

Bristol City Council

# The Bristol Green Space Design Guide



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Cover image: An early sketch for steps and ramp into Castle Park.

## Contents

	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>Who is this Guide for?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Local People and Stakeholders</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Greenspace Design within Context</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Design to Greenspace Type</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Historic Greenspace and Cultural Landscape</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Built Development and Greenspace</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Increasing Greenspace Security</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Natural Greenspace</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Children's and Young People's Space</b>	<b>26</b>

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## Introduction

The importance of best design practice in creating an optimum green space resource is universally recognised, and promoted strongly by national organisations such as *CABESpace* and the *Landscape Institute*.

First and foremost, it is important to consider, whether from a design, planning or management standpoint, an individual green space to be part of the city's overall green infrastructure. Where possible, a green space should also be seen as physically linking with other green space sites, irrespective of whether they are of a type covered by the strategy, and, bonding with green infrastructure such as strong highway planting as part of a citywide green network, and, part of the *Forest of Avon* Community Forest.

In designing green space a site must be considered within its context, with fullest consideration of the wider setting, access routes, and surrounding land uses. It is also vital to understand the dynamics of how it will be used, and by whom. When looking afresh at existing greenspace sites, it may well be appropriate to research their historic development. This will establish a proper basis for informing future design decisions that respect their original integrity.

The requirement for landscape architects to embrace this, is just as relevant when making proposals for existing green space, as it is when generating schemes for new sites. New greenspace creation may well be generated by new residential development, where the need has not already been provided by the existing resource.

Achievement of a *high quality environment* is a key aim of the City Council and its partners, and the objective to improve the quality of Bristol's green spaces will be a vital element. The associated aim, of achieving *balanced and sustainable communities*, must also ensure best design and site planning practice is in place at the earliest stage when development is proposed.

In gauging how design should raise the standard of existing green spaces across the city, it is readily apparent, from quality assessments already carried out, just how variable they are in quality. Not everything can be attributed to shortcomings in their management. It is clear that the layout of many sites, has not, at any stage, been the subject of any conscious, cohesive, overall design process. Typically, sites have suffered from incremental, or ad hoc changes, with little or no design involvement. In remedying this, and bringing consistency much of the future emphasis must rely on best design practice in close harmony with planning long term management.

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## Who is this Guide for?

The guide is for all those directly or indirectly involved with the planning, design and implementation, and long-term management of greenspace.

*The Bristol Green Space Design Guide*, will:

- guide developers and planning officers with regard to standards that are to be delivered through the planning process, including by way of *SPD 4 - Achieving Positive Planning through the use of Planning Obligations*,
  - guide landscape architects engaged to design integrated schemes for the refurbishment of existing green spaces, or when designing new ones,
  - inform officers who will act as clients, about design considerations to be incorporated in a brief,
  - enable those responsible for greenspace management to appreciate how design should contribute to raising quality whilst being realistic about future maintenance provision.
  - enable local people and stakeholders to appreciate considerations associated with greenspace design,
  - enable decision-makers and allied professionals to appreciate the factors that must come together to achieve best greenspace design practice,
  - explain the link that greenspace design provides between planning and greenspace management, and
  - stimulate a shared awareness, of designer and landscape manager, of long-term design and management considerations, with a specific view to their sustainability.
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# 1. Local People and Stakeholders

## 1.1 Earliest Engagement

- 1.1.1 The earliest engagement of local people and greenspace stakeholders will be crucial to the design process if the outcome is to respond to local needs and ambitions, and to be 'owned' well into the future.
- 1.1.2 Whilst sound professional advice will need to apply throughout, local participation in decisionmaking will enable people to have a stake in an outcome. Such an early involvement of the community will help encourage a shared desire to actively engage in protecting, nurturing, improving greenspace well into the future.



*Mancroft Avenue Open Space, Lawrence Weston: April, 2007 saw the earliest engagement of local people in the process toward upgrading this existing greenspace proposed to contain natural play.*

## 1.2 Inclusiveness and Working toward Consensus

- 1.2.1 The City Council's Equal Opportunities policy provides the basis for all its actions, and processes associated with the design of greenspace, which must be of benefit to the whole community, must be a particularly important element.
- 1.2.2 The approach in designing greenspace must be an inclusive one, one of enabling sites to be accessed and enjoyed by all, through embracing the fullest range of diverse needs. In this context, community involvement must be genuinely inclusive, ensuring that the interests of all are to be fully represented, and that no groups are disadvantaged.
- 1.2.3 Particular care will be needed in ensuring that the interests of black and ethnic minority groups are represented. Design, within the context of ongoing management considerations associated with individual sites, shall also embrace the specific needs of disabled people. It will also be important to ensure that considerations for both younger and older people are adequately embraced, whilst ensuring that the interests of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people are treated integrally.
- 1.2.4 Consultation techniques must ensure that as much as possible is illustrated in order to minimise reliance on explanatory text. Where text has to be incorporated, current

best practice in respect of font size and type shall be applied, in the interests of legibility by the visual impaired.

- 1.2.5 Engaging local people in design also enables the effects of factors such as: territoriality, potential conflicts in access, use and activities, and the need for defensible space, to be explored collaboratively. However, there must also be a preparedness for divergence in aspirations and views, resolution of which may need to be achieved through consensus building.

### **1.3 Strengthening Shared Pride in the Local Environment**

- 1.3.1 Such engagement of people in planning the environment in which they live, will support the design of high quality greenspace to which they will relate. The best outcome will sustain, high community self esteem, through providing greenspace that contributes to a positive local image and identity, and a continuing sense of achievement.

### **1.4 Community Involvement toward increasing Safety and Security**

- 1.4.1 Local participation will strengthen the ability to transform an environment from one by which people have become alienated, associated with crime, disorder and fear of crime, and which is distinguished by vandalism, graffiti and ugly security measures. Local knowledge will be vital toward finding solutions that result in sustainable solutions, rather than local or isolated 'fixes' that merely displace problems.
- 1.4.2 An inherent sense of 'ownership' by the community will contribute to safeguarding an environment that will be popular, feel safe, and generate local pride. These considerations are reinforced under **Security**.

Further References:

- *The Equal Opportunities Policy - Bristol City Council - Adopted April 2003.*
- *Environmental Access Standards - Bristol City Council - 2006.*
- *Disability Discrimination Act, 1995*

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## 2. Greenspace Design within Context

### 2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 Whilst *Planning Policy Guidance 17* acknowledges that 'it would be wrong to impose standard approaches' it asserts that 'carefully developed urban and landscape design guidelines can help ensure that developers take full account of the need for 'placemaking', and do not simply seek to comply with accessibility, quality and quantity standards at the lowest possible cost'.

### 2.2 Placemaking

- 2.2.1 Where landscape design is to be an element of comprehensive area regeneration, a landscape architect should first be involved in overall spatial planning, to help ensure that the relationship between built development and greenspace provision is optimum, and to advise on how landscape elements can 'knit' everything together. Landscape planning and design should be regarded as an inherent part of the process that contributes to the strategic overview of how greenspace, and built uses, of land, should relate to one another, in serving the future needs of the community. In this way, it can be a significant contributor to 'Placemaking', whilst playing a vital role in creating balanced and sustainable communities.
- 2.2.2 High quality design and management of local greenspace will contribute significantly to reversal of the effects of degradation and deprivation, symptoms of which include vandalism and antisocial behaviour. Green space that is attractive and safer, through being well used, should be seen as a central element in enabling a community to have true social vitality.
- 2.2.3 'Placemaking' will involve landscape architects working as part of a co-ordinated team of planners, urban designers, greenspace managers, and other specialist disciplines, collectively able to bring comprehensive, creative and sustainable solutions. The process must also engage the community in working toward a common vision, of which well designed green spaces and landscape infrastructure will be a vital part.

### 2.3 Landscape Character

- 2.3.1 A community's greenspace will contribute significantly to its overall character, and where appropriate, an assessment of local character should be carried out with a view to it influencing planning, design and management decisions, in the context of the surrounding area. For large or otherwise significant sites, or those which fall within an area the subject of comprehensive regeneration, the production of a landscape character assessment may be a prerequisite.
- 2.3.2 Whilst this guide does not set the parameters for carrying out a landscape character assessment, it is important to recognise that in an urban area, what constitutes character must be assembled from an assessment of landscape elements as they relate to the broader built environment context.



*Left: Contribution of the Railway Bridge and street furniture in reinforcing the setting of Lover's Walk adjacent to Cotham Gardens.*

*Below: Clifton Downs at Sion Hill, demonstrating how greenspace and adjacent built environment can collaborate in bringing unified local character.*



2.3.3 The assessment process involves mapping, classifying and describing variations in character, with a view to identifying identifiable character areas to a point that their boundaries can be plotted. A character area will be assessed to have sufficient cohesion through the elements that bind it together, enabling it to be identifiable as distinct from its neighbours. Consideration will need to be given to the predominant underlying or inherent contribution of elements, such as:

- geology
- landform
- townscape
- street patterns
- built environment (period of development),
- buildings, collectively or, where significant, individually (design unity, scale, form, use of materials, etc)

- parks, squares, greenspace, highway associated landscape, etc (formal/ informal/ natural, scale, visual contribution)
- private gardens
- quality (general impressions: positive ranging to eroded through neglect, dereliction, vandalism, graffiti, etc)
- hard landscape construction (design unity, detailing and materials colour, texture), incl: walls: brick, stone (Pennant, Bath, Limestone, etc)
- soft landscape
- trees (species unity apparent, scale, route hierarchy reinforcement, space defining)
- street: formal avenues (e.g. *Broad Walk, Thicket Avenue, Promenade*)
- parks/ squares: formal and informal
- private gardens: visual contribution
- hedges
- remnant rural/ other native hedgerows
- private garden hedges (effect upon public realm) (e.g. *privet hedges bringing unity in Hillfields and Sea Mills*).

2.3.4 Assessment embraces making judgements about the character and quality of the landscape, and the analysis of forces for change. This will provide an informed basis for future decision-making.

## 2.4 Local Distinctiveness

2.4.1 Where a green space is at the heart of a community, providing public realm that is 'pivotal' in providing a social focus, design may reinforce its status and in turn help 'anchor' the community's 'sense of place'. Such a space, whether it is a park, or a square, or village green', will, in providing a memorable focus within the urban fabric, assist in enabling orientation within, and legibility of, the community to which it relates. Historically, squares were recognised centres of communities, often being edged by significant public buildings and associated with social events and activities that brought people together, and made for a high level of animation.

*Right: Fishponds Park is a rarity in contributing to Fishponds 'sense of place' on one of the city's key roads. It's location associated with an important local shopping street contributes to 'sense of place'.*



2.4.2 In evolving proposals that respond appropriately to a site's context, good design, either for a new green space, or improvement of an existing one, will reinforce local character.

2.4.3 An understanding of what makes the overall location, within which a green space is set, distinctive, should have a strong bearing upon the design approach. This, in conjunction with a brief that responds to what type of space is required to satisfy

local need, will influence the degree of formality or informality, or whether provision will be natural in emphasis, responding to a site's inherent ecological value or, where necessary creating habitats.

- 2.4.4 Irrespective of the approach taken, a well designed park will be highly influential in establishing a positive image for the locality, and reinforce community identity and self esteem. It will also contribute to an area's attractiveness to people considering a move, and to investors able to bring economic stability.

## **2.5 Green Corridors and Greenspace Linkage**

- 2.5.1 It is also at this point, that it will be so important to achieve optimum linkage; that is between green spaces as part of a network, between greenspace and other key public realm areas, and how effectively routes with green spaces link up.
- 2.5.2 The strategic contribution of greenspace sites, or their component types, individually or collectively will have a strong bearing on how sites are both planned and designed. The process of design may well contribute to increasing the range of types of greenspace accessible locally, bringing greater diversity in experience available to the local community.
- 2.5.3 The ability to establish connections between sites, or understand how each may perform as part of a local green network, or 'Greenprint', will guide how opportunities may be fully exploited when designing a specific greenspace. Many sites' contribution is a complementary one that arises from being part of a green corridor; *Eastville Park*, *Snuff Mills Park* and *Oldbury Court Estate* provide a succession of linked types of greenspace within the Frome Valley landscape corridor. Where actual physical green linkage can be achieved or reinforced, there are gains to both people, through extending the diversity of experience and activity, and wildlife, through connectivity between habitats.
- 2.5.4 It is in this context that it will be important to consider how all forms of movement may serve green spaces, the uses and activities with which they are associated, whilst providing links with surrounding areas. Of particular significance is the role green corridors, linear parks, and 'legible' linkage between green space sites, may each provide through containing greenways (strategic routes for non-motorised forms of transport, including walking, cycling and horse-riding).

## **2.6 Greenspace and the Land Uses that surround it**

- 2.6.1 In planning future greenspace, or when reviewing the quality of existing sites, it is vital to consider the relationship between greenspace and built development. In most cases the aim must be for the association to be a strong one, although there may be exceptions, for instance, where screening or buffering of visually intrusive or otherwise incompatible (e.g. as a noise source) land use may be required.
- 2.6.2 Particular attention is important, to ensuring that residential development addresses (rather than turns its back on) greenspace. This arrangement ensures a much safer feel to the green space for its users who are more likely to sense that greenspace activities are at least the subject of informal surveillance. The ability to achieve this will help reverse the 'backlands' feel that has arisen from abutting development where houses turn their backs or sides on greenspace. In conjunction with having a row of houses that face green spaces, it is also important to have the road and pavement which serves them, providing part of the common boundary. Whilst this is likely to entail the use of railings to protect the edge of the green space, again the safer feel of it use will arise from constant peripheral movement.

2.6.3 Similarly, in the event of proposals for offices or light industry to abut greenspace, the opportunity for a positive design treatment with units that face the greenspace should be fully explored. Again, access between unit frontages and park should be a consideration as it is with housing, and the design quality of buildings must be appropriate to their setting.

2.6.4 Irrespective of the nature and form of associated built development, it will be important for the landscape infrastructure in which it is set, to provide a bond with the greenspace's own enclosing vegetation framework. However, this must be done in a way that retains the distinctive qualities of each, and certainly avoiding any risk that the greenspace will end up feeling like a campus to the development.

**2.7 Refurbishing, or introducing new elements within existing historic parks and estates**

2.7.1 Many of the city's historic estates, parks and estates had originally been the subject of designed layouts, based on clear principles. See chapter: **Historic Greenspace and Cultural Landscape**

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## 3. Design to Greenspace Type

### 3.1 Formal Greenspace

- 3.1.1 In establishing the primary function of greenspace sites, or that of identifiable zones within them, each have been mapped according to definitions contained within the *Parks & Greenspace Strategy - Typology*. This has enabled a general appreciation of the range and distribution of each type across the city, with a view to assessing whether it may be appropriate to address any local imbalances.
- 3.1.2 An awareness of what constitutes 'type', will therefore enable those characteristics that comprise a particular type to be reinforced through design. In some locations, subject to local character and the physical constraints of a site, it may be appropriate, through sensitive design or review in management and maintenance, to 'move' a site or part of a site from one type into another.

### 3.2 Formal Greenspace

- 3.2.1 The formality of Formal Greenspace, if not derived from 'design' may largely stem from the organised nature of its layout. Typically sites have a network of paths that enable people to pass through, or circulate within. Their vegetation 'structure', notably including trees, is likely to have been the result of some level of design arrangement that reinforces the sense of enclosure of the park, defines the spaces within, and indicates path hierarchy. Often the result is a blend of both formal and informal. Ornamental planting, decorative structures (e.g. *Bandstand - Castle Park*), statuary, etc may well also be a feature of parks and gardens.
- 3.2.2 A typical formal greenspace to most people will typically be based on Victorian examples such as *St Andrews Park* and *Greville Smyth Park*. However, more recent sites such as *Redcatch Park*, or those which have only recently been laid out, such as *Monks Park* will contain many of the same basic elements and effectively serve the same purpose.

Formal Green Space should also be seen as covering the following sub types:

- 3.2.3 **Civic Space:** Typically, Civic Spaces are likely to be the subject of use by a range of users, including: visitors to the city centre, central area residents, office workers and shoppers. Those which are in prominent central locations, such as the *Queen Square* area, will be attractive to tourism.
- Formal Squares and Greens which are of civic significance, notably in the city centre; e.g. *Queen Square, King Square, Portland Square, Brunswick Square* and *College Green*.
  - Major predominantly hard paved spaces such as: *The City Centre Promenade, New World Square, Anchor Square, Lloyd's Arena, St James Barton 'Bear Pit.'* Though not visually true green space, their function is such that their significance within this type has to be acknowledged.
- 3.2.4 **Formal Community Focus Space:** Whilst Civic Space relates more to city centre locations, this sub type covers locations beyond the central area (whether in the inner city, or in the suburbs) where a green space functions as the focus or provides a hub within the community. Such sites may fulfil this function in conjunction with other key facilities. At best, and with an appropriate treatment, a site may function as a large community's 'town square'. Investment may be needed to raise the quality of a Community Focus Space in order to realise its

status, and contribution to local character. Typically, sites that have the potential to become Formal Community Focus Spaces have been Informal Greenspace, having lacked investment to fulfil a more significant function when they were originally laid out; e.g. *Barnard Park*, *Henbury* is opposite the shops; *Sea Mills Square* is in the middle of *Sea Mills* and surrounded by shops; *Gainsborough Square*, *Lockleaze* is an acknowledged focus in *Lockleaze* and has shops and a church fronting onto it; and *Ridingleaze Green* at the heart of Lawrence Weston has shops and a church abutting it.

- 3.2.5 **Churchyards/ Former Church Yards/ Burial Grounds with legitimate public access:** Such sites, with legitimate public access, are included within this sub type where they have the appearance and function, as described above, of parks and gardens. *St. Stephen's Churchyard*, in *St. Stephen's Avenue*, just off the City Centre and *St. Paul's Church yard*, *Coronation Road*, *Southville* are examples of this.

### 3.3 Informal Greenspace

- 3.3.1 The informality of Informal Greenspace, will be attributable to a more informal in layout and character. They will typically contain path routes where the principal emphasis is more on informal recreation. Where a single path connects each end of a linear green space, its alignment, though being reasonably direct, will typically meander and be graded to sit comfortably within the landform. In larger spaces, networks of paths will also be informal in nature, and provide options for casual, perhaps contemplative, rather than purely directional use.
- 3.3.2 Where nature conservation considerations predominate, or where public use relates strongly to a site's natural experience, what might otherwise be regarded as an informal green space will be designated as **Natural Green Space** (described below). In some cases, it may be possible, through wildlife sensitive management, or, where appropriate, habitat creation, to enable the re-designation of a site from an Informal Green Space to Natural Green Space.
- 3.3.3 Informal greenspace within a housing context, though excluded from the scope of the Parks and Greenspace Strategy, and noted under **Incidental Residential Green Space** below.

Informal Green Space should also be seen as covering the following sub types:

- 3.3.4 **Green Corridors:** Green corridors may be large scale and strategically significant, in having greenway routes passing through them. The narrow corridor which contains the *Bath - Bristol Railway Path* is a prime example. Another example is the *Lower Trym Valley* as it links *Blaise Castle Estate* with *Sea Mills Harbour*. They may also be smaller and local in scale such as *Trymside Open Space*, *Southmead* and *Crow Lane Open Space*, *Henbury*. This sub type covers those sites which are informal green spaces with their corridor form contributing a strong secondary purpose.
- 3.3.5 **Informal Community Focus Space:** Such sites may have the character of a village green. They may fulfil their function, as focuses, in conjunction with other facilities; e.g. *Shirehampton Green* is in the middle Shirehampton, adjacent to its shopping centre. In some cases investment may be needed to raise the quality of a Community Focus Space in a way that appropriately establishes its status, and contribution to local character. At best, and with an appropriate treatment, a site may function as a large community's 'town square'.

- 3.3.6 **Churchyards/ Former Church Yards/ Burial Grounds with legitimate public access:** Sites, with legitimate public access, include: *St. John's Burial Ground, in St. John's Lane.*

### 3.4 Natural Green Space

- 3.4.1 Natural Green Space, includes sites, or parts of sites, where the predominant function is one of providing people with access to, or the experience of, nature. The city has developed along a series of hills and river valleys and its wildlife and geology contribute to the variety of natural experience that green space sites are able to provide. In some cases, sites benefit from retaining a rural feel, despite having been absorbed as the city has expanded. These sites will typically be rich in habitats, diverse in flora, and provide abundant wildlife interest, in a way that will be apparent to users.

Natural Green Space should also be seen as covering the following sub types:

- 3.4.2 **Churchyards/ Former Church Yards/ Burial Grounds with legitimate public access:** Sites, with legitimate public access, include: *Clifton Parish Churchyard abutting St Andrew's/ 'Birdcage' Walk, in Clifton.*

### 3.5 Children's and Young People's Space

Children's and Young People's Space should also be seen as covering the following sub types:

- 3.5.1 **Equipped Children's Play:** Formal, equipped play areas, 'stand alone' as unassociated with other green space; e.g. *Charles Place, Hotwells.* In most cases, sites are defined and enclosed by railings and gates to exclude dogs. An exception to this is the *Clifton Downs* play area which remains open due to the character of the site.
- 3.5.2 **Wheels Facilities:** Wheels facilities are designated, formally laid out areas for use as:
- **BMX** bike tracks, (e.g. *St George Park, Hengrove Park*).
  - **Skateboard** facilities with ramps, etc. (e.g. *Dame Emily Park*)
- 3.5.3 **Teen Areas:** Teen areas are those which provide for teenage activity or social interaction and include **Youth Shelters**, as places to meet.
- 3.5.4 **Games Areas:** These include:
- **Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs)**, provided for informal activity, including kick-about, as opposed to those covered in **Active Sports - Fixed** (below), which are the subject of formally booked, organised use. There are sites where the distinction between **Sports Surfaces, Hard and Artificial** (below) and **Teen Areas - Multi-use Games Areas** (above) is not clear cut. *The Dings Park, MUGA*, though the subject of partial local formal booking arrangements for competitive games, coaching sessions, etc, was provided principally to serve local teenagers, rather than to function first and foremost as a formal sports facility; it will therefore be designated as the latter.
  - **Basketball** facilities with hoops and hard surfacing (e.g. *Brandon Hill Park, Hillfields Recreation Ground*)

### 3.6 Active Sports - Fixed

- 3.6.1 This type refers to areas within parks and green spaces, and their associated buildings (changing rooms, pavilions, etc) that are permanently laid out, year-round active sport facilities, and which are the subject of formal booking/ leases to sports clubs. The designated area may include associated amenity landscape elements such as ornamental planting, and seating areas for spectating (e.g. *The Ardagh Tennis and Bowling, Horfield Common*).

Active Sport - Fixed should also be seen as covering the following sub types:

- 3.6.2 **Tennis Courts:** e.g. *Canford Park; Eastville Park; and Greville Smyth Park; The Ardagh, Horfield Common.*
- 3.6.3 **Bowling Greens:** e.g. *Canford Park; Eastville Park; and Greville Smyth Park; The Ardagh, Horfield Common.*
- 3.6.4 **Sports Surfaces, Hard and Artificial:** This category includes Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs). These are typically hard surfaced, enclosed with high fencing and marked for multi-purpose use, including for 5-a-side football and basketball. Occasionally they may have artificial surfacing. e.g. *Owen Square.*

As noted above, under **D3 Teen Areas - Multi-use Games Areas**, the distinction between that classification and this one, may not be clear cut. In most cases, clarity will arise from judgement on whether the facility has been provided principally for formal sports provision, or if it exists to satisfy the needs of local teenagers. Some clarity may be available in respect of the nature of bookings.

### 3.7 **Active Sports - Seasonal**

- 3.7.1 This type is unique in being the only designation which may 'overlay' another type. It applies to seasonal pitches; i.e. Football and Rugby in the Winter, and Cricket in the Summer, which will only be in use when formally booked for fixtures.

Active Sport - Seasonal should also be seen as covering the following sub types:

- 3.7.2 **Football Pitches**
- 3.7.3 **Rugby Pitches**
- 3.7.4 **Cricket Pitches**

Other types excluded, and therefore not covered by this Design Guide, from the *Parks & Greenspace Strategy* Typology:

### 3.8 **Allotments**

### 3.9 **Adventure Playgrounds**

- 3.10 **Schools Grounds**, including:  
**Children's Play Areas**  
**Active Sports - Fixed**  
**Active Sports - Seasonal**

### 3.11 **Cemeteries and Crematoria Landscapes**

- 3.12 **Residential Green Space**, including:
- **Communal Residential Gardens** for residents use only.
  - **Children's Play Areas** for residents use only.

- **Incidental Greenspace** where true public access is not promoted.
- **Sheltered Gardens** associated with Sheltered Housing.

3.13 **Highway associated Landscape Infrastructure and Mitigation**

3.14 **Streetscape**

3.15 **Homezones**

3.16 **Development associated Landscape Infrastructure and Mitigation**

3.17 **Development associated Landscape Infrastructure and Mitigation, including screening.**

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## 4. Historic Greenspace and Cultural Landscape

### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Bristol has a magnificent legacy of historic parks and gardens. They range in scale from the small garden sites such as *Red Lodge*, to extensive historic designed landscapes such as those at *Ashton Court*, *Blaise Castle*, *Kingsweston* and *Oldbury Court Estates*. They are an important but vulnerable part of the Bristol's heritage, a subject of civic pride and a source of public enjoyment. They are also a great asset for education and tourism, have special aesthetic qualities, and make a significant contribution to the appreciation of local and national history and art. They offer diversity in the city, and characterise the distinct social and economic developments of different neighbourhoods. These landscapes are of high relative quality and are sensitive to change. They constitute a finite and important resource.
- 4.1.2 It is important to recognise that, within environments such as these, ill-considered or unplanned interventions can readily give rise to damage and loss of their special qualities. Consequently, when considering change to the historic environment, it is essential to understand what matters, and why.



*Queen Square: One of Europe's largest Georgian squares, recently restored.*

## 4.2 Existing Policy

- 4.2.1 Bristol's historic parks and gardens are listed within the local *Gazetteer of Historic Parks and Gardens in Avon*, and appear as an *Appendix to Policy NE 9* in the *Bristol Local Plan, Adopted December 1997*. A number of these sites are also considered of national importance, and as such are registered on the *English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest*. The *Local Plan* proposes the protection of these sites on the basis of information in the *Gazetteer and the English Heritage Register*.
- 4.2.2 *Bristol Local Plan Policy NE9* states that: '*historic parks and gardens and other designed landscapes of national and local importance on the proposals map and described in the appendix will be protected. Development which would adversely affect the character or appearance of historic landscapes and, in the case of nationally important sites, their settings will not be permitted*'. Though not adopted, *First Deposit Proposed Alterations to the Local Plan, Feb 2003 (Draft for consultation) Alterations*, intended removal of '*in the case of nationally important sites*', as impacts upon the settings of locally important settings are also regarded as important to avoid.
- 4.2.3 Where historic sites have become degraded, *Policy NE10* states that: '*development which conserves the integrity of and restores historic parks, gardens and other designed landscapes of national and local importance will be permitted*'. Whilst adding that: '*priority will be given to pursuing restoration of: Stoke Park, Brentry House Garden, Kingsweston House Grounds, Blaise Castle Estate, Arnos Vale Cemetery and Oldbury Court Estate and Frome Valley*', progress on some of these has already been made. Priorities will continue to evolve for these and other sites.

## 4.3 Research and Assessment of Historical Development

- 4.3.1 Understanding a landscape, means 'reading' the fabric in order to analyse its design, construction, alteration and use through time, and then placing it in a wider context in order to assess its significance and sensitivity to change.
- 4.3.2 From the outset it will be necessary to consider engaging specialist consultants to research and assess the site and the available historic information.
- 4.3.3 This will provide an analysis of the site's development, and can be used as basis for making decisions and recommendations. These may be in respect of how design should affect restoration, and/ or integrate compatible modern uses. Conservation strategies may also be needed to establish whether the emphasis is to be on repair, restoration, or reconstruction. It will also inform the preparation of a management plan.

## 4.4 Historic Survey

- 4.4.1 Change to the historic environment should be founded upon an appropriate understanding of the site's historic development. A thorough field survey of all surviving features should be carried out, in conjunction with the identification of any documented material on elements that have been lost. Survey should therefore cover:
- landscape design; original plan and any subsequent changes,
  - archaeological features,
  - architecture and buildings,
  - vegetation, including,
  - information, where available, on original plantings, or where not, compilation of planting plan based on surviving specimens,

- development of planting, identifying any changes at key historic points,
- ecology, and
- management history.

4.4.2 Many sites have already been the subject of 'desk-top' historic survey, which can be made available for analysis. The need for further research, sufficient to guide restoration and design decision-making should be established before proceeding. The ability to survey others, will depend upon the availability of historical records, including those at the *Bristol Record Centre*.

4.4.3 The boundaries of nationally important sites, as currently defined by *English Heritage* should also be ascertained.

#### **4.4 Historic Assessment**

4.4.1 A site's inherent historic value relies entirely on the authenticity and integrity of its topography, the design of its landscape including how planting has been used, and its architectural fabric. In researching a site's historic development, it will be important to establish the degree to which it has retained its original intactness, and reveal the original design intentions.

4.4.2 Where subsequent change has been made to the original layout, it will be necessary to identify the sequence with which any modern additions or alterations have been incorporated, establish any rationale behind their inclusion, and assess whether or not such changes are in harmony. Changes, such as replanting, landform remodelling, or the addition of a constructed feature, may well have been insensitive and ill-considered. Where their effect has resulted in damage to the appearance and authenticity, and historical and ecological value of the site or that of its elements, an historic assessment must guide how proposals can restore an overall integrity.

4.4.3 Over decades, there is also likely to have been a general deterioration, which, where un-arrested by regular maintenance, is likely to have resulted in more significant repair. In certain locations, much of a site's fabric may have become prone to physical abuse, including vandalism. Recommendations that arise from assessment may well identify the need for the substantial restoration of certain elements, in conjunction with management measures aimed at promoting conspicuous care and enabling positive community engagement.

4.4.4 Where archaeological or ecological considerations apply, proposals will need to be guided by sensitive management measures that are carefully reconciled with historic restoration. This is the case, for example at *Castle Hill, Blaise Castle Estate*, where tree and scrub encroachment resulted in archaeological concerns about impact from roots on historic fabric.

#### **4.5 Conservation Proposals**

4.5.1 Where the need for repair to the historic fabric has been identified, new work should match or be compatible in respect of quality and appearance. Use of original materials should be assumed, in conjunction with the appropriate application of techniques that will result in restoring the integrity of the historic and cultural landscape.

4.5.2 Remedial options will be necessary where insensitive modern initiatives, inappropriate use of materials, or change effected by natural processes, (e.g. elm losses), have resulted in erosion of the original scheme.

4.5.3 Where identified by an historic assessment, proposals should cover the removal of any elements found to erode the integrity of the original design, with appropriate reinstatement.

#### **4.6 Integration of Modern Uses and Activities, Elements, Materials and Techniques**

4.6.1 Decision-making on the incorporation of modern uses, design elements, materials, or techniques will need to have been carefully assessed, and have a thoroughly justified basis. Any future benefit will need to have been clearly balanced against appearance, authenticity, archaeological, historical and ecological values.

4.6.2 Particular attention should be given to how modern features have been/ are proposed to be, sensitively integrated within the landscape. These include:

- children's and young people's elements (play areas, skateboard/ bmx, youth shelters, etc). It may be that the reintroduction of a lost bandstand can function as an appropriate youth shelter.
- paths/ greenways (widths, alignment, materials, etc),
- buildings, including kiosks.

Where assessment confirms any inadequate incorporation, proposals should include removal and reintegration.

4.6.3 Proposals for access and information that complies with the Disability Discrimination Act will require particular care, and reference should be made to *Easy Access to Historic Landscapes*, published by *English Heritage/ Heritage Lottery Fund, Oct 2005*.

4.6.4 Where damage to constructed features is to be repaired, or failed elements replaced, restoration detailing should be carried out honestly, and without attempt to simulate the effects of ageing.

4.6.5 Sites that have, subsequent to their original layout, suffered from the direct impact of significant physical intrusion (e.g. *Jessop Way upon Greville Smyth Park*), proposals should be guided by recommendations arising from historic assessment. Judgement is likely to involve site specific judgement as to whether site integrity is best served by honest minimal or non intervention, or new design that reinforces the modified envelope of the site. Advice in respect of the impact of the *M32* which dissects *Stoke Park* has been to retain the openness and informality inherent to the parkland. It was accepted that any tree planting along the motorway edge would fail to sufficiently address impact, whilst effecting further severance of the parkland beyond.

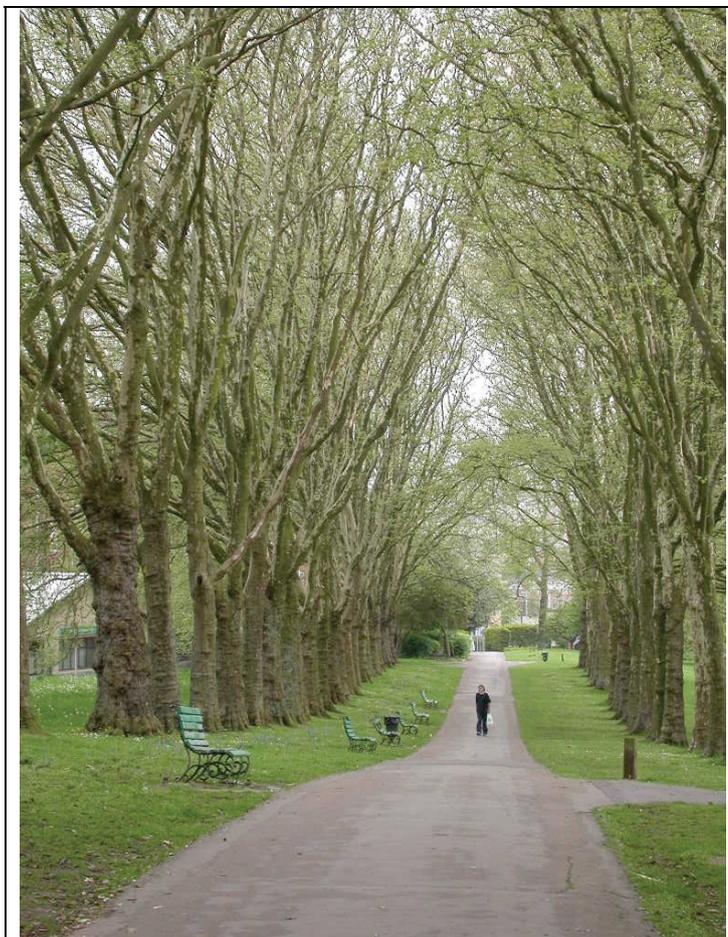
#### **4.7 Vegetation structure**

4.7.1 In the event of trees or other vegetation requiring replacement, the presumption should be in favour of planting original species in original positions. The use of alternatives will require justification in relation to the intended effect of the original planting layout. Where this is unavoidable, perhaps due to disease, or impact from change in ground conditions, similar alternative species should be considered.

4.7.2 Where existing trees have failed, their stumps should be removed to enable replacements to be planted in the same location.

4.7.3 The specification of plants should favour stock selected to maximise establishment and long-term quality over 'instant impact'.

- 4.7.4 The temptation to introduce additional trees should, without justification, be resisted. A number of historic parks have suffered from incremental or ad hoc planting. Whilst this will have impaired the integrity of the original structure, it can detract from the aesthetic experience. An overpopulation of trees can also result in overshadowing and gloominess, especially if tree management has failed to keep canopies of mature specimens from becoming too dense.



*St George Park: The Plane Avenue is a distinctive and impressive feature of the park, and demonstrates the importance of fully understanding the existing vegetation structure as a prerequisite to justifying addition.*

## 4.8 Addressing Conflicting Objectives

- 4.8.1 Conflicts between requirements in conserving archaeological, ecological, historic and landscape values, will be inherent to some historic sites. Where some or all are apparent, design and management will need to be guided by recommendations based on careful assessment of their relative significance. There may be a range of options rather than a single solution, but ultimately measures will need to incorporate any reconciliation, ensuring that, as far as possible, the historic integrity of the site is not compromised.

## 4.9 Future Management

- 4.9.1 Whilst this guide is concerned with design, this should be in conjunction with an appropriate programme of management and well planned renewal. All this can be brought together with the preparation, involving all stakeholders, of an effective management plan. This process should embrace the fullest consideration of:

- future capital and revenue costs, as they will rise following restoration,
- compatibility of uses and activities with each part of a sensitive site,
- access, especially as use will increase following restoration.

Refer also to: [Guidance sheet: Historic Greenspace and Cultural Landscape](#)

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## 5. Built Development and Greenspace

### 5.1 Residential Development and Greenspace

- 5.1.1 In planning future greenspace, its consideration is best made in relation to a broader review of built land use. This should particularly apply within regeneration areas, or otherwise, in areas of the city where development is likely to occur.
- 5.1.2 The potential for new residential development and, for its street to address parks, should, wherever possible, be explored. Ideally, this should occur on each of its boundaries. *St Andrews Park* is overlooked on each of its four sides by residential properties, whilst *St George Park* and *Victoria Park* benefit similarly to a significant degree.
- 5.1.3 A direct rapport between greenspace and development will be mutually beneficial. As discussed under **Security**, people will be more inclined to use greenspace that, through being overlooked, and having an edge with movement and activity, benefits from natural surveillance. Equally, the fact that property that fronts onto greenspace attracts higher valuations, bears out the premium that people put on an attractive green outlook. This arrangement of built use, in relation to greenspace, has to be more sustainable than the many existing 'backlands' locations, where greenspace is wholly or substantially surrounded by the rear of built development.
- 5.1.4 Particular benefits can arise from a similar association of retail development, with greenspace. The presence of shops, libraries, churches, cinemas and other buildings in regular public use, will all bring natural surveillance.
- 5.1.5 Opportunities for office development to address greenspace may be less obvious. However, research has also demonstrated high motivation and low sickness levels amongst office workers able to see external greenery from their desks; the benefits that can arise will therefore be mutually beneficial.



*Monks Park: This demonstrates where new properties have been arranged to overlook the park, creating a more positive relationship between greenspace and development.*

## 5.2 Light Industrial Development and Greenspace

- 5.2.1 The benefits of orienting the fronts of light industrial units in relation to greenspace may be less evident. However, it is believed that a positive association between both uses can be achieved through high quality planning and design, with a view to eliminating any need to mitigate against visual, acoustic, etc impacts.
- 5.2.2 Where existing greenspace sites abut established industrial units that are impactful (e.g. *Fishponds Trading Estate*, where it abuts *Ridgeway Playing Fields*), opportunities to address this should be explored in the event of any redevelopment initiative. Where impacts (visual, acoustic, or other) are likely to continue, the emphasis must be on reviewing the effectiveness of current mitigation.

*Right: Ridgeway Playing Fields. Past site planning has failed to enable a positive relationship between light industrial development and greenspace. Where this is the case, design of the greenspace site as a whole needs to address this by more creative means than pure reliance upon a single row of widely spaced trees along the common boundary.*



## 5.3 New Greenspace in the context of Built Development Proposals

- 5.3.1 In locations where existing greenspace is in insufficient supply to meet the needs of a population that will be increased by proposed new development, an appropriate amount of new greenspace will be sought.
- 5.3.2 Opportunities for the reconfiguration of open space as land use, in relation to that of built land uses, may arise from initiatives for comprehensive local area regeneration. Where this is the case, the *Parks & Greenspace Strategy* shall guide what may be required by way of quantity and type. However, in meeting quantity requirements for a larger area, the priority shall be to provide one large high quality shared amenity, rather than distribute provision inadequately throughout the area.
- 5.3.3 Setting a specific minimum size for new provision is difficult, as requirements and contexts vary from one part of the city to another. However, *Bristol Parks* are able to advise, providing examples of benchmark sites that appear to perform well in a variety of different locations and circumstances. These will help inform the realistic minimum functional size required for new provision within the development locality.

## 5.4 Hub Greenspace

- 5.4.1 The presence of a greenspace at the heart of a local community can reinforce its significance and, where appropriate, status as a district centre. Traditionally this function would have been served by a town square or green, as a recognised centre for communities. They would typically have been edged by significant public buildings and associated with social events and activities that brought people together and made for a high level of animation.

5.4.2 In its optimum form, such a greenspace will:

- function as a readily identifiable social focus or 'hub', where people can meet,
- be surrounded by the frontages of: publicly accessed facilities such as shops, residential properties, or a combination of each,
- reinforce local status, and in turn, help 'anchor' the community's 'sense of place',
- bring legibility and sense of orientation, by being at the heart of a community, and
- be the point where routes into the community converge; e.g. it may be the bus interchange.

5.4.3 Examples of 'Hub Greenspaces' within the city that already match this description, in full or in part, are extremely limited. *Fishponds Park* and *Barnard Park*, *Henbury* are prime examples of greenspace associated with local centres, including shopping streets. Others have the potential to provide that role, although their status is less apparent given poor quality and design of the spaces and buildings that edge them; examples of those include: *Gainsborough Square*, *Lockleaze*, and *Ridingleaze*, *Lawrence Weston*. It is understood that the original intention for *Glencoyne Square*, *Southmead* to fulfil this function was compromised when the decision was made to reorientate shops to face *Greystoke Avenue* instead.

## 5.5 Buildings within Greenspace

5.5.1 Historically, parks have contained buildings that accommodate functions that either relate to management (lodges, gatehouses, depots) or activities (bandstands, boathouses, kiosks, shelters, sports pavilions, etc) that have attracted public use. Whilst their presence is no less relevant, their progressive loss of significance over the years may be associated with an overall deterioration in the fabric of parks. The refurbishment of existing parks should therefore respond to any review in how existing buildings may be used, with a view to their restoration. Similarly, new park layouts should seek to integrate buildings appropriate to future use. Recent examples include the *Sports Pavilion*, *Netham Park* and *Play Building*, *Hengrove Park*.

5.5.2 Whilst buildings will need to be the subject of a carefully prepared brief that reflects their intended use, it will be vital for their design to respond to the character of the site and its setting.

## 5.6 Greenspace Linkage

5.6.1 The connectivity of sites is important in promoting increased use of greenspace whilst increasing linkage of the city's wildlife network.

5.6.2 It may also be appropriate to regard an abutting greenspace site as 'added value' through its capacity to effectively extend it. Such an extension may be a visual rather than physical one, but this too can increase the site's green setting quality, especially within a built-up environment.

Refer also to: [Guidance sheet: Built Development and Greenspace](#)

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## 6. Increasing Greenspace Security

### 6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 The government continues to place considerable emphasis upon the quality of planning and design, and the need to optimise community safety needs to be central to the design of all public realm areas, including greenspace.
- 6.1.2 Local authorities are required under *Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3* to ‘*promote design and layouts which are safe and take account of public health, crime prevention and community safety considerations.*’
- 6.1.3 Under the *Crime and Disorder Act, 1998*, Local authorities are also responsible to consider the crime and disorder implications of all their activities, and ensure that their actions minimise opportunities for crime and fear of crime.
- 6.1.4 Many of the *Secured by Design* principles that are associated with public realm within well designed residential developments are equally applicable to greenspace design, and have been shown to reduce levels of crime, fear of crime and disorder. Their application is intended ‘*to increase the likelihood of detection and to reduce the fear of crime.*’

### 6.2 Integrated approach

- 6.2.1 Any potential conflicts between security and other key project objectives need to be resolved at the earliest stage of planning and design. ‘Retrofit solutions’ may be impossible, and are unlikely to be budgeted. In this respect early dialogue is urged between the design team and the *Police Architectural Liaison Officer*.

### 6.3 Community interaction

- 6.3.3 As explained under **Local People and Stakeholders**, the design process should engage local people and greenspace stakeholders. In a number of contexts, it is necessary to transform an environment in which people: feel alienated, associate with crime, disorder and fear of crime, and which is distinguished by vandalism, graffiti and ugly security measures. Initial community involvement and sustained interaction, will help guide solutions that respond to locally experienced problems, whilst people’s future participation, will create an optimum setting for continued greenspace security.

*Right:*

*Lamplighter’s Marsh:  
‘Shirehampton Greens’  
practically engaged in the  
planting of an orchard on the  
first day of spring in 2005.*

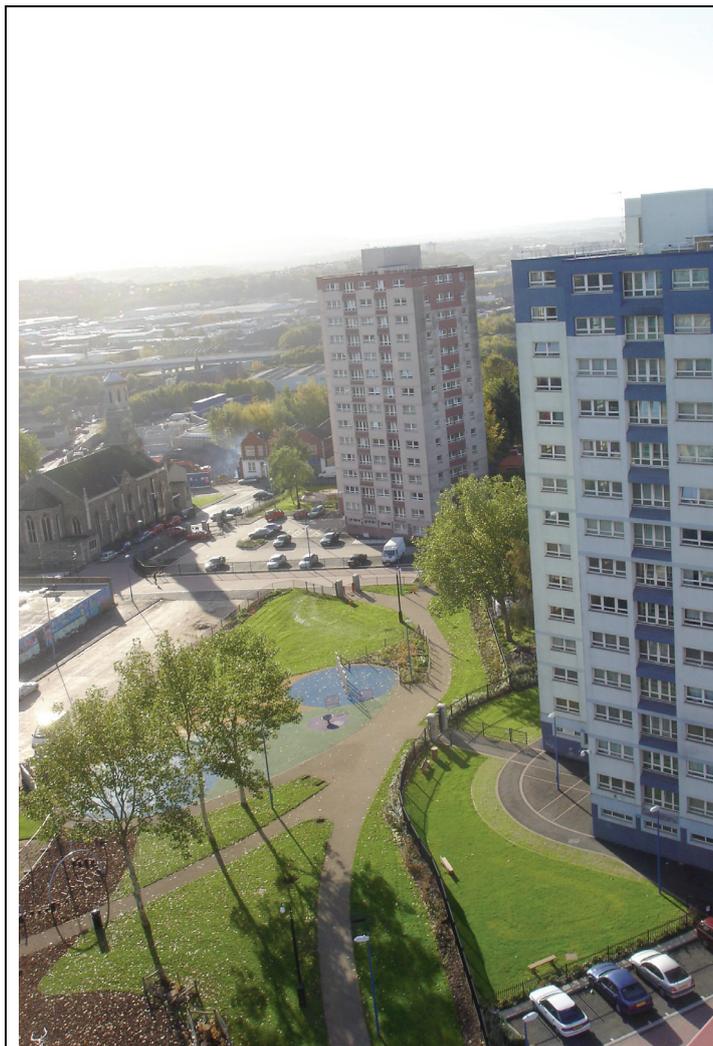


## 6.4 Natural Surveillance

- 6.4.1 The importance of ensuring that green spaces, and the routes that pass through or next to them, are frequently used and open to view, is fundamental in designing for natural surveillance. In this way, the green spaces and the activities they contain can become substantially 'self policed'. The design of access to new greenspace should also ensure that routes are not narrow, pinched or with hidden corners that will engender unease.
- 6.4.2 A positive interface between land use and greenspace is therefore strongly urged. Whilst particularly valuable to have houses facing greenspace on all its sides, the presence of a street that forms a common edge, is also beneficial. The presence of parking not only brings activity to the park edge, it is also reassuring to residents. Where possible the incorporation of balconies to properties to overlook the greenspace is (through pre-application dialogue as part of the planning process) to be encouraged. (e.g. Morley Road corner of Dame Emily Park, Lyndale Road edge of St George Park).

## 6.5 Public - Private Access/ Uses Clarity

- 6.5.1 In planning and designing greenspace in relation to surrounding uses and activities, it will be fundamental to distinguish public areas in relation to semi-public and private ones. This may necessitate physical definition, including by enclosure and control of access, in order to eliminate any ambiguity in use.



*Left:*

*New urban park in Barton Hill demonstrates how design has resulted in removal of any ambiguity in what is public and what is private.*

*The communal garden around the base of Beaufort House has its own enclosure, whilst the public park, which includes equipped children's play, is seen stretching out alongside.*

## 6.6 Escape

- 6.6.1 The design of greenspace and its access points must take into account the need for users to feel at ease, eliminating any sense of being cornered or trapped. Ideally sites should be overlooked on each side, and with good visibility from surrounding streets or other public areas; the creation of 'backlands' sites, or corners of sites where there is no clear escape must be avoided.

## 6.7 Avoidance of Resident Disturbance and Loss of Privacy

- 6.7.1 Whilst it is important for greenspace to feel overlooked by surrounding development, that should ideally face onto it, the proximity of public areas must not undermine defensible space. Such a concern will arise if a park or greenspace is unrealistically small in size in relation to the uses and activities it must contain. If a greenspace is not large enough, or otherwise suitable, for activities planned, or likely to be attracted, it is likely that disturbance will impact upon nearby residents. Tensions such as this are known to arise on small sites become meeting places for large groups, where play, and the noise it generates is intrusive.
- 6.7.2 In planning local greenspace provision, careful consideration must be given to adequacy of the area is needed to accommodate local recreational facilities, plus the extents of any buffering distance needed to avoid any negative impacts upon local residents. Such distance is needed to eliminate the risk of stress upon people who live nearby, that would otherwise arise from noise, physical intrusion (e.g. balls retrieved from gardens) loss of privacy, etc. Few minimum distance yardsticks exist, and irrespective of this, judgement is still necessary as to how inherent site characteristics may also apply. The nature of sound received by residents may also be a factor of landform and building masses, etc that may enclose the source.

## 6.7 CCTV

- 6.7.1 Generally, CCTV has been introduced within retail and residential contexts, and only to a limited extent within parks. Were its introduction to be considered for a greenspace site, considerable care would need to be applied regarding how this might be achieved without impact that compromises design integrity and attractiveness.

Refer also to: [Guidance sheet: Security](#)

### Further References:

- *Crime and Disorder Act, 1998.*
  - *Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3.*
  - *Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3 Companion Guide 'By Design: Better Places to Live.*
  - *Safer Places - The Planning System & Crime Prevention - ODPM - 2004.*
-

## 7. Natural Green Space

### 7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Bristol has a rich wildlife heritage with a great diversity of sites, species and habitats of significance at an international, national and local level. Wildlife and wild spaces are found throughout Bristol, forming an integral part of the fabric of the city, bringing pleasure and inspiration to many people and adding to the attractiveness and liveability of the city. Peoples' association with wildlife is a complex but vital consideration. Design and management for nature conservation will optimise human appreciation of, and engagement with wildlife.

### 7.2 Ecological Survey

7.2.1 The starting point must be the collation of any existing ecological data on a greenspace and its context. Further survey may be necessary if surveys already carried out, are not in sufficient depth to inform proposals sufficiently; there may also be a need to carry out further survey(s) in seasons when fauna is active and when all flora can be detected.

### 7.3 Ecological Analysis

7.3.1 Assessment of data will provide the basis for recommendations upon which guidance for a particular site will apply. Such guidance will steer relative emphasis on:

- protection of existing habitats,
- enhancement through sensitive management, and
- design, with appropriate habitat creation.

### 7.4 Wildlife and Wildlife Habitats

7.4.1 Whilst expected that wildlife and wildlife habitats shall be protected for certain species and habitats, this is required by law. Current legislation is referred to on **Guidance Note: Natural Greenspace** although advice should always be sought from the Nature Conservation Officer.

### 7.5 Habitat Protection before Habitat Creation.

7.5.1 Normally, the presumption must be in favour of protecting and enhancing, through sensitive management, existing habitats, eliminating, as far as possible, any impact.

7.5.2 Mitigation measures, including habitat creation, should only be considered where impact is unavoidable. In the context of new development, compensatory measures may involve off-site habitat creation to connect with on site provision.

7.5.3 Valuable existing landscape features, including native hedgerows, woodland, trees, tree groups, watercourses, ditches, ponds, etc, should, where possible be retained and integrated within any new proposals. Where appropriate, as elements that contribute to character, they may be incorporated within a new landscape structure, thereby enhancing local distinctiveness.



*Left: Callington Road Nature Reserve.*

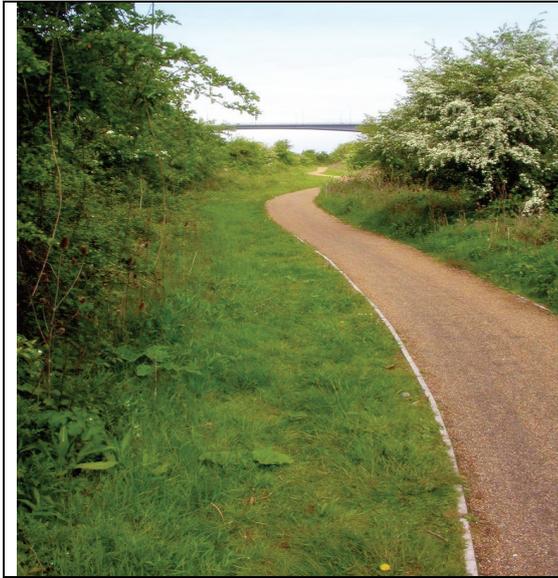
*Newly formed dew pond habitat in conjunction with sensitive nature conservation management.*

## 7.6 Human Use Pressures

- 7.6.1 In designing for the introduction of new uses or activities that may affect a green space's main habitat types (woodland, hedgerows, grassland and wetland), consideration should be given to:
- potential impacts of change in uses or activities, upon habitats (e.g.introduction of new paths), and
  - the capacity of each habitat to accommodate additional visitors; factors may include; habitat size, location, aspect, topography, and fragility, in relation to the current context and degree of use.
- 7.6.2 Attention should be given to designing to exclude public activity that would have an unacceptable impact upon habitats. These effects can be more devastating still where the illegal intrusion of motorbikes, or 'torching' of cars is likely to be destructive. Public access by way of footpaths, bridleways, cycle routes must also be compatible with the wildlife value or biological function of the habitat type. Uncontrolled access may leading to a proliferation of desire lines resulting in excessive trampling of ground vegetation and general disturbance.

## 7.7 Raising Awareness

- 7.7.1 In formulating proposals on certain key sites, or those with particular ecological vale, it may be appropriate to incorporate either on site interpretation, or, leaflets that communicate their significance.



*Left:*

*Lamplighters Marsh where sensitively integrated access improvements have improved public access to and enjoyment of rich wildlife habitat.*

Refer also to: [Guidance Sheet: Natural Greenspace](#)

Further References:

- *Biodiversity by Design - Town & Country Planning Association - Sept 2004.*
-

## 8. Children's & Young People's Space

### 8.1 Play Environment

- 8.1.1 In creating stimulating play environments, albeit within the context of careful risk assessment, opportunities should be taken to offer a range of challenges for differing age groups and abilities.
- 8.1.2 Ideally, play facilities of any type should be set within an attractive landscape, as that too will enrich the overall play experience. The 'atmosphere' and unique 'sense of place' of the play context can also stimulate children's imagination.
- 8.1.3 Designing the overall play environment provides a creative alternative to typical 'off the peg', template-based, play schemes derived largely from a stiff, equipment led, approach, one that tends to make one play site look just like many others. Design should also bring proposals that are 'tuned in' to the environment into which they are to be set.
- 8.1.4 Play environments should provide both open and shaded areas. They should also be sheltered from the wind.

### 8.2 Locational Considerations

- 8.2.1 Play areas should 'sit well' within the overall landscape, and utilise landform sensitively. Even where topography has to be modified to incorporate a play area, the landform shall be contoured to secure harmonious integration.
- 8.2.2 The siting of areas suitable for either equipped and natural children's play, shall be carefully selected to benefit from natural surveillance. Suitable locations will include those visible from nearby well used areas, within the park, or from adjacent areas of public activity (streets, shops, etc) or buildings. However care shall be taken to ensure facilities are sufficiently far enough from housing to avoid forms of nuisance that arise from proximity.
- 8.2.3 Play areas should be a minimum 600m<sup>2</sup>. Ideally a high proportion of this area should be grassed and arranged in a way that encourages social games and blankets on the ground.

### 8.3 Landscape setting

- 8.3.1 Children's play provision should not be seen purely in terms of providing equipment. Indeed, the best sites for children are generally acknowledged to be those that are set within an attractive landscape, whether the emphasis is a 'natural' one or a designed one. Apart from being popular with children, such a setting will be more conducive to a longer stay by supervising carers who will enjoy the pleasant surroundings and facilities.
- 8.3.2 The interest of both children and carers will be sustained for a longer period if the quality of the overall experience is right. An optimum setting, whether as part of an formal layout or an informal one, whether within a park, an informal green space or a housing landscape, will attract children and their carers, at best functioning as a key destination or 'honeypot'.



*Left:*

*Established play area at Cotham Gardens that was designed in close collaboration with the Redland and Cotham Amenity Society, demonstrates the value of an attractive landscape setting.*

## 8.4 Accessibility

8.4.1 Play facilities and their locations should be inclusive so that disabled children and/or disabled carers are able to access and use them in an integrated way. Access to and around facilities, and to items of equipment must comply with current standards.

## 8.5 Security

8.5.1 Consideration of parents and carers must be central to play design and management. It is they who should be seen as being in control. It is they who should decide whether or not whether they will take a younger child to a play area, and it is they who should encourage an older child that a site is suitable to visit without their supervision.

8.5.2 Both approaches to, and the facility location itself, must have a safe 'feel'. In some cases this may arise from a play location's proximity to regular activity, perhaps (for instance, housing that overlooks or a busy street - in each case without being too close). The nearby presence of CCTV may also be of comfort to children/ carers.

8.5.3 Play area access points should be as visible and prominent as possible, both from locations offering natural surveillance within the site and externally. Parents and carers will benefit from reassurance that their children cannot leave the site without their awareness.

8.5.4 Good visibility within, and into and out of play areas must be provided. This will restrict the use of plants to those that will not exceed 1.5 metres in height, with a reasonable level of maintenance.

8.5.5 Equipped play areas should be enclosed and gated to be dog-free and provide some control against small children wandering off unaccompanied.

## 8.6 Safety in use

8.6.1 The design layout of a play area should be such that opportunities for informal surveillance by parents and carers is encouraged. This may be in the form of central sitting or picnic areas that enable observation in a way that avoids

interference by parents and carers in the play process; such a consideration generally discourages linear play area arrangements. Nevertheless, proposals should still incorporate sufficient space to enable parents and carers to share in young children's play experience.

- 8.6.2 In selecting plants, awareness is needed in respect of avoiding the use of plants that are significantly toxic, cause irritation, or, at worst result in injury (e.g. through their thorns).
- 8.6.3 For equipped play areas, the requirement for an enclosed **dog free** environment of at least 600m<sup>2</sup> should be assumed, This allows for social games and for visitors to put blankets on the ground within the overall playground design. However, for locations conducive to informal play in a stimulating environment, this may not be desirable, or practical, and the emphasis must be on the presence of carers.
- 8.6.4 Where the design of play areas within inherently steep greenspace sites necessitates change in level, adjacent to, or within a play area, care shall be taken to ensure detailing for safety from unprotected falls.

## **8.7 Risk**

- 8.7.1 Design, in conjunction with management, must also address the issue of risk. There is now a widespread acknowledgement amongst those who advise on play, that, an understandable aim on the part of the play industry, to reduce accidents to a minimum, had progressively resulted in more sterile play environments, that were lacking in many of the characteristics now recognised to be important to child development through play.
- 8.7.2 In some respects this approach to provision may well have contributed to accidents, arising from children's general exposure to hazards, without their having had the opportunity to experience managed risk within a play environment.

## **8.8 Attractive and welcoming play**

- 8.8.1 As explained under '**Security**' above, parents and carers are seen as crucial to an optimum play experience. It is therefore important for play areas, and the green spaces within which they are set, to be attractive and welcoming. They should provide a good first impression, and stimulate visit after visit. Whilst not all sites can sustain the proximity of a café, the provision of benches and seats or an area of grass can increase the attractiveness of a play area to adults and result in longer stays.

## **8.9 Equipped Play Areas**

- 8.9.1 Whilst standards BSEN1176 and BSEN1177 cover the manufacture, layout and installation of play areas, they should only be treated as guidance. Legal considerations are such that current risk assessments must always be in place to cover any hazards that might arise in use.
- 8.9.2 Equipment should be selected for its suitability for different age groups, and arranged within the site in a way that separates provision intended for each. This will be important to avoid conflicts between age groups and dominance by one at the expense of another.

- 8.9.3 Optimum choice of equipment, and in the range of items selected for an individual site, and for each age group, is crucial in the achievement of the fullest play value to be derived from that site. Many local sites will only be used by local children on repeat visits, so getting the right mix of equipment will be essential if their interest, and desire for challenge, is to be sustained over the years they are growing up.
- 8.9.4 Equipment selection should result in diversity in experience, as children's individual play needs will influence their choice in play. Whilst popular activities include spinning, swinging, sliding, rocking and climbing, some children's interest may be less predictable. Where items are likely to be well used, it will be important to provide features in sufficient numbers to reduce frustration arising from undersupply. For this reason, multiple swings provision is likely to remain a requirement for most sites. The selection of play structures that incorporate a range of activities should also take into account the need for a range of features for sliding, rocking, climbing, etc.



*Left:*

*New urban park in Barton Hill includes an attractively laid out children's play area.*

Refer also to: [Guidance sheet: Children's & Young People's Space: Equipped Play Areas](#)

## 8.10 **Natural Play**

### **Introduction**

- 8.10.1 Many children growing up in some of the most urban parts of Bristol, have little contact with, or understanding of, natural processes.
- 8.10.2 The concept of 'natural play' is currently an evolving and explorative one, but one that is intended, to some degree, to address this deficiency. The outcome should enable children to interact with the landscape. It is also believed that this sort of play will encourage children to manipulate the very fabric of their environment.
- 8.10.3 The appropriateness of a particular approach in laying out a natural play area will be heavily dependent upon the environmental and social context in which it is to be set. The degree to which proposals go in exposing children to risk will depend much upon how risk is assessed for a particular site. That may draw upon a site's inherent natural surveillance, and recent local experience of child behaviour, and expected levels of adult care.

### Natural Materials

- 8.10.4 Children should have the opportunity to learn from natural experiences gained from play with both 'natural' and artificial materials, in combination. Examples are provided on: [Guidance sheet: Children's & Young People's Space: Natural Play Areas](#)

### Seasonal Awareness

- 8.10.5 Whilst seasonal change may not coincide with points on the calendar, an awareness of what may be involved in that change as the year proceeds, and from one year to the next, is an important feature of children's experience of their environment. Design may optimise an understanding of this change.
- 8.10.6 The flowers of different plants will come and go with each of the seasons, and the recognition of those which appear at different times of the year, will provide markers of time. Children will come to associate each season with leafing out, with flowers and fruits, and leaf fall, and may connect them the activities of birds, butterflies, insects and other wildlife at different times of the year. When leaves change colour and fall to the ground in the autumn, children may gather them, form them into heaps and jump into them.

### Engaging the Senses

- 8.10.7 Sensory play involves one or more of the five senses: touch, sight, smell, taste and hearing, and it is regarded as a crucial element in children's development. The use of materials in an undirected, explorative way will improve their creative skills and raise their self confidence. Cognitive skills will also be developed as children gain from what they see, how they experiment, including through the manipulation of materials, and solve problems.
- 8.10.8 **Sight:** The Natural Play environment provides a range of opportunities for children to develop through their use of sight. They may experience the reflection of their faces in shallow pools, and will see the range of colours and textures of all the materials that surround them.
- 8.10.9 **Smell:** Children may pick up much from smells in their environment. These may come from the flowers and foliage of a range of vegetation, including trees, shrubs and herbs. The smell of new mown grass is also particularly distinctive.
- 8.10.10 **Sound:** True natural play is associated with an environment attractive to wildlife generally. Plants that provide cover for birds and berries upon which they will feed should be incorporated within the wider setting; where habitats attract a large number of bird species, children will be more likely to experience their song throughout the year. The introduction of nesting boxes, bird houses and feeders will also attract birds to settle nearby. In certain contexts it may also be appropriate to introduce materials that make sounds like chimes and Aeolian harps, although proximity to residential property will be a constraint. Such elements can also help children, and carers, who have visual impairments, to orientate themselves within the site. The sound of bamboo, wood or metal chimes may be ambient. Otherwise, bells may be hidden within trees and bushes.
- 8.10.11 **Taste:** In some sites, it may be appropriate to include plants, including edible fruit and herbs. Although plants that are toxic must not be used.
- 8.10.12 **Touch:** Tactile surfaces to paths and walls may introduce children to a range of textures.

### Stimulating physical activity

- 8.10.13 The arrangement of a well laid out area will provide opportunities for physical activity that will be beneficial to physical skills, and conducive to fitness through exercise. In its most straight forward form designed circulation and landform should result in encouraging: **running, jumping, rolling, tumbling**. The integration of a carefully placed felled tree trunk may enable **balancing** to be experienced, whilst opportunities for **climbing** may be introduced (e.g. ladders and climbing walls), or arise naturally on sites including *Observatory Hill, Clifton Downs*, where there are rocks and rock slopes.

### Enabling creativity

- 8.10.14 The incorporation of loose natural or artificial materials, incl. sand, clay, water, will trigger creative play, including: **digging and mixing**. Children's learning will also benefit from opportunities to creatively manipulate those materials individually and in combination.

### Circulation, Exploration and Self expression

- 8.10.15 Narrow trails that wind their way through, around and between natural features, and connect activity elements, may stimulate a child's desire for exploration.

Paths may be 'secret', but this will relate to opportunities for concealment, and the degree to which this may be possible will depend upon how risk is assessed.

Subject to risk assessment of security related hazards, some sites may be suitable for **chasing and hiding**, and, where appropriate, **den making** (e.g. willow tunnels and enclosures).

A range of materials may be considered for paths, ranging from the creative use of standard hard materials, such as: bricks, concrete blocks or slabs, to flexible or loose materials such as: asphalt, wood chips, stepping stones and timber boardwalks. The use of moulded concrete may enable its 'printing' or the setting in of other textured materials associated with the natural environment.

The co-ordinated use of different surfacing elements, in combination, can also bring interest, contribute to tactile experience, and bring an element of surprise. Care will be needed to use loose materials such as gravel, or pebbles, in locations where unlikely to cause a nuisance if thrown.

In the right context, the opportunity for **self expression** may be provided, come in the form of shouting (subject to avoidance of disturbance to others), role play and performance. Conversely, children may also benefit from **quiet places**.

### Awareness of space, scale, height and form

- 8.10.16 The layout of, and incorporation of elements within a natural play area, can also contribute to how children develop their spatial awareness. Spaces may vary in extent, proportion and form, and in how enclosed they are. Integrated elements may also assist in a child's ability to gauge height (e.g. totem poles) or mass.

**Site Furniture**

8.10.17 The integration of fixed seats, perching places and tables will encourage **social interaction**, whilst enabling **natural surveillance** by parents and carers. They may be incorporated in resting places, or locations where play may be observed. Tables may also be incorporated where suitable for art, or making ‘mud pies’.

**Planting**

8.10.18 The use of plants, that by their nature may be regularly cut back to their base, or ‘coppiced’ to become reinvigorated, are also likely to recover after a ‘mauling’. For this reason, plants such as willow and bamboo, have already become associated with this sort of play environment in providing the opportunity for children’s direct interaction with, and discovery of, living elements. Otherwise, the incorporation of plants with particular textures and fragrances, in conjunction with those that bring variety in form, along with those that may rustle distinctively in the breeze can contribute to a range of sensory experiences.

**Art**

8.10.15 The inclusion of art may occur in a range of ways, the applicability of each, or all, depending upon the site, its context and anticipated use. Proposals may benefit from the inclusion of an artist working in collaboration with a landscape architect from an early stage in evolving sketch ideas. In this way, art can be integral to the design process, especially where designer and artist work alongside in exploring ideas with children.



It may also be possible for the design process to anticipate ways in which art may enrich play once the space is in use. Children’s natural play may be expanded through events in which artists are able to facilitate their use of materials in a way that stimulates creativity.

Where possible to modify or exploit landform, it may be possible to create a small scale amphitheatre, or locate a ‘stage’. Where children’s performance (dance, etc) may be appreciated.

Refer also to: [Guidance sheet: Children’s & Young People’s Space: Natural Play Areas](#)

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