

GreenSpace North West

Review of 2006



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1. Mission Statement

Providing a united voice dedicated to promoting, advocating and lobbying for the regeneration and sustainable future of quality green spaces throughout the North West.

2. Strategic Aims

- To work with North West green space practitioners to raise the standards of parks and green spaces for people to enjoy.
- To establish the Forum as the leading advocate for parks and open spaces in the North West
- Raise the profile of parks and green spaces in the region

3. Introduction

The North West boasts a strong tradition of parks and green spaces, highlighted by it being the first region to attain more than 100 parks with Green Flag Awards. The concept of a North West parks forum was first initiated by the two founding partners; the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) Parks & Open Spaces Group, and GreenSpace, a national charity based in Reading.

The Forum was launched in July 2004 with an event at Manchester Town Hall. To reach this stage, the aims and objectives had been developed; enough Members had signed on to provide a funding base, and the business plan had been written. The operational phase of the Forum officially commenced in March 2005.

The focus of 2005 was the development of the Forum's emerging networks and building momentum. The Forum celebrated the first working groups and the publication of its first report, *Communities in the North West's Green Spaces*.

2006 has been another busy year for GreenSpace North West and has been characterised by the networks taking ownership and control. Green space professionals are working in an increasingly complex environment with huge demands on their time and resources. Despite these pressures there are 19 organisations closely involved with driving the development of the Forum's activities and strategy through the Steering Group and the working groups. 30 local authorities attended county-based networking meetings last year and most importantly the Forum regularly has high levels of responses to questionnaires and consultations. The core organisations may decide what questions to ask, but it is vital that they get the answers so they know the wider Forum's views. It is this high level of participation that drives the development of the Forum; taking us into new and exciting territory as we head into 2007.

4. Strategic Development

The activities of GreenSpace North West are coordinated by the Steering Group who meet four times a year. This group consists of representatives from each of the sub regions, the working group chairs and a number of independent members. The Steering Group oversee the activity of the working groups, they ensure that the Forum is managed efficiently and over-see finances. An overview of the Forum's committee structure can be found in appendix 1.

This year the Steering Group have written a Strategic Plan and Action Plan in consultation with the wider form. This is available on the website. They have since been working on implementing the plan tackling areas ranging from broadening out the membership structure to the Forum's role in engaging with elected members.

5. Membership & Finances

The Forum's financial and membership year runs from 1st April to the 31st March and at year end for 2005 / 2006, the Forum showed a net income. The Forum's full accounts are audited with GreenSpace's accounts and are reported at their AGM in their annual report.

To date the membership has stayed constant at 30 of the region's 46 authorities with 21 members having paid their membership fees. Contact is being made with the remaining 9 to encourage payment. A list of Member organisations can be found in the appendix.

An objective for 2006 was to increase the membership and this has not been successful, however initial discussions have been held with a number of non-local authority organisations and plans are in hand to focus and restructure the membership to encompass this group.

6. External Consultation & Representation

In 2006 the Forum responded to formal consultations on the then ODPM Guide *How to create quality parks and open spaces?* and the *North West Green Infrastructure Guide*. The Steering Group is also in the process of consulting the networks on the Green Flag Awards, both in terms of benefits and challenges. Almost complete, this consultation is in response to the Forum's strong support for the award and the North West's desire to be involved in any discussion to take it forward.

The Forum is represented on the North West Green Infrastructure Think Tank and also has expressed an interest in the ENCAMs led North West Liveability Foundation that aims to coordinate the cleaner, safer, greener agenda for the region.

GreenSpace North West has been represented at all the national meetings of the regional forums this year and, as one of the most established regions, aims to take an active role in the development of the wider network and the working practices that are slowly evolving.

7. Events

7.1 Green Space Strategy Workshop

A workshop was run by CABI Space and GreenSpace North West on writing green space strategies. GreenSpace North West administered the event, CABI Space provided the content of the day and Preston City Council provided the venue. Approximately 35 people attended from 14 organisations.

7.2 Introductory Training to Green Flags

Two pilot workshops were run by the Civic Trust and GreenSpace North West to give an introduction to the Green Flag Award for those who have not yet had any contact with the scheme. The days were primarily targeted at North West local authorities who have not got an award, however they were open to the whole region. The meetings / venues were coordinated by GreenSpace North West and the training was provided by the Civic Trust. The groups were kept small, around 15 attendees, to encourage discussion and debate. Over the two events 32 people attended from 14 organisations.

The venues were generously provided by GreenSpace North West members and parks with green flag awards were targeted. The events were held on at Astbury Mere Country Park (managed by Cheshire County Council) and at Mercer Park, Hyndburn Borough Council.

The popularity of the events and high turn out demonstrates that there was real need for the workshop. The feedback has been very positive and those who attended have valued the day.

7.3 Urban parks: do we know what we're getting for our money?

The Forum supported CABI Space with this expert seminar based on their recent research and were very pleased to welcome them to the North West.

8. Email Network

The email network remains a popular service provided by the Forum. Membership of the network steadily builds, currently standing at 160 contacts from 63 organisations, with all removals to date being due to members moving job. Over 100 emails have been circulated on the network including information and questions from members. A taste of the numerous and varied topics discussed during the year includes: pesticides policies, events policies, club licensing, funding park rangers, experiences with park based gardeners, staffing cemeteries, arboriculture contract comparison, measuring visitor numbers, commuted sums, increasing skills of community groups, writing green space strategies, funding for allotments and dealing with; motorbikes, dog fouling, litter bins, chewing gum, graffiti, locking parks and mare's tails (*Equisetum*) growing through tarmac.

The number of answers to questions is not known as many respondents reply directly to the person who asked the question. The network has a high level of contribution from the members, most responding to questions where they have particular expertise. Manchester CC, Hyndburn BC, Ellesmere Port BC, Wigan Culture and Leisure Trust, Rochdale MBC and Bury MBC have all gone out of their way to answer questions this year. In addition Nicola Mather and her colleagues at CAFE Space have regularly supplied information providing their national overview of publications and research.

Following a spate of questions requesting fee information, Sefton and Stockport councils devised a form for collection of fees and charges information. This is collated by the Forum and provided to participating authorities to use when they are setting their fees. There is no attempt to standardise or benchmark the information. The list includes football, mini soccer, cricket, rugby, mini rugby, bowling, tennis, allotments, pitch & put, golf and events. There is also information on a number of miscellaneous sports such as fishing and boating.

The fees and charges list has had the beneficial effect of reducing questions of this type on the network and also ensures the information is available when it is needed. Seventeen authorities have participated to date and there have been requests to include cemetery charges and car park fees next year.

'We have little time to inwardly reflect upon our activities and services and seeing or hearing how others in like for like services are doing it can save hours, £'s, grief and get you to where you want to be more quickly.'

Giles Nance, Liverpool City Council

'The information was used to compare our service with other authorities and to inform the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee of our performance and level of service.'

Graeme Douglas, Rochdale MBC

9. Community Involvement Working Group

Set up in June 2005, this group presented their research report *Communities in the North West's Green Spaces* to the Open Meeting in that year. Since then they have been developing a plan of action based on the report's findings.

The Group's three main areas of activity are:

- 1) Enabling professionals working with communities in green spaces to share resources, primarily through the GreenSpace North West website.
- 2) Networking community groups through a series of county forum events.
- 3) Improving access to training for both members of community groups and professionals working with them.

9.1 Sharing Information

The group have developed a case study template and designed an area of the GreenSpace North West web site that aims to enable officers working with the community to share information. This site is North West focused, although the group are aware that there is a national need for more of this type of information.

They are talking with GreenSpace and the other regional forums to identify if a national site with regional elements would be more effective, however while these discussions are on-going, the GreenSpace North West site will be a resource for North West authorities.

9.2 Networking Community Groups

The Forum has run two community events in the past and the Forum's original business plan contained an action to regularly run a regional community forum. On the basis of the research and the experience of the officers in the working group, it was decided that a regular North West forum was not practical. The numbers involved would be very large, and the distance to travel impractical for many volunteers.

The group decided to run county events or celebrations where community groups working in green spaces can come together to network and be thanked for their work. The approach they have taken is through the sub regional networking groups to allow officers in each area to organise an event appropriate for the county.

Bernard Dumphy of Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council agreed to host the first event on behalf of Greater Manchester. The evening event was held on the 22nd of November and 135 delegates attended from Stockport, Manchester, Wigan, Rochdale, Tameside Salford and Oldham. There were also delegates from Warrington, Vale Royal, Liverpool and Burnley observing the celebration in anticipation of organising events in their own counties.

Speakers from the Friends of Clayton Vale in Manchester, the Friends of Gorse Hall in Tameside and the Friends of Walkden Gardens in Trafford all gave hugely entertaining presentations about their work bringing local parks to life. Bursting with energy they described running events, working with young people and how a local community can transform a park. Deborah Fox, Head of Standards and Best Practice at CABE Space, the government's advisor on parks, explained how essential the work done by green space volunteers around the country is, and thanked the attendees for all their hard work.

91 of the delegates completed feedback forms and these show overwhelmingly positive satisfaction ratings in addition to some interesting suggestions for future celebration events.

9.3 Training

The group have discussed both the skills needed to work with the community and the skills needed by community groups. The research project identified a broad need for training for officers working with the community and therefore a more detailed piece of work is planned to determine more specifically what type of training is needed.

The Working Group has not had much direct communication with the community and therefore the feedback form at the Greater Manchester celebration event had questions to quantify if there is a need. If this is the case then further work will be done in this area.

The Training Working Group is aware of their activity.

10. Funding Working Group

This group had their first meeting in September and have set their terms of reference. They talked in some detail about their remit, undertaking a research project and how they should work together. The meeting was extremely productive and was an excellent start for the group.

11. The Training Working Group

Set up in October 2005; this group is just over a year old and their first task was setting terms of reference. Skills and training is a challenging area and to focus their activity they decided to survey the region's local authorities. In August they published the resulting research report *Skills & Training in the North West's Green Spaces*.

The writing of the report and interpretation of the data was the main topic for the group's early meetings with a number of the group's members providing detailed case studies. The report has been well received within the sector, has been the subject of articles and has been featured at a national skills conference. Most importantly the recommendations in the report have proved a strong foundation on which to build an action plan, a task which is well underway.

11.1 Current areas of activity

The group are keen to work with partner organisations to increase training provision in the region. Examples of this are the events held with CABE Space and Civic Trust this year.

The group are talking to Myerscough College regarding establishing a new course for parks staff. Dave Brayshay (Stockport MBC) and Eddie Curry (Preston CC) have been taking a lead working with Richard Jeffries at Myerscough. A course outline was developed by Eddie Curry that has been consulted on in the region and this will be taken forward.

A seminar is planned on apprenticeship schemes in February 2007 and initial discussions have been held with potential partner organisations.

The group are encouraging the sub regions to discuss if they want to work together on training and have made the example of the Lancashire County Horticulture Training Committee available to the sub regional chairmen.

11.2 Future Ambitions

The group are at the point of drafting an action plan and the areas they are looking at including are:

- Regional advocacy for skills
- Increasing funding
- Support for managers who need to effect cultural change
- Examples of continued professional development systems
- Examples of structured approaches to on the job training
- Working with existing courses to tailor them to employer's training needs

11.3 National Areas for Action

They have also identified a number of recommendations where the solutions lie with our national bodies. These include the need for structured professional development system for the sector, advocacy for skills in the sector and the need for better coordination of information on training opportunities to allow hard-pressed managers to ensure their staff access the most appropriate courses for them.

12. Sub Regional Open Spaces Groups

The Forum has been working to establish networking groups in the sub regions that do not have a tradition of meeting. These groups are vital to the Forum's development as they are a mechanism for officers in local authorities to meet their neighbours and also regularly interact with the Steering Group.

Groups were pre-existing in Greater Manchester and Lancashire and the Forum has established links with these. Historically meetings have taken place in Cheshire, Merseyside and Cumbria, although there was no tradition meeting regularly. These have therefore been areas of focus.

12.1 Association of Greater Manchester Authorities Parks and Open Spaces Group (AGMA)

Chairman: Les Parker, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council

The AGMA group was originally a benchmarking group and has been collecting data for many years. This year they have discussed their approach to the collection of performance indicator information and have decided to undertake a thorough review to ensure that the information is relevant to the management of green spaces today.

The group has continued to look at the potential for joint working while the impacts of the Green Flag scheme and Job Evaluation have proved popular points for discussion at recent meetings.

Group members are also keen to take advantage of the regional profile of GSNW and have asked, through the steering group, that a number of topics be taken up by the Forum including the future direction of CABE Space and the possibility of a working group being established to look into anti-social behaviour in parks.

12.2 Cheshire Parks and Open Spaces Group

Chairman – David Stamp, Warrington Metropolitan Borough Council

The Cheshire sub-regional group is slowly but surely developing into an active and useful group from a challenging start in 2005. A steady growth in attendance has been achieved over 2006, culminating in the election of a new Chair, George Broughton (Cheshire County Council) and Vice-Chair, Martin Thornhill (Vale Royal Borough Council). Thanks must be given to the sterling and tenacious work done by Warrington Borough Council's Dave Stamp for his pioneering drive with the admirable support of Ros Johnson.

The group has been focussed on identifying and addressing the issues and priorities of parks and green space managers in Cheshire. These have been reported to the Steering Group to ensure the county's needs are properly represented by the Forum. The Group has set their terms of reference, successfully hosted a Green Flag introductory seminar (at Astbury Mere), they have already agreed some areas of focus including crime and disorder and a key target for 2007 is to organise a Celebration of Cheshire Parks. Through this event they aim to raise the profile of the collective activities of those working in Cheshire's green spaces.

If the Cheshire Parks and Open Spaces Group achieve nothing else, they hope to provide support for each other in the difficult times ahead.

12.3 Cumbria

Chairman: Toni Magean, Copeland Borough Council

Development in the Cumbria sub region is planned for early 2007. Copeland Borough Council has offered to act as the lead organisation and the establishment of a group will follow the template trialled in Cheshire.

12.4 Lancashire Parks and Open Spaces Group

Chairman: Tim Riley, Blackpool Council

The Lancashire Parks and Open Spaces Group meet on a quarterly basis and the Lancashire councils are well represented at the meetings. In the past year they have exchanged information on performance management which has included the performance+ quality system, Bidtrack funding system, CPA scores, agency staff, joint funding of park rangers, security in parks and such diverse issues as philosophy cafes in parks.

The group's aims in 2007 are to continue to look at best practice, benchmarking, local issues within each authority's area of responsibility and fostering closer links with other authorities. There are still a few Lancashire authorities that do not attend the meetings and we will continue try to get 100% Lancashire authority attendance.

The Group aim to have a vice chairperson so that there is always a member to represent the group at the Green Space North West Steering Group meeting. Eddie Curry, formerly of Preston City Council, in conjunction with the Training Working Group has worked hard at progressing the new Park's Development Qualification with Myerscough College.

12.5 Merseyside Parks and Open Spaces Group

Chairman: Nigel Sharp, Liverpool City Council

2006 has been an important year of consolidation for the Merseyside Parks and Open Spaces Group. Meeting regularly to coordinate with the GSNW Steering Group, the Group membership has become more established to enable strong networking links to develop and lay the foundations for further joint working.

The Group has become a conduit for exchange of information and comment with green space and other bodies, enabling discussion and feedback on national programmes and initiatives from a Merseyside perspective. The Group has members in each of the Working Groups and continually reviews the outcomes from these groups with a particular view to their application on a local level.

In response to the Working Group discussions, over the next 12 months it is intended to identify key topic areas and work to deliver workshop based training targeted to meet the needs of the Merseyside sub-region. This follows a successful Management Planning event hosted by Wirral MBC. In turn it is hoped that such events will provide useful feedback to the Working Groups and the wider Forum membership.

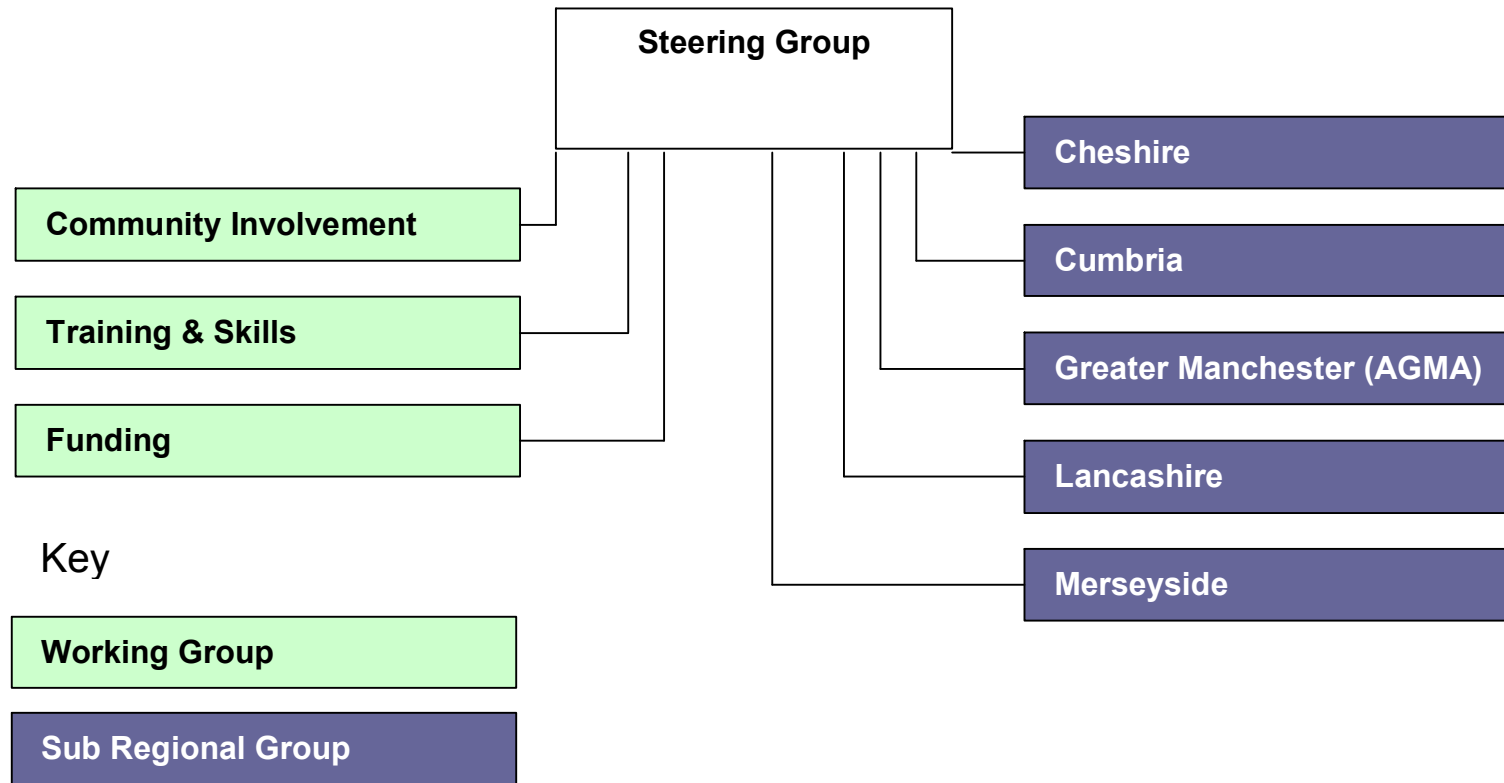
Through sub-regional networking the Group will continue to promote the considerable benefits and potential contributions of our parks to ensure Merseyside's parks play an integral part in the forthcoming celebrations associated with Liverpool's 800th birthday (2007), the European Capital of Culture year (2008) and the city's Year of Environment (2009).

13. Looking ahead to 2007

The Forum has ambitious plans for 2007. The action plan lays out in detail our targets, and these change quarterly. The Forum has events already in the planning phase and the activities of the networking meetings core areas for developments include:

- Developing & expanding activities and projects through the working groups.
- Establish a working group to look at antisocial behaviour in green spaces
- Continue to develop the email network
- Continue to develop the sub-regional structure
- Expand membership categories and consolidated existing membership
- Review and clarify organisational structure
- Clarify working practices
- Collaborate with regional & national organisations
- Undertake a funding report

Appendix 1 Structure of GreenSpace North West



Appendix 2: Who Is GreenSpace North West?

GreenSpace North West Member Organisations

Allerdale Borough Council
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Blackpool Borough Council
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Burnley Borough Council
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Cheshire County Council
Chorley Borough Council
Congleton Borough Council
Copeland Borough Council
Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council
Fylde Borough Council
Halton Borough Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Liverpool City Council
Macclesfield Borough Council
Manchester City Council
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Pendle Borough Council
Preston City Council
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Sefton Council
St Helens Borough Council
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Warrington Borough Council
Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Other Financial Supporters

CABE Space
GroundWork North West

Steering Group Members

Tim Riley, Blackpool BC
Toni Magean / Ruth Walsh, Copeland BC
Andy Wimble, English Heritage
Paul Bramhill / Sarah Moore, GreenSpace
Andrew Darron, Groundwork North West
Nigel Sharp, Liverpool City Council
David Brayshay, Stockport MBC
Norman Hudson, Stockport MBC
Peter Noden / Les Parker, Tameside MBC
David Stamp, Warrington BC

Community Involvement Working Group Members

Tim Riley, Blackpool BC
Ian Sturzaker, Burnley BC
Sandy Mohamet, Groundwork, Bury
Craig Horabin, Hyndburn BC
Fiona Mather, Knowsley MBC
Kevin Shackell, Manchester City Council
Mark Billington, Preston City Council
Kath Ward, Stockport MBC
Bernard Dunphy, Trafford MBC
David Stamp Warrington BC

Training Working Group Members

Wilf Griffiths, Bolton MBC
George Broughton, Cheshire County Council
Ros Johnson, GSNW
Shirley Parkinson, Hyndburn BC
Dave Kelly, Liverpool City Council
Eddie Curry, Preston City Council
Peter Campbell, Sefton Council
David Brayshay, Stockport MBC
Bob Walton, Trafford MBC
Dave Cowling, Wirral MBC