



Green Spaces, Better Places

Summary of the final report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce

This Briefing Sheet contains the executive summary of the report *Green Spaces, Better Places (2002)*. The report is available from Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, PO Box 236, Wetherby LS23 7NB.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parks and green spaces are a popular and precious resource, which can make a valuable contribution to the attractiveness of a neighbourhood and to the health and well-being of children and adults alike. They are assets to the nation.

Despite their popularity, there has been a worrying decline in the quality of far too many urban parks and green spaces and action is urgently needed if they are to deliver their many benefits.

The final report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce has a simple message: now is the time for an urban renaissance with these invaluable, but often neglected, resources. We hope the report also conveys the enthusiasm of all involved for achieving our vision of excellence.

The report is split into four parts, as outlined below.

2. PARKS, GREEN SPACES AND URBAN LIFE

The first part of the report emphasises the benefits urban parks and green spaces bring to people, neighbourhoods and cities. They make an important contribution to wide, long-term social, economic and environmental progress; examples are as follows.

- *Urban regeneration and renewal*: helping to improve the quality of projects, creating community enterprise and new jobs.
- *Health*: promoting healthy living and preventing illness, by providing places for physical activities, walking and cycling.
- *Social cohesion, community development and citizenship*: encouraging involvement and local pride by giving people the chance to participate in design, management and care.
- *Education and lifelong learning*: providing a valuable resource for learning about the natural world and local environment.
- *Environmental sustainability*: countering the pollution which can make cities unbearable and unsustainable, and helping to promote ecologically sensitive towns and cities.
- *Heritage and culture*: parks and green spaces are reservoirs of

collective memory, and provide venues for local festivals and civic celebrations.

Across the country there are signs of increasing public awareness of the value of good-quality parks and play areas, and their many benefits in regenerating local communities.

So parks and green spaces should be considered at the heart of policy in all these areas.

3. CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Part two of the report considers some of the problems affecting urban parks and green spaces and how they might be overcome.

3.1. Marginalised groups

Parks and green spaces are needed to serve the whole community, especially children and young people, the elderly, those with disabilities, minorities and people in disadvantaged areas.

3.2. Investment

The report suggests that at least £100 million capital funding will be needed in each of the next five years to reverse the decline of urban parks and green spaces and to create good-quality new ones. It also suggests sources other than local authority funding for helping to deliver new resources. The case for investment is strengthened by the potential impact on other key policies, outlined above.

Additional capital and revenue funding needs to be supported by a range of non-financial improvements, such as training and skills for managers and staff, local groups and volunteers; more partnership working and community involvement; and better information systems. A new administrative body is proposed.

3.3. Partnership

Different types of partnership and community involvement are reviewed. The report suggests how more could be done to attract the private sector and local businesses into partnerships and to promote greater mutual understanding between partnerships and different providers of funding, and users and local communities.

3.4. Information systems

Fragmented information and data-recording systems create

obstacles to making good decisions. The report proposes short- and long-term remedies, and for helping to develop and spread good practice.

4. CREATING GREEN SPACE NETWORKS

Additional resources and attention will be much more effective with a strategic policy framework within which all decision-makers should operate and everyone involved can work collaboratively to deliver networks of urban green spaces.

Responsibilities split between government departments need to work better and strong local champions are essential. A more coordinated approach is called for at the national level to guide local strategies for creating networks of diverse green spaces that can benefit whole communities.

Part three makes recommendations for good practice, including for

- planners to take better account of the benefits of urban parks and green spaces and the needs of local communities
- design reviews to enhance and revive urban green spaces
- management plans and model service and maintenance contracts
- performance indicators, quality standards and reviews

Part three also suggests how planners, designers and managers could overcome concerns about misuse of local parks and green spaces by taking better account of and providing for the needs of the local community.

5. MAKING IT HAPPEN

Part four shows how and why the recommendations made in parts two and three can help deliver our wider vision of 'liveable', sustainable, modern towns and cities.

Strong civic and local pride and responsibility are necessary to achieve this vision, reinforced by a successful green spaces strategy.

The report proposes common criteria to measure quality and care, and that each site should be seen as part of a continuous network of green space to benefit the whole nation.

The report sets out the role and responsibilities of each of the main interests involved: national and local government, business, the voluntary sector, and local interests. It calls for strong leadership at the local level and greater support at national level.

It also calls for a scheme to fund enablers to work with local groups, businesses, users and local authorities to help spread good practice and create partnerships for improving local green spaces.

Finally, it calls for a new champion. It recommends the setting up of a steering committee within the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, leading to the creation of a new national agency for urban parks and green spaces.