

<i>Parks and Green Space Strategy</i>	<b>Discussion Paper</b>	Version Date: 2nd Draft, July 2007 sh
Subject: <b>Size of Sites</b>		

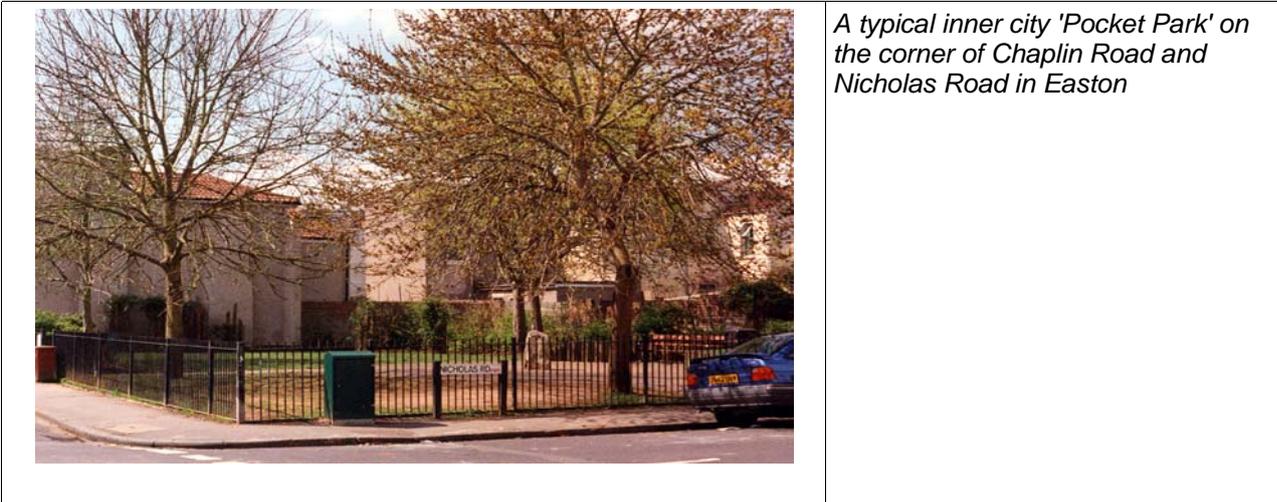
**Background**

Consideration has been given, during the process of preparing this strategy, to the issue of green space size, and whether it should be a determinant within the overall approach. In a general sense, it is easy to adopt a view that there must be a cut-off point, below which a greenspace is so physically limited that it is unable to provide sufficient usefulness to the local community. This paper will describe size-related considerations that are relevant, but explain the circumstances under which the inclusion of small sites is important enough for them not to be statistically 'invisible'.

The *Companion Guide to Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)17* offers little by way of definitive guidance in respect of the significance of size, alluding to it more in the context of strategies based on a hierarchical approach. However, this strategy has followed a typologically-based methodology, rather than a hierarchically generated one. A typological approach was felt to be more appropriate, given the importance of assessing the degree to which the resource, both citywide, and locally, reflects local people's aspirations for green spaces, and the recreational facilities, or experience, each green space is capable of providing.

**The case for including small sites**

It was not initially envisaged that sites smaller than 0.3ha would be taken into account in applying the typology. However, as analysis proceeded, it was soon acknowledged that 'Pocket Parks', in densely built-up areas, held a significance well in excess of their size, and that, the value of even the smallest site, should not be underestimated. An example of such a site in Easton, is that on the corner of Chaplin Road/ Nicholas Road (0.374 Ha), which occupies the site of three houses destroyed in the Blitz, and accommodates little more than a park bench, to which residents can occasionally 'escape' to relax, chat or read; many people do little more when appreciating one of the city's larger parks. The reality, in the intensely built-up areas of Easton, St Paul's, St Agnes, Southville and elsewhere, is that there little else available, and failure to count these small greenspace sites would result in their very existence being overlooked.



Over recent years, including in the context of multi-disciplinary working on the regeneration of built up areas (including Easton and St Agnes and St Werburghs Renewal Areas), experience has been gained in respect of just how important sites as small as 0.03Ha are to local communities. Nevertheless, such sites will continue to be vulnerable to development, unless this strategy embraces a formal acknowledgement of their value. At the moment, most small sites are too small to be coloured green on the Local Plan map, as protected by policies NE1 and L1.

However small, these sites may adopt a significance disproportionate to their size, as the scale and nature of park or green space, that people take for granted elsewhere in the city, do not exist locally. They also contribute valuable green interventions in densely built up parts of the city, contributing diversity and distinctiveness where otherwise there would be homogeneity.

## **Considering Size in the context of a Typological Approach**

Irrespective of location within the city, the principal emphasis, in applying the typology to an individual green space, has been on gauging how useful, irrespective of size, it is to the community. Whilst size is bound to be a factor in accommodating diversity of activity that will increase the degree of usefulness, it does not mean that small sites have no use, or type, at all.

## **Excluded Small Sites**

The arguments above have highlighted the importance of including small sites where they fulfil a function that has a clear value to local people. However, that is not always the case, as many small sites do not satisfy any use-related needs. For this reason, any small site whose description is not covered by the *Parks and Green Space Strategy - Guidance for Defining Typology* will be excluded. Notable in this respect are sites termed 'Development Associated Greening', such as:

- Space Left over after Planning (SLOAP), and
- Sites that are not of a size, shape or form conducive to physical use, their role being simply one of providing visual amenity, softening or screening e.g. landscape associated with residential properties, office blocks and retail or industrial premises.

## **The case for Larger Sites**

It may be realistic to accept that in existing densely developed parts of the city, the greenspace job is likely to continue to be performed by a limited number of sites, where priority will be given to raising their quality and range of facilities.

In locations where existing parks and greenspace sites do not have the capacity to satisfy projected future needs, at least in terms of quantity and distribution, sustainable new sites (as opposed to 'space left over after planning'), must be planned and incorporated. In any context, over-reliance upon a resource that is unrealistically restricted in what it will offer a local community (amount, diversity of experience, and activity options), represents an unacceptably high risk, not just in greenspace planning terms, but in respect of adequate social planning.

A more recent example of a built-up part of the city is Horfield, notably the part associated with PRC redevelopment. At the heart of this area is Poet's Park (0.19 Ha), and the experience of this, since its creation, has been one of a high level of pressure from both use and abuse. However, it is probably typical of greenspace across the country, that has been expected to do the work of a site(s) at least ten or more times this size. Such

solitary sites are in danger of becoming the only 'valve', where pressure of all types will be released.

Whilst respecting the significance of small sites, as at least being 'better than none at all', all this points to ideal provision as being, a combination of at least one reasonably sized park (e.g. St Andrew's Park, XX Ha), and a number of smaller sites (say XX Ha to XX Ha), cumulatively representing the fullest possible range in types. The ability to achieve this will vary across the city, and in most circumstances it will be a case of working with what already exists.

In the context of potential future fringe estate regeneration projects, where possible to be bold in 'vision', the belief is that it would be better to vest the cumulative equivalent of existing small greenspace sites and space left over after planning, in one or more large parks or greenspace sites. A larger park at the heart a community, that is overlooked by the fronts of surrounding development, and is able to accommodate uses to which the community aspires, should serve public needs in a way existing scattered small green plots and slivers cannot. In the context of residential development, there is also a need to replace semi-private, housing associated greenspace, with fewer, high quality sites, that members of the wider community can unambiguously use without feeling they are intruding.

Larger green space sites, through their size alone, but subject to their form and aspect (e.g. not being 'landlocked' by development), will provide inherently greater physical scope for diversity in experience and in how they may be used. Large Natural Green Space sites alone, will have an inherently greater potential for diversity in wildlife habitats than small ones.

## **Conclusions**

- The valuable contribution of sites smaller than 0.3 Ha, where they can be used by local people, even for extremely 'low key' recreation/ relaxation, should be included within the scope of the strategy.
- The contribution of small sites is vital to those parts of the city where there is limited or no scope for larger scale provision.
- The 'cut-off' point must relate more the degree of usefulness of a site within its context, than its size alone.
- Avoidance of reliance on small green spaces, where still possible to provide larger sites.
- Larger sites, where they exist, or can be created, will provide an optimum setting for accommodating the range of types and sub types of greenspace that satisfies local needs.

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