



# Parks and Green Space Strategy

## Public Research Summary Report 2007



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## 1. Introduction

In order to provide better access to a range of good quality spaces across the city, Bristol City Council is producing a Parks and Green Space Strategy. The Strategy is due to be adopted by the Council in 2007 and will set out Bristol Parks' priorities for improving green spaces over a twenty year period.

A key part of work to develop the strategy has been to ensure that it responds to the concerns of people across Bristol and to those with different and specific needs. To this end a comprehensive public research programme was undertaken in 2005 and 2006. The result will be a strategy that will improve parks in a way that the public want and which acts on those issues that are the public's priorities as much as possible.

This report provides an overview of the results of public research used to support the development of the strategy. More detailed information on the research results can be found in the following reports which can be viewed online at [www.bristol.gov.uk/parks](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/parks):

- **Parks and Green Space Strategy research full report** – provides a more detailed assessment of the public research results;
- **Parks and Green Space Strategy Equalities Impact Assessment** – provides the results and recommendations of an assessment of the existing service provided by Bristol Parks to determine if current practice is having a differential impact on equalities groups;
- **Design-a-park report** – contains the results of a survey with 293 children and young people aged 8–12 years;
- **Bench project report** – contains the results of consultation with 176 young people aged 13–19 years whilst they were using parks and green spaces in different parts of the city;

The priorities, preferences and needs summarised in this report and those above are given as those involved in the research expressed them. The council may react to the findings in any number of ways, or choose not to. For example a finding of public concern over antisocial use of parks in evenings could be tackled by a publicity campaign, working closely with the police, providing more to do in parks and improving quality so that they are busier places, use of park wardens/keepers, altering the design of a park, altering facilities, or any number of these.



## 2. Public involvement

The public research carried out in 2005/2006 involved individuals, community groups, resident groups, young people and schoolchildren from across the city. The research also involved Bristol's community forums which act to allow the council to hear the views of citizens from all walks of life, cultures and age ranges.

It was important that the research included people that do not currently use parks and also people that do not commonly give their views about parks in other ways.



In total, 1540 people were able to take part in the more detailed research. In 2005 a series of strategy-specific questions were included in the council's Quality of Life survey, reaching a further 3880 people.

The views that people expressed were compared with views given in previous consultations on parks and green spaces, including previous Quality of Life surveys.

People were able to contribute to the Strategy research in a number of ways including completing a survey, being part of a focus group talking about specific issues, being part of a focus group in different areas of the city and through an online discussion forum. Young people contributed by being interviewed whilst in a park, through focus groups and via a computer-based survey completed in schools. Residents of 15 areas of the city were consulted and 36 group consultation sessions took place with schools, youth groups and advisory groups.

In addition to public research, Bristol Parks Forum, a network of 80 individual community groups and organisations that work to improve green spaces or have an interest in them, has acted as an advisor to the Strategy team that took the process forward. Some of the Forum's member groups took an active part in the research process.



### 3. Scope

The questions, topics and issues covered by the research were guided by the intended themes of the Parks and Green Space Strategy and the need to carry out a full equalities impact assessment for the strategy – determining whether certain groups of people in the city have particular needs that are not currently being met.

The Strategy has been developed in response to government changes to planning regulations and, alongside a new Local Development Framework (which will replace the existing Local Plan), will provide a new framework for the management and improvement of green space in Bristol. A key part of this response is the development and subsequent application of new green space provision standards for Bristol.

The strategy will affect future plans for all Bristol Parks' key services: children's play, sports, wildlife conservation, horticultural and ornamental features and park-tree management.

The scope of the public research was quite broad and many different questions were asked and issues explored. The following specific, key questions were asked to inform the main strategy themes:

- What prevents people visiting and making use of parks?
- What are the priority improvements to make in parks?
- What do people most like to do in parks?
- How far are people willing to travel to parks?
- What types of green spaces do people prefer?

The following key questions were explored indirectly to inform the main strategy themes:

- What is a “quality” park or green space?
- How much green space are people satisfied with?



## 4. Research Findings

### Key Messages

Some specific findings from the research were as follows:

- Fear over personal safety is the main reason for people choosing not to visit parks and green spaces or not to visit them very often.
- The provision of more and better toilet facilities was a need for nearly all the different groups of respondents, including children and young people. Toilet facilities should also be made fully accessible, incorporate children's toilets and be maintained at a high level of quality.
- A key public concern is the need to tackle dog mess and to prevent dogs being walked off a lead. The latter is a particular problem for disabled people and parents/carers with young children. At the same time however, "walking a dog" is one of the most popular reasons for using parks.
- The public have expressed a strong wish to see more on-site staff in the city's parks. The role of on site staff should be clearly defined to enable them to act to encourage a culture of safety on the site – acting on incidences of crime and anti-social behaviour.

■ Disabled people are particularly disenfranchised from parks and green spaces in Bristol. Bristol Parks needs to improve services for disabled people by working in four key areas:

- 1 Providing relevant training for staff**
- 2 Acting to change perceptions of safety**
- 3 Provision of better quality information**
- 4 Working more closely with disabled people when making park improvements**

- Bristol Parks needs to be better at providing quality seating and providing it in the right areas. Priority areas for improving seating, and in particular "sociable" seating eg picnic tables, are children's play areas, young people's facilities, sports facilities and Ashton Court and Blaise Estate.
- There is a need to act more quickly on the consequences of vandalism in parks with a priority on repairing facilities that are well used and park entrances. This will help prevent parks appearing unsafe and unwelcoming.
- Access to urban woodland areas and natural green spaces needs to be improved. This should include entrances to these sites and pathways within them. This will help reflect their status as the priority type of green spaces for many people and encourage greater use.

■ Play areas are an important resource and their provision should be considered alongside other key facilities and services – particularly toilets, decent pathways and entrances, seating, car parking and on-site staff. Research shows that play areas are best provided in a formal park setting and where the level of management and maintenance is higher. In spaces that are large enough, play facilities for older young people should be provided in addition to but separate from play facilities for younger children.

■ The provision of facilities for young people should reflect their need for challenges and to take risks. For young people between the ages of 11 and 16 years facilities in parks need to include play equipment targeting their age range, environments that allow the use of bikes and skateboards and social spaces to sit and talk. This is especially important to meet the needs of young women. Some social spaces should provide protection from poor weather.

### Public Satisfaction With Parks

An evaluation of the level of public satisfaction with green space over a three-year period (2002–4) found that improving the quality of parks and green spaces is key to raising overall satisfaction with them.

Over time general satisfaction levels across different areas of the city remain similar, and hence the areas in which respondents are most satisfied remain the same. When public response was considered at election ward level, it was found that there was a strong correlation between respondents' satisfaction with access to green spaces, satisfaction with amount of green spaces, satisfaction with the quality of green spaces and also with frequency of visits.

Further analysis of the results has shown that satisfaction with amount does not appear to reflect what is on the ground with regard to the amount of actual green space provided locally and that quality is the driving factor for respondents' choices ie **those living in areas with good quality parks will perceive that access to them is easier, there is more of it (quantity) and they will visit them more.**

This supports the priority of raising quality for Bristol's green spaces and brings confidence that this will result in greater overall satisfaction with them and more frequent use of them.



## 5. Answers to core research questions

### What prevents people visiting and making use of parks?

The two top issues from focus groups were the need for on-site staff in parks ie the current lack of them, and the presence of dogs on-site. The next top issues were fear of crime – a persistent theme in the research – and vandalism.

The presence of large groups of teenagers or young adults in parks is a key issue for park users. Six out of ten groups identified this as a barrier to access and three of those groups were made up of young people. However there was also strong recognition that facilities for young people are important.

Carers of disabled children highlighted an individual need for facilities for disabled children and young people. In addition, three focus groups concerned with disability access to parks gave a “holistic” comment that “parks are not welcoming”.

For children aged between 8 and 12 years only 10% stated that they don't do an activity because they don't have appropriate facilities nearby. We can assume that a lack of facilities or space isn't necessarily a problem for this group.

The main reason for children not visiting a particular space is that it is “too far away”. This is in line with other results and reinforces the finding that local spaces or local facilities are important to children and young people as well as other park users.

### What are the priority improvements to make in parks?

The data shows that the priority improvements required for all types of green space are:

- “keep it cleaner – get rid of litter and dog mess”;
- “stop it being vandalised”; and
- “providing a park keeper/regular staff presence”.

When different types of green space were considered individually, some had different priority improvements:

- Formal parks/gardens – “providing a park keeper/ regular staff presence” is the top priority improvement and flowerbeds and better lighting are higher priority improvements for formal parks than other spaces.

- Informal green spaces - “keep it cleaner – get rid of litter and dog mess” is the top priority improvement and “Improve personal safety” is a top priority.
- Children and young people's space – “providing new play equipment” in Bristol's play areas is greater priority improvement. Not surprisingly a “no dogs allowed area” is also a much greater priority for this type of space as are picnic benches and refreshments. People also highlighted a need for a separate place for older kids to hang out where play areas are provided.
- Natural green space – “keep it cleaner – get rid of litter and dog mess” is the priority improvement for natural green space. “Improve entrances/pathways” (make it easier to access) is a priority improvement only expressed for urban woodlands.
- Sports space – seating is the top priority facility for this type of space and a no dogs allowed area is also a greater priority than for other spaces.

The priority facility for respondents to the general survey was toilets followed by seating and trees.

When the results of the general survey are compared with the results from a survey with children aged 8–12 years, five of the top ten priority facilities are shared:

Facility	Priority level from top 10 given	
	Priority for children aged 8–12 years	Priority across all ages
Toilets	2	1
Picnic benches	3	10
Trees	6	3
Pond	7	6
Seating	9	2

### What do people most like to do in parks?

The favourite activity in a park for adults is “going for a walk” followed by “enjoying the environment” and “taking children to the play area”. Going to events and cycling are also popular activities. For people that chose “walking the dog”, “going for a walk” and “taking children to the play area” as an activity, this is their priority activity ie the main reason they decide to go to a park in the first place. Urban woodlands, wildlife areas and informal spaces play an important part in park users “enjoying the environment”. For each of these spaces “enjoying the environment” was a priority activity.

The activities that children most commonly do are not automatically their priority activities. “Riding a bike”, “hanging out”, “having a kickabout” and “playing a sport” are both common and priority activities. “Playing games” and “running or walking around” are common activities but not priorities. The stand-out priority activity for this age range is “having a kickabout”. “Ball games” is the most common type of game played. Children also like to use parks to “run” and “climb” but not so much to “sit” and “watch”.

### What types of green spaces do people prefer?

The results clearly showed that natural green space – space that is good for wildlife – was the overall favourite type of space. However this didn’t correlate to the type of space people used most often or wanted close to their home. In order of popularity participants voted for:

1. Natural green space;
2. Informal green space;
3. Children and young people’s space;
4. Formal green space;
5. Sports space.

This suggests that participants get a quality of experience from visiting natural green space that they value highly but don’t feel the need to have as often and are willing to travel longer distances to experience. It may also be that people prioritise these spaces for ideological/idealistic reasons rather than for personal use.

When schoolchildren between 8 and 12 years old were asked a similar question, in order of popularity, the types of outdoor spaces most visited by this group of young people were:

1. A park;
2. In my street;
3. A grassy area;
4. A woodland;
5. A sports space;
6. A play area;
7. A natural space.

The choice of “in my street” as the second most popular visited space shows the importance of local space ie space close to children’s homes.

The space used most often was a formal park/public garden that is sited within one mile of a park user’s person’s home. All types of space, apart from sports space are visited within one mile of a user’s home. This finding is supported by the response from children age 8–12 years, 69% of whom visit a space that is “very close” or “close by”.

Significantly more older people (aged 65 or over) use urban woodlands and natural areas than other types of green space. Considerably more people under 29 years of age visit play areas as their favourite space in comparison with other types of space.



### **Bristol's Provision standards**

The Parks and Green Space Strategy will set three new standards for the provision of green spaces that the council will work towards during the 20-year lifetime of the strategy. There will be a new standard for quality, quantity and distance.

- **Quality standard** – identifies an aspiration for all sites to meet a certain level of quality as determined by a thorough, objective quality assessment;
- **Quantity standard** – identifies the amount of green space of different types people living in Bristol should be able to get access to.
- **Distance standard** – identifies a maximum distance people should expect to walk to get to different types of green spaces;

An assessment of where these standards have been met in the city will help identify those areas of Bristol where investment in green spaces is most needed.

### **What did public research tell us about: Quality**

Different groups of people use parks and green spaces in different ways, seek different experiences from them and look for different facilities and features. All of these factors affect whether an individual feels that they are visiting a good quality park and as a result defining and creating good quality green space is challenging.

Quality is the overriding factor affecting the public's satisfaction with green spaces – quality is a factor which affects people's satisfaction with the quantity and accessibility of green spaces. Data from Quality of Life Surveys has demonstrated that those in areas with lower levels of green space but which are of high quality are still satisfied with the amount of space they have, while those in areas with high quantities of low quality space are dissatisfied with the amount of space they have.

A conclusion that can be drawn is that if quality is not improved any changes to access and quantity will have limited impact on people's satisfaction.

A quality parks service must also involve providing different types of spaces – from informal semi-natural green space to busy, multifunctional, formal parks; for reasons set out in the previous section. Quality must also deliver an environment that feels safe and welcoming and has obvious signs of being cared for and being regularly maintained.

Asking the public what their priorities are for improving different types of green space and what type of facilities they prefer in them will inform the council what to act on in order to increase the quality of each type of green space.

### **What did public research tell us about: Quantity**

Bristol Parks recognised that public research was unlikely to directly provide figures for an overall green space quantity standard for Bristol. However finding out the public's preferences for different types of space was achievable which could be used to support how space is allocated between these different green space types. Levels of satisfaction with the "amount of green space locally" were also assessed.

In assessing this allocation several strands of research have come together which can be split into two distinct elements:

1. The overall research programme demonstrated which was peoples' favourite type of space, which spaces were used most often and what people used them for, providing an indication of which spaces should be prioritised.

2. Additionally a consultation tool was devised to specifically obtain public preferences for different types of space. These preferences were made while being fully informed of the relative costs of providing and maintaining these types of spaces. While providing preferences, those that took part in the research were told that they could “sell” green space to help improve other areas of space and, on the whole, this was something they declined to do.

Both levels of research identified a preference for increases in space for children and young people. The overall research has identified a preference for formal parks (which include a significant amount of landscaped green space) although the consultation tool indicated that people would be willing to give up some smaller ornamental space in preference to other types. The tool indicated a slight decrease in the amount of natural green space but this was still the largest amount of green space preferred followed by informal green space. The indication is that sports space should stay at the same level.

**What did public research tell us about: Distance**

To support a distance standard for Bristol the public were asked how far they would be willing to walk (in time) to visit each of a number of different types of space. A great deal of time was put in to making sure that people of different ages, abilities and home circumstances took part and that the final result was representative of an “average” person.

For people, including young people, across Bristol, the most common reason for not visiting a park is that it is “too far away” so setting a reasonable accessibility standard for Bristol is important.

The average walking times in minutes taken from the survey and focus groups for different types of space were:

	Time (minutes)
Children and young people’s space	12
Informal space	13
Formal space	15
Sports spaces	16
Natural green space	18



**NB** It is important to recognise that these times are not to parks but types of space within parks. As already described, the research also shows that people’s judgement over how far they would be willing to walk is based on a number of factors and the results don’t show which are people’s favourite types of space.

## 6. End note

This research information has been used to inform new policies, priorities and actions in the council's Parks and Green Space Strategy, due to be adopted in 2007.

A draft of the Strategy will be subject to a full public consultation before its adoption so that it can be checked and revised if necessary. In addition, wherever possible, those individuals, groups and organisations involved in the research presented in this report will be asked to comment on the Strategy's response to it.

Bristol Parks routinely carries out customer research to monitor user needs and the public's satisfaction with its services. The information and evidence gained will be used to continually inform the Strategy as it is being implemented. This will help ensure the evidence base presented in this report does not become outdated and that policies in the Strategy remain relevant and meet the public need.





If you would like this information in a different format, for example Braille, audiotape, large print or computer disc, or community languages, please contact us:

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