerable people are using the site.
- **The presence of site staff.** As well as providing park staff, managers should consider using neighbourhood wardens and community support officers. Collectively, these staff provide a reassuring presence to users. Volunteers and the community representatives, through 'friends' groups, and managers of cafes and other facilities, can also add to the sense of security.
- **A rapid response to vandalism.** This sends the message that vandalism will not be tolerated. High standards of

conspicuous care generate respect and local pride.

- **Ensuring clear sight lines, open vistas, and good lighting.** These measures will make the park feel safe for all users. But a balance is needed, and a draconian approach to pruning and shrub maintenance may undermine the site's attractiveness and biodiversity.
- **Fully engaging all members of the community,** including those who create problems in parks. Managers should find out what concerns people and how they would like to use their park. They should then be involved in the design and management of the park.
- **Providing positive diversionary activities** for those caught or perceived to be anti-social is a vital part of the approach. Given the chance, children and young people will help design and look after the spaces they use.

“Target-hardening” can also be useful, if carefully and sensitively applied where it is most needed. This means removing opportunities for criminal behaviour by, for example, securing bins and seats to the ground, coating walls in anti-graffiti paint, creating clear lines of sight and locking parks at night. CCTV, anti-social behaviour contracts and orders (ASBOs), Designated Public Places and local bye-laws have their place too, and can be useful in targeting particular trouble spots and individuals. However over-reliance on target hardening can lead to a place being turned into an unattractive environment.

Model byelaws can be adopted by local authorities to prevent and tackle unsuitable behaviour and uses of green spaces. Many park managers use them to set out opening hours, and restricted and prohibited activities. Byelaws are local laws that create criminal offences, but before they can come into effect, a Secretary of State must confirm them. It is also important to consult the local community before the introduction of closing times or restrictions on popular uses. A regular review of byelaws and replacement or removal of unsuitable byelaws that are redundant, should be considered.

Some local authorities have adopted a code of conduct to replace or supplement byelaws. These can help to promote a more positive atmosphere by encouraging good behaviour and respect for other users.



Code of conduct model

- Many people enjoy the quiet and tranquillity of parks and open spaces. Please respect your fellow users.
- Please do not disturb any wildlife and leave all plants and flowers for others to enjoy.
- Well-behaved dogs are welcome. Please keep your dog under control and use the waste bins provided.
- Games and sports are encouraged. But please use designated areas and be considerate to other parks users.
- Considerate skateboarders and cyclists are welcome in the designated areas. Please watch out for other park users, especially children, and elderly and disabled people.
- Most of our parks and open spaces are accessible at all times, but please observe any notices that may restrict access or activity.
- You are encouraged to use our parks for organised events or outings, but please contact us first to let us assist you in making them successful and safe.
- Please use the litterbins provided or take your litter home.
- Please contact us with your comments and views on how we can improve this park. Any problems with maintenance of the facilities or grounds should be reported to (insert contact details or a helpline number).

An inspiring and energetic individual can often transform a park from a den of bad behaviour to a well-used community resource. Dealing with those who act in anti-social ways is often best carried out alongside social, health and crime-reduction agencies, which may already be aware of the individuals involved and who can provide additional support. Neighbourhood wardens and community safety officers can be useful allies to parks and facilities staff, both to provide a presence, and – where accredited – to help with enforcement.

Tools for success

- **Together** – The Government's programme for tackling anti-social behaviour includes detailed advice on tools and powers available to practitioners to deal with anti-social behaviour, including a national helpline and anti-social behaviour co-ordinators. www.together.gov.uk
- **Decent Parks? Decent Behaviour?** – Published by CABE Space in May 2005, this guide studies the link between the quality of parks and user behaviour. It offers a range of ideas for preventing anti-social behaviour in parks, drawing on nine case studies from across the country. www.cabespace.org.uk
- **Safer Places: The Planning System and Crime Prevention** – This was published in March 2004 by the ODPM and the Home Office. It provides good-practice guidance on planning and design. www.odpm.gov.uk/planning

■ **Public space legislation**

This web-based resource gives a quick and easy point of reference for practitioners who want to find out what legislation is on the statute book in relation to all elements of parks and public space management, covering issues such as tackling litter, graffiti and other anti-social behaviour, and links to guidance on model bye-laws. It also aims to provide a one-stop shop for good practice, which you will find listed alongside each theme.

www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk

■ **Byelaw-making powers**

A section of the ODPM's website concerns the byelaw-making powers for pleasure grounds, public walks, open spaces and burial grounds. Bye-laws relating to commons and village greens can be found on Defra's website.

www.odpm.gov.uk

www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/issues/byelaws/index.htm

In practice

Park wardens in Southwark

Southwark Warden Service currently has 12 community wardens operating in its parks and open spaces. The team provides a service until 10pm in the summer months, and operates seven days a week. It patrols four major parks and also carries out health and safety checks and patrols in a further 65 open spaces across the borough.

The team has to lock the parks each night, dispose of needles and carry out playground

inspections in 43 parks and open spaces. It also enforces byelaws for dog fouling, littering, golf practice, graffiti and wilful damage to infrastructure.

A number of events are hosted in Southwark's parks, and wardens play a role in carrying out pre-event health and safety checks and providing high-visibility patrols. The wardens also provide information in the community to raise their profile and to encourage positive interaction and communication.

One project being piloted in Burgess Park – a partnership between the council and the Greater London Authority – involves the promotion of women's safety in parks. As with other projects, it contributes to making Southwark's green spaces cleaner, greener and safer.

Community action to take back control

As a result of poor maintenance, Tavistock Gardens, in the middle of Notting Hill, became overgrown and dark. Dog owners allowed their pets to use it as a lavatory and drinkers fought and yelled at passers-by. People openly used and dealt drugs, and the entrance to the park was via narrow, steep, brick staircases that led into a gloomy



interior. The park became a virtual no-go area.

Just over two hectares in size, the gardens had the potential to provide an important green lung in an area surrounded by densely populated, low-rise apartment blocks and Victorian terraces. When representatives from the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea visited the site, they were shocked at the state of neglect it had fallen into. They agreed that minimal maintenance and the lack of permanent staff based on site had contributed to its decline, and they offered financial support for remedial community initiatives.

The All Saints Road Business Community Association spearheaded a clean-up campaign, forming the Tavistock Improvement Group. The Group conducted a survey, which found that people wanted their new park to provide amenities for the whole community, action to deter criminals and encouragement to dog owners to be responsible for their pets.

The Group succeeded in raising a regeneration grant of £250,000, part of which was used to launch a design competition for local architects. The winning design – chosen by the local community – incorporated a clean and contemporary open landscape with clear sight lines. The design made good use of the limited space and also increased visibility through the park from the surrounding area. A new infrastructure included low walls, steps, railings, footpaths, litterbins and benches. Signs to the site, and on it, were erected and new lighting installed around the perimeter of the park, as a further deterrent to crime.

A separate, fenced, dog-free area is used for children's play, and a fenced area of lawn is dog free. There are also plenty of dog-litter bins throughout the park. The first phase of the project was completed in December 2001, and the second phase, involving the construction of the new children's play area, was completed in 2003 at a cost of £60,000.

The local community appreciates their new park and respects it by using the litter and dog-litter bins provided. People now feel safe enough to walk through the park rather than around it.

Groups unite to save a park

Like many of the parks across Oldham, Coalshaw Green Park had slipped into gradual decline over the years. Regular drug dealing and vandalism added to its state of decay.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council's Parks and Open Spaces service had no specific budget to upgrade the park's facilities. But they were able to redistribute budgets and move contract funds from maintenance to development, so increasing the annual budget by around a million pounds. Benefits were obtained from planning obligations, by persuading planners of new housing developments not to create small areas of "green desert".

As a result, quick, high-profile improvements were made, and sixteen 'friends of' groups have been established within two years as a link between the community and the park. Each group is allocated a thousand pounds to organise community events. For each refurbishment the principal landscape architect puts forward some general plans and images. A masterplan is then proposed, and the community amends it.

The focal point of the regeneration of Coalshaw Green Park was a new bowling pavilion, replacing one that had been burned down. It led to the growth of eleven bowling teams, increasing healthy exercise in the park.

Barbara Wilson, a resident and leading light of the Friends of Coalshaw Green Park, persuaded the Council to develop a community centre in the pavilion.

She also helped to start a young friends group. Youths are rewarded for good behaviour, but any who vandalise the park are photographed and put on a “name and shame” board.

Work with young people is supported by the Youth Works programme. The Friends of Coalshaw Green Park work closely with the Council’s youth outreach workers to devise ideas for entertaining young park visitors. Out of this has grown an inter-parks football league and the construction of a highly popular skateboarding site.

The park is now well used by all sectors of the community, including numerous elderly visitors.

