

Bristol City Council

Parks & Greenspace Strategy

Discussion Paper Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: General Principles

**(Main document keying to other B&SC
Discussion Papers)**

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1. Background

Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17 (1) stated that:

- ‘open spaces, sport and recreation all underpin people’s quality of life’.
- open space provision is ‘fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives including: supporting urban renaissance, the promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion, health and well being, and promoting more sustainable development’.

Bristol Accord, Dec 2005 (2) described Sustainable Communities as:

- ‘places where people want to live and work, now and in the future’.
- meeting ‘the diverse needs of existing and future residents’;
- ‘sensitive to their environment’ and contributing ‘to a high quality of life’;
- ‘safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all’.

Bristol City Council’s Corporate Plan, 2006 - 2009 (3), refers to:

- the creation of Balanced and Sustainable Communities, as its first theme, and
- ‘developing a planning framework which encourages more balanced communities’, as an aim.

Bristol’s Community Strategy, 2006 (4), describes:

- ‘a diverse and accessible city made up of vibrant and balanced communities where everyone is valued and can thrive economically, culturally and socially’,
- ‘safe city that promotes health, learning and sustainable development - a city where no one is disadvantaged’,

Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West, 2006 (5)

- sets the overall scene within which future planning must be achieved.
- indicates the need for accommodation, in the Bristol area, over the next twenty years, of some 28,000 new dwellings, along with the employment, recreational, etc measures they will generate,
- describes the parameters, including environmental ones, within which development should happen.

Bristol Local Plan, Adopted Dec 1997 (6)

- provides the current planning policy framework for the city area. Whilst its ‘main concern is with land use and the physical and natural environment’, it recognises that ‘it is not possible to separate these matters from the social, economic and natural aspects of the area’. As a result, the plan incorporated five themes that underpin the Plan. One of these, ‘Quality of Life’ identified an objective ‘to recognise and act upon local, national and global environmental issues by adopting and implementing a long term environmental strategy to ensure a cleaner, greener, healthier and safer city both for present and future generations’.

2. Landscape Infrastructure

In the context of this paper, Landscape Infrastructure should be considered as covering those physical green elements that collectively contribute, including:

- Parks and Greenspace (covered by the *Parks & Greenspace Strategy*), including:

- Formal Greenspace,
- Informal Greenspace,
- Natural Greenspace, including woodland,
- Children’s and Young People’s Space,
- Sports Greenspace, including
 - Fixed Sports
 - Seasonal Sports

(Though not true public realm account may be made of schools and private sector facilities which may be bookable).

(The contribution of parks and green spaces is covered in greater detail in associated *Discussion Paper: Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: Greenspace*, and *Discussion Paper: Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: Trees and Woodland*.)

- Streetscape design
- Trees, including:
 - Street Trees,
 - Structure planting associated with developments (for integration, screening, shelter, etc).

*(The contribution of trees is covered in greater detail in associated Discussion Paper: **Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: Trees and Woodland**)*
- Green corridors, which may comprise some of the above,
- Green links and Greenways
- Allotments (covered by the **Allotments Strategy**)
- Communal housing block gardens and, in the context of buildings:
- Green roofs, some of which may be accessible for use.

Many of these aspects of landscape infrastructure bring cohesion to development, binding together its component built elements and uses. It will also enable places to be made that are attractive in which to live, work and enjoy recreation, whilst providing a green setting in which all this can happen.

3. The Significance of Landscape Infrastructure in planning for Balanced and Sustainable Communities

In evolving proposals for Balanced and Sustainable Communities, it will be essential to incorporate green infrastructure in a way, and to a degree, that will adequately serve the needs of both the existing and future population.

'Placemaking' for new communities, in a way that will be both liveable and sustainable, must involve striking the right balance between accommodating built development, and its landscape infrastructure.

Many aspects of planning for higher density living are beneficial, but much of its sustainability will depend on ensuring the right level of physical greening. This will be crucial in planning for future communities that have a landscape infrastructure, adequate to counter local concerns about people living on top of one another or feeling being crammed in.

However, when addressing the inadequacies of existing development, there must be care to ensure that proposed measures do not result in long-term social problems. Planners and designers have a responsibility to get this right first time, as 'retro-fit solutions' are extremely unlikely to be possible, especially if the greenspace that has been retained, is of an insufficient size to perform adequately, inappropriately located for ready access, or otherwise inherently unfit for purpose.

4. Landscape Infrastructure Performance

Much of the achievement of balance and sustainability in a community must relate to how green infrastructure as a whole can be provided, although parks and green spaces must be seen as the main element toward this being realised.

Parks and Green Spaces are key elements, and the *Parks and Greenspace Strategy* will, once adopted, guide the minimum quantity standard for each of its component types. However, in planning for future requirements, account must be taken of the projected population, as increased densities, will bring with them a correspondingly increased need for greenspace. By 2006, the number of people whose gardens are limited to 'terrace or patio size had risen from 13% to 23% (12)'; this trend will increase the need for high quality public parks and green spaces.

In achieving balance, the Strategy process is reviewing existing greenspace, with a view to establishing how it is performing, in its present form, in relation to how it should be performing in order to adequately serve the future population is there enough of it? is it in the right place? does it contribute sufficiently to diversity? i.e. is it of the right type? is it of an adequate quality? does it feel safe?

4.1 Quantity

Quantity will be guided by the minimum standard contained within the *Parks and Greenspace Strategy*. Where new residential development is proposed, it will be necessary to calculate its effect in increasing the local population, with a view to assessing whether it will generate the need for additional greenspace, or whether it can be served by existing provision, albeit with contribution under *SPD 4 - Achieving Positive Planning through the use of Planning Obligations*. Future allotments provision will continue to be guided by the *Allotments Strategy*, which sets a minimum standard of 7 plots/ 1,000 people.

4.2 Location

Whilst Bristol may have an image of being a city with attractive parks and green spaces, the reality is that their distribution and quality is variable, and that not all communities will feel that the balance is right. Although in some parts of the city, there may already be enough greenspace, some of it may either be in the wrong place or poorly located. Examples include 'backlands' sites (where natural surveillance is limited), sites that are marginal in relation to where people live, and those where access is below current standards or constricted. Future planning must also seek to avoid proposals that include 'space left over after planning' or 'SLOAP', so much a feature of post war development.

In ensuring an holistic approach to landscape infrastructure, green linkage between green spaces is particularly important, and initial feasibilities should explore the potential for such connectivity. This is particularly appropriate in respect of natural green corridors, such as the Frome Valley, and greenway links, but will also be a factor in promoting the structural tree planting of major highways, or main streets through areas to be developed or regenerated.

4.3 Diversity, including through Greenspace Type

The range of landscape infrastructural components, identified above, highlights the diverse contribution landscape may make in all its forms.

In engaging with the community, whilst evolving the approach being taken on the *Parks and Greenspace Strategy*, particular attention was given to 'testing' people's recognition of the key types of greenspace identified. As a result, Formal Greenspace, Informal Greenspace, Natural Greenspace(including woodland), Children's and Young People's Greenspace, and Sports Greenspace, and their component sub types, were seen as appropriately reflecting the range of provision ideally expected.

However, the very characteristics that give much of Bristol its inherent existing diversity, including its topography, and historic development patterns, will impose inevitable limits to what may be physically possible to change in order to bring true balance, through providing new greenspace where it is most needed.

4.4 Quality

The qualitative contribution of green infrastructure may be seen visually and environmentally. It will reinforce a development's contribution to local character through helping to bond it with its context whilst helping to 'bind' its component land uses and built elements together, bringing unity and 'sense of place'.

In addressing key aspects known to be of concern to local people, quality was also regarded a key consideration for the *Parks and Greenspace Strategy*. Criteria against which key greenspace elements could be assessed to be 'poor', 'moderate', 'good' and 'excellent' were defined in relation to each, and the approach tested with those representing park users and those involved with greenspace management. All sites have been assessed and scored, not only in relation to their current provision, condition and standard of maintenance, but also in respect of their potential. It is the gap between existing and potential scores that will be particularly influential in guiding future priorities for investment in the interests of delivering balance in quality.

4.5 Safety

An attractive green setting is likely to be a safer one. Through being attractive, site will be better used, and contribute to higher community self esteem and sense of civic pride and local 'ownership'.

5. Quality of Life and Management of the Environment

... an introduction to the Discussion Papers

The quality of life - related benefits of trees and green space, in bringing a strong physical green framework to communities, can be seen in a range of ways, though not all are measurable ones. Their presence will also have significant contributions in respect of management of the environment. A strong landscape infrastructure, that is either integral to new development, or, as far as is possible, reinforced within existing communities, will bring a range of benefits. The following papers discuss this contribution from a number of perspectives.

Discussion Paper: Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: Health and Wellbeing

- Physical health and wellbeing from increased fitness through exercise and lifestyle Improvement.
- Psychological health and well-being.
- Improved health through healthy eating.
- Healthier children & young People.
- Optimising air quality and air cooling. Combating of the 'Urban Heat Island' effect.

Discussion Paper: Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: Trees and Woodland

- The value of trees and woodland, including:
 - attractive environment and healthier lives,
 - local and regional economy,
 - improving difficult urban land,
 - useful products.
- Contribution to
 - the attractiveness of the city,
 - cultural importance and local distinctiveness,
 - strengthening communities
 - community safety and crime reduction,
 - emotional well-being,
 - physical well-being,
 - shelter,
 - air quality and cooling,
 - noise reduction,
 - shade provision,
 - ecology,
 - economy,
 - rain storm protection and flood control,
 - ground stabilisation,
 - remediation of contaminated land, and
 - climate change.
- Challenges associated with protecting existing and establishing new trees.

Discussion Paper: Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: Wildlife

- European, national, regional and local planning context and legislative context.
- Fundamental significance of wildlife.
- Specific contribution of wildlife, including:
 - better living environments and health benefits,
 - getting in contact with nature (enjoyment and economic benefits),
 - enjoyment of wildlife through the media,
 - cultural importance and local distinctiveness,
 - artistic inspiration
 - community development and cohesion
 - natural products
 - ecosystem functions

- contribution to global life support
- flood and erosion control,
- water provision, and
- pollution control.

Discussion Paper: Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: Water

- contribute to flood control, including through the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS).

Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities Discussion papers that cover other perspectives are under consideration but at this point have not been prepared. These may include:

***Greenspace* (subject to there being no undue duplication of *Discussion Paper: Landscape Infrastructure in Balanced & Sustainable Communities: Trees and Woodland*)**

Potential scope:

- the value of greenspace, including:
 - attractive environment and healthier lives,
 - local and regional economy,
 - improving difficult urban land,
- contribution to:
 - the attractiveness of the city,
 - cultural importance and local distinctiveness,
 - strengthening communities,
 - community safety and crime reduction,
 - emotional well-being,
 - physical well-being,
 - ecology,
 - economy, and
 - rain storm protection and flood control,

Economy

Potential scope:

- Economic factors associated with good quality landscape, including:
 - attraction of investment,
 - enhancement of property values,
 - the benefits of a green outlook to workers as evidenced by reduced sickness absence, and
 - reduced costs to the national health service arising from faster patient recovery in hospitals with a green outlook.

Equality and Inclusion

Potential scope:

- Public greenspace as a resource free to all to use.
- Engagement of local communities in planning, design and management of greenspace.
- Local availability of facilities for recreation.

Greener Movement Corridors

Potential scope:

- Improvement of movement corridor environments for people.
- A physically greener setting for key routes, including greenways.

Security and Safety

Potential scope:

Subject to reference to: ***Bristol Greenspace Design Guide - Section 6.***

Stewardship

Potential scope:

- The contribution of good quality landscape management.

6. Diversity and Local Distinctiveness

The *Bristol Accord* refers to sustainable communities as '*diverse, reflecting their local circumstance*', and emphasises that '*there is no standard template to fit them all*', whilst the *Draft Regional Spatial Strategy* (5) acknowledges that '*landscape provides an important setting for settlements and contributes to local distinctiveness and a sense of place*'.

The earliest and fullest consideration of how greenspace provision can contribute to diversity will be crucial to 'Placemaking'. An area's Landscape Infrastructure, and the Greenspace it includes, will, where adequate, contribute to both diversity and local distinctiveness, within a community, and across the city. It will also both reinforcing the character of existing areas, and, through creative planning and design, create new distinctiveness to newly developed areas.

The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (5) recognises the importance of planning with local centres in mind '*in providing choice and reducing the need to travel to other centres*'. If development within the city is to be sustainable, planning will either need to reinforce the role of existing local centres, or replace them with new centres that respond to what has become the heart of the communities they will need to serve.

In this context, a local area will, ideally, have at its centre, a Green Space at the centre of the community. In its optimum form, it will:

- function as a readily identifiable social focus or 'hub', where people can meet. (Traditionally a town square or green. Historically, squares were recognised centres of communities, often edged by significant public buildings and associated with social events and activities that brought people together, and made for a high level of animation).
- be surrounded by public facilities such as shops, that have a frontage onto this space; or with overlooking residential properties.
- reinforce its status, and in turn, help 'anchor' the community's 'sense of place'.
- bring legibility and sense of orientation, through being at the heart of a community,
- be the point where routes into the community converge; e.g. it may be the bus interchange.

7. Optimum relationship between Built Development and Greenspace

It cannot be assumed that existing parks and greenspace are in a location or of an aspect conducive to optimum use. (e.g. Filwood Park may not be ideally located being substantially bounded by the backs of houses)

Where all or part of a park or greenspace becomes the subject of development in part of the area which is in undersupply, replacement green space must be sought in a suitable location.

Greenspace that is attractive, and, through being well used, safer, should be seen as a central element in enabling a community to have true social vitality.

Where appropriate to provide greenspace that more effectively serves the needs of the community, it should be located and designed in such a way that development addresses it rather than backs onto it. Similarly, the roads that access the fronts of houses should also edge the greenspace, much as is the case with many traditional parks.

Where new development is proposed, the need for greenspace, and its component types, shall be tested against the standard contained in the Parks and Greenspace Strategy with a view to remedying deficiencies, whilst avoiding the unnecessary creation of new 'space left over'.

The contribution of greenspace provision, whether existing or proposed, shall be judged in relation to how effectively it serves the local community, particularly in respect of accessibility and recreation provision.

8. Conclusions

Many of the benefits that can be derived from a sound programme of Balanced and Sustainable Communities projects will be readily apparent. The momentum and commitment

required to deliver them, will, out of necessity, demand radical solutions to significant problems. Nevertheless, it will involve challenge and counter-challenge before both emergent balance and sustainability can stand up to audit. The content of this paper has set out a range of considerations that relate to the part green infrastructure must play, and its key conclusions are as follows:

- The calculation of proposals' viability must embrace the big picture described in this paper, developers being required to look fully into aspects of sustainability and long-term cost-benefit.
 - In many cases, true sustainability will only arise if the project area is large enough and radical enough to address inadequacies in existing development (e.g. inefficient layout).
 - Whilst recognising the attractiveness of short term receipts arising from land sales, longer term costs (national and local) that would otherwise arise from having an inadequate green infrastructure, must be part of an overall cost benefit analysis.
 - The minimum standard for greenspace types for local use, as laid out in the *Parks and Greenspace Strategy*, needs to be considered in conjunction with other landscape infrastructural requirements as described above.
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References

- 1 *Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation - ODPM, 2002.*
- 2 *Bristol Accord: Conclusions of Ministerial Informal on Sustainable Communities in Europe - ODPM, 2005.*
- 3 *Bristol City Council: Our Corporate Plan - BCC, 2006 - 2009.*
- 4 *Bristol's Community Strategy: Towards a Local Area Agreement - The Bristol Partnership, 2006.*
- 5 *Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West, 2006 - 2026.*
- 6 *Bristol Local Plan, Adopted Dec 1997.*
- 7 *First Deposit Proposed Alterations to the Bristol Local Plan, Feb 2003 (Draft for Consultation)*
- 8 *Proposed Alterations to the Bristol Local plan - First Deposit (Draft for Consultation) - Feb 2003.*
- 9 *Green Spaces, Better Places - Urban Green Space Task Force, 2002.*
- 10 *Your Parks - Urban Parks Forum - Oct 2002.*
- 11 *The Value of Public Space - CABE Space - 2003*
- 12 *The Great British Gardener: A Profile of Gardens in 2006 - Horticultural Trades Association - 2006*
(More specific references are listed under the associated topic papers referred to above).

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