

TOWARDS A LEEDS PARKS & GREEN SPACES STRATEGY 2020 – 2030

Consultation Document September 2019





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Introduction

The purpose of this consultation document is the development of a vision for the future of Leeds City Council owned and managed public parks and green spaces beyond 2020, and a strategy for how to deliver that vision over the next 10 years.

It has been produced by Leeds City Council's Parks and Countryside Service (the lead agency for the management of public parks and green space in the city).

We would like the strategy to reflect the views of residents and visitors to Leeds, so that we can provide a service that meets the needs of all our communities now and in the future – your responses to this consultation document will help us to do that.

Timescales

The public consultation process will take place September 2019 to February 2020.

Aims of the strategy

The aims of the strategy are:

- To identify a clear and simple vision for the public parks and green spaces in Leeds.
- To identify clear priorities for the next 10 years so that Leeds City Council can target limited resources effectively.
- To identify key objectives for delivery over the next 10 years.

Background – Leeds City Council, Parks and Countryside Service

Leeds City Council Parks and Countryside Service manages almost 4,000 hectares of public parks and green space. This 'green space' includes:

- 7 major parks (e.g. Roundhay, Golden Acre and Temple Newsam) – all Green Flag award winners
- 63 community parks (e.g. Cross Flatts Park, Horsforth Hall Park)
- 95 recreation grounds
- 101 allotment sites
- 819 km of public rights of way
- 156 nature conservation sites (including woodlands).
- 24 cemeteries and 3 crematoria

The department has won several awards in recent years, including being the winner in the city centre category of Yorkshire in Bloom 2019.





The facilities provided on parks and countryside sites include:

- 174 playgrounds
- 500 sports facilities including bowling greens, golf courses, tennis courts, football and cricket pitches.
- 29 outdoor gyms
- 3 zoos (at Tropical World, Lotherton Hall and Pudsey Park)
- A rare-breeds visitor farm
- 5 cafés
- 24 skate parks
- 5 shops
- Specialist gardens and plant collections (e.g. at Golden Acre and Temple Newsam)

We also run The Arium, a nursery which produces over 3 million plants for the city each year.

Visits – Leeds parks are very well used, as evidenced by the residents' surveys that were undertaken in 2006, 2009 and, most recently in 2016. The Leeds Parks Survey Report, undertaken by University of Leeds in 2016 revealed the following:

- There are approximately 45 million adult visits to Leeds parks per year.
- 91% of Leeds residents visited a park in the preceding year
- 77% of visitors to Leeds parks describe their visits as 'very pleasant'.
- The most popular park in Leeds is Roundhay which hosts over 9 million visits a year!
- Woodhouse Moor is the second most well used park in Leeds hosting over 3 million visits a year. Temple Newsam, Meanwood Park, Golden Acre Park, Middleton Park, Springhead Park, Pudsey Park, Kirkstall Abbey Park and Horsforth Hall Park all host more than 1 million visits a year.
- 63% of visits recorded were to local community parks and 37% were to 'major parks'.

Events:

- Leeds parks host over 650 events a year, ranging from community fun days to rock concerts, sponsored walks to bonfires.

Volunteers:

- Over 60 community volunteer groups, such as '*Friends of*', help to care for, improve and promote public green space in Leeds through a range of activities from fundraising to picking litter.
- The Parks and Countryside Service also works with over 50 '*In Bloom*' groups to beautify the city through floral displays. In 2018 Leeds city centre achieved a silver gilt in the RHS Britain in Bloom competition, and many of our more local In Bloom groups won awards too; for example, Kippax was the category winner in Yorkshire in Bloom.





- Leeds has a successful [Parks and Green Spaces Forum](#) – a network of organisations dedicated to the protection, promotion and enhancement of public green spaces in the city; and working in partnership with Leeds City Council to do so. The Forum currently has members from over 90 different local organisations.
- Nearly 1,000 corporate volunteers joined us to help improve the local environment in 2018, undertaking tasks such as pruning orchards, bulb planting, cutting back overgrown footpaths and painting playgrounds.

Delivery of the current Parks and Green Space Strategy

The current Parks and Green Space Strategy for Leeds was adopted by the council's executive board and published in 2009 for the time period to 2020. It was based around the following key themes:

- Places for people: *To engage the community in promoting parks and green spaces as accessible places for everyone to experience and enjoy*
- Quality places: *To provide good quality parks and green spaces that are well managed and provide a range of attractive facilities*
- Sustaining the green realm: *To plan for the development of new, and to protect existing parks and green spaces that will offer lasting social, cultural and environmental benefits for the people of Leeds*
- Creating a healthier city: *To promote parks and green spaces as places to improve health and well-being and prevent disease through exercise, relaxation, and contemplation*
- An enabler for regeneration: *To promote liveability and the economic benefits of quality parks and green space provision as an integral part of major regeneration*

The key aims of the strategy as set out in the accompanying Executive Board Report were as follows:

- For all community parks to meet the Green Flag standard (locally known as Leeds Quality Park or LQP) for field based assessment by 2020
- To develop an investment strategy
- To establish a parks and green spaces forum
- To develop a city centre park

Leeds Quality Park Standard

The Parks and Green Space Strategy document referred to a £15 million net budget in Parks and Countryside when published. At this time it was hard to predict the difficult years ahead for the sector nationally as a result of a reduction in core funding from central government resulting in a decrease of over 50% in the parks budget to around £7 million in 2019/20.





It would have been easy, given the circumstances, to abandon the strategy and dedicate our entire focus on meeting the financial challenges that we continue to face.

However, the themes and key aims of the strategy have remained in the forefront of thinking and it is useful to reflect on the achievements that have been made.

The key focus has been on sustaining and improving parks and green spaces and on bringing community parks up to 'Green Flag' standard. The field-based criteria are assessed in what is known as the Leeds Quality Park standard for all 63 community parks each year and a range of 81 further sites assessed every 3 years.

Despite the unprecedented fall in funding, there has been a consistent improvement in the number of parks and green spaces achieving Leeds Quality Park standard during the life of the strategy. Just 23% of community parks achieved the standard in 2006 which increased to 70% in 2018. This does mean that there remains work to do in achieving the overall aim of 100% and this will be a priority that the new strategy needs to consider.

Investment Strategy

How was this level of improvement achieved given the difficult financial position that was faced? The answer lies in developing an investment strategy that has enabled funding to improve facilities driven primarily around increasing income. Whilst the net budget fell throughout this period, gross expenditure actually increased slightly. The investment strategy was focussed on adopting a 'civic enterprise' approach whereby the council becomes more enterprising, businesses and partners more civic; and the public more engaged. There are several examples of developing this enterprising approach to maximise the financial impact of parks assets:

- Tropical World - a paid for zoo attraction within Roundhay Park. A £1.7m investment in partnership with a local philanthropist, the Ziff family, developed new theming and species along with significantly expanded café and retail facilities.
- The Arium – a new purpose built plant nursery with café, retail and play area. Opened in October 2017, with turnover for the first year of activity in this new attraction over £1.5m.
- Concessions. Mainly food and drink with now £350k income annually.
- Sponsorship. Working with local businesses to achieve £300k annually.
- Golden Acre Park. A partnership with a local window firm was developed to expand the café. Income up 42% compared to previous year.
- Partnership with 'Go Ape' at Temple Newsam. Opened in May 2018.

This approach has enabled revenue funding for gardeners in parks to be sustained, as well as allowing us reintroduce an apprenticeship scheme which has seen 50 apprentices start working with us since 2012, many of whom have been retained in the service.





Capital funding during this period of around £1 million each year has been invested in park improvements via S106 planning gain, matched where possible with other sources of external funding and an emphasis on community parks. Middleton Park received investment via the Heritage Lottery Fund which enabled it to be transformed with the outcome that it has held a Green Flag Award since completion in 2013.

Parks and Green Spaces Forum

The Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum was established in 2012 as an independent body with a stated aim of protecting, promoting and improving public green space in the city. The Forum meets quarterly for member networking, site visits and to share best practice and works closely the Parks and Countryside service to find ways to achieve shared goals such as reducing litter in parks. The Forum is becoming increasingly well-known and influential, supporting innovations such as the externally funded Leeds Parks Fund, Rethinking Parks project.

City Centre Park

The need for a city centre park was identified as a priority in the consultation on the last Parks and Green Space Strategy. Plans for the first phase of a new park located on land at the former Tetley Brewery site in South Bank Leeds were approved at Leeds City Council's Executive Board in February 2018. The park is envisaged to be approximately 3.5 hectares in size when complete, with construction work on the park due to begin in 2020. Creation of the park will be phased over the next five years.

Scope of the new strategy

The next strategy is being produced by Leeds City Council Parks and Countryside Service and, as such, will focus on how we manage local public green spaces and their components (as described above) going forward.

Subject areas themed around public green spaces that are related to the upcoming strategy, but won't be addressed in detail in it because they have their own plan, are detailed in the table overleaf.





Subject Area	Related Document	Current Position
Sports pitches	Leeds Playing Pitch Strategy	Under development
Public rights of way	Rights of Way Improvement Plan	In place
Planning matters (such as allocation of new public green space)	Leeds Core Strategy	In place
Play	Leeds Play Strategy	In place
Parks and Countryside allotments	Allotment Management Plan	Under development
Bereavement services	50 year burial plan	In place

Although it is not our aim to focus on these issues in the upcoming Parks and Green Spaces strategy, relevant links will be made, and comments on those subject areas that arise during the consultation process will be taken into consideration and shared with relevant council departments as appropriate.

Overview of relevant research findings

A range of local and national research into public use of, and opinions on public green space is useful when planning for the future. Key findings (from University of Leeds research in 2016 unless otherwise stated) are highlighted below:

Park Usage:

Parks are very popular with 91% of Leeds residents having visited a park in the preceding year and 50% visiting a park at least once a week in the summer months. It is estimated that Leeds parks host around 45 million adult visits a year.

Importance of parks:

88% of park users described spending time in parks as either essential, very important or fairly important to their quality of life.

Satisfaction:

Satisfaction with Leeds parks is high with 77% of park users in Leeds reporting very pleasant experiences and 90% were satisfied or very satisfied overall with their main park. Major park users were more likely than community park-users to rate their park in good or excellent condition (94% compared with 80%). 57% of users say they feel very safe using their park.





Who uses parks?

High usage of parks in Leeds is reported across the board when survey respondents are compared for gender, ethnic group, disability and age. However, people with disabilities and people aged over 75 are significantly less likely to visit a park than those without disabilities or under 75 (77% of people from these groups compared with 91% of people on average had visited a park in the last year).

Which parks are visited most often?

63% of residents in Leeds chose a local community park as their 'main' park and 37% chose a 'major city park' as their 'main' park. 94% of respondents chose a 'Leeds Quality Park' as their main park which suggests usage is linked to park quality.

Why do people visit parks?

The most popular reasons for people to visit parks are: to get some fresh air, to go for walks, to enjoy nature and wildlife, to relax and think in peace and quiet, for family outings and children's play.

Priorities for the future

The top 5 priorities for the future are; keeping parks clean, keep existing facilities open or improve them, keep parks free to enter, events and activities in parks, tackling anti-social behaviour and crime.

When asked what aspects of parks and green spaces respondents would prefer to donate to (if they made a charitable donation), the most popular options were: wildlife habitats; keeping parks clean and tidy; children and teenagers; improving disability access; combatting anti-social behaviour; crime, and mental and physical health (UoL 2018).

Strategic Context

The strategy will also be developed in the context of national and local policy, key aspects of which are outlined below:

National policy and thinking around public green space

Recurring themes emerging from national research, planning and policy around public green space are threefold:

- There is a great deal of evidence around, and emphasis on, the importance of good quality public green space, and its benefits to health and wellbeing, and the environment in particular.





- There is widespread acknowledgement (backed up by research) that there isn't sufficient funding to maintain all public green space to a good standard.
- There is a lot of research being undertaken (and conversation around) the best ways to manage parks, and secure sufficient funds to ensure they are sustainable so that people can continue to benefit from them in the long term.

A range of solutions to the funding gap are currently being explored, largely with Heritage Lottery funding, ranging from the almost universally approved idea of councils working more closely with communities and partners, to more controversial proposals around maximising the commercial potential of parks, and charitable fundraising.

In terms of public opinion, research by HLF and University of Leeds suggests that the most popular proposals for supplementing the funding of parks are:

- National Lottery funding
- Funding from central government
- Business sponsorship
- Funding from local developers
- Charitable donations and fundraising by volunteers

The options above all received support from over 65% respondents in the surveys with residents and businesses. Increasing charges for using park facilities (like tennis courts or car parks) is the least popular option, with support declared by only 20% respondents.

Local strategies, plans and priorities

Vision for Leeds

The Vision for Leeds set out in 2011, following a large scale consultation with local residents, aims to make Leeds the Best City in the UK and identifies 3 key aims that we plan to take into consideration when developing the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.

- Leeds will be fair, open and welcoming – public green space is free, open to all, and used by most local residents.
- Leeds' economy will be prosperous and sustainable – people want to work and live near good quality parks (for example, property prices are higher near good quality parks).
- All of Leeds' communities will be successful – parks provide opportunities for everyone to enjoy a range of healthy activities. The majority of local survey respondents said parks were important to their quality of life. Evidence shows that mental health inequalities are lower in people with good access to green space.





Best Council Plan

As most of the public green space in Leeds is managed by Leeds City Council, we expect the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy to reflect and support the Best Council Plan, which in turn feeds into the Vision outlined above. We believe parks and green spaces can contribute to the following priorities highlighted in the Best Council Plan:

- Health and Wellbeing – reducing health inequalities and supporting healthy, physically active lifestyles
- Inclusive Growth – supporting growth and investment, helping everyone benefit from the economy to their full potential
- Safe, Strong Communities – building thriving, resilient communities
- Culture – growing the cultural sector, ensuring that culture can be experienced by anyone, enhancing the image of Leeds through major events and attractions.
- Age-Friendly Leeds – making public spaces accessible, safe, clean and welcoming and promoting opportunities for older people to be healthy, active and included.
- Child-Friendly City – improving social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing, enhancing the city now and for future generations
- Sustainable Infrastructure – improving transport connections, improving air quality and reducing pollution, improving the resilience of the city's infrastructure and natural environment, reducing flooding and other risks from future climate change.

Other local strategies

We also envisage that the Parks and Green Spaces strategy will complement and support other important local strategies in Leeds such as:

- Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Leeds Children and Young Peoples' Plan
- Leeds Culture Strategy
- Leeds Core Strategy
- Leeds Inclusive Growth Strategy
- Leeds Biodiversity Action Plan

Local thinking around parks

Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum (described above) has over 90 members from organisations such as *Friends, In Bloom*, Residents Associations and environmental charities. Every year they identify priorities to focus on, and these can be helpful for our understanding of the topics communities around parks and green spaces are interested in. Priorities they have highlighted since launch include: making green space accessible, finding funding, controlling litter and dog fouling, sharing best practice, defending threatened green space, promoting and developing green corridors, creating wildflower meadows and promoting the benefits of public green space to decision makers.





The importance of public parks and green spaces

As briefly mentioned above, there is now widespread acknowledgment that public green space is essential, particularly in urban locations, because of their contribution to the following key areas:

Health and wellbeing

The evidence for the mental and physical health benefits of spending time in green space is so convincing that it's now taken as fact. Research shows that regularly spending time in green space dramatically reduces incidence and severity of conditions that are a real concern in modern cities, such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, anxiety and depression, in people of all ages and backgrounds. In the 2015 report 'Planning a Healthy City', the Director of Public Health in Leeds stated that well-managed green space is essential for the health of the future population of Leeds.

In addition to the health benefits that simply spending time walking, or even just sitting, in a green space can bring, parks in Leeds provide a range of sports facilities and activities for those who are interested, including:

- 29 outdoor gyms
- 6 grass cricket pitches
- 7 Parkruns
- 302 football pitches (for a variety of age groups)
- 67 rugby pitches (for a variety of age groups)
- 64 bowling greens
- 24 skate parks
- 2 golf courses

Climate change control and mitigation

Parks and green spaces play a role in mitigating climate change by directly helping to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, reduce the effects of extreme weather events, and build more resilient habitats to help sustain species and food production. Trees and other vegetation remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store carbon; trees in particular help cool down urban centres and provide shade. Suitable vegetation helps address flood risks by storing and slowing down water flow upstream and they provide a range of connected habitats to sustain species resilience and diversity. They also provide opportunities to use sustainable transport options such as cycling and walking safely.

An example of using green space to mitigate the effects of climate change can be found in the Wyke Beck Valley where a large scale flood alleviation scheme is currently under construction. The scheme includes slowing down the flow of water along the Wyke Beck to the River Aire, creating temporary water storage ponds at Killingbeck Fields as part of a 7 mile long green corridor and sustainable transport route in East Leeds.





Communities

Public green spaces are free and open to all. They are shared spaces where people of different backgrounds can meet and get to know one another. Evidence shows that the vast majority of people of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and physical abilities use parks, and that they can play a role in reducing feelings of social isolation in visitors. The research undertaken by the 2016 government inquiry into public parks (which surveyed over 13,000 people) suggested that parks play a key role in bringing communities together and providing a sense of local identity. In Leeds we are very lucky to have hundreds of volunteers helping out at parks and green spaces every year, with over 50 site based 'Friends' groups - many people volunteer for the social benefit as well as a desire to improve their local environment.

Biodiversity

Public green spaces provide homes for much-loved wildlife from common species such as birds, to rarer, more threatened species, which include glow worms, great crested newts and harvest mice in Leeds. Local and national research shows that enjoying nature is one of the main reasons people visit public parks.

Clean air

Air pollution contributes to respiratory problems such as asthma and bronchitis and, as a large metropolitan city, it is a priority for Leeds to reduce levels of pollution in the air. Well-placed trees and shrubs can reduce the negative impact of pollution by filtering fine particles out of the air and absorbing gases such as sulphur dioxide. Green spaces offer respite from the more polluted air surrounding our roads and can sometimes host sustainable transport routes; in fact, 'getting some fresh air' is the number one reason people give for visiting parks (UoL 2016).

Culture and heritage

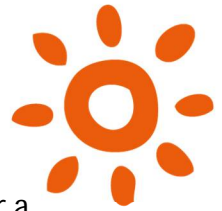
Parks form a key part of the cultural backdrop of a city and its local areas. Our definition of culture is that it's the distinctive character of a city and areas within it, created by what we do there – things like art, music, events, sport and history.

Developing the cultural sector, and ensuring culture can be experienced by anyone, is a priority in the Best Council Plan because having a good cultural offer makes cities more interesting and exciting places to live in and visit.

Parks and other green spaces support a wealth of cultural and social history, such as at Temple Newsam, Kirkstall Abbey and Middleton park (with its bell pits and historic railway).

There are several visitor attractions in our parks including Tropical World, Home Farm and Lotherton Wildlife World which provide entertainment and education for visitors.





The parks in Leeds host over 650 events a year and are considered an excellent location for a range of community activities from food festivals to outdoor theatre. In August 2019, the parks hosted events for over 250,000 people (including the Ed Sheeran concerts and Leeds West Indian Carnival) – this snapshot of our parks in summer highlights the importance of parks to the city's cultural landscape.

We also consider our specialist gardens and horticultural displays (for example, the national plant collections at Golden Acre Park and Temple Newsam and the award-winning Chelsea Flower Show Gardens at Roundhay Park) as part of the cultural offer of the city.

The local economy

Public green space has been shown to benefit the local economy by attracting residents, businesses and visitors to the area (for example, Roundhay Park hosts approximately 9 million visits a year), and reducing the costs of poor health to the NHS.

A Fields in Trust study in 2018 estimated parks to have an equivalent economic value of £30.24 per person, per year based on several objective government measures of non-market goods including willingness to pay, life satisfaction and health.

The 2018 University of Leeds research suggested that businesses perceive the benefits of local parks to be; improved area attractiveness; improved employee health and wellbeing; reduced risk of flooding; tourism, and increased footfall.

The challenges

As well as acknowledging the benefits of public green space, a strategy for managing it for the next 10 years needs to address the following key challenges:

Population of Leeds

Leeds currently has a population of 789,194, which is predicted to increase quite dramatically to 838,027 in the next 10 years (according to the Leeds Observatory). Additionally, national research by Natural England suggests that green spaces are getting busier (due both to population increase and individuals visiting more often), particularly in towns and cities. Increasing demands and pressures regarding public parks and green spaces must therefore be taken into account when planning for their future management.

With such a large population comes the challenge of providing parks and green spaces, not just for a large community, but a very diverse one. Residents of Leeds come from a whole range of different backgrounds, interests, age groups, opportunities and abilities (for example 18.9% of Leeds residents are from a minority ethnic background), and it can be a challenge to ensure we provide a good quality service for everyone – for example, where some people favour peace and quiet in their local park, others want to see lots of events taking place.





Budget

As highlighted in the HLF report 'State of UK Public Parks 2016,' there has been a significant national decline in core funding for parks, and this is reflected in Leeds where, as a result of central government budget cuts, our core funding has reduced by over 50% in the last 10 years. Clearly, it is a challenge to continue to manage parks to a high standard given such financial setbacks.

Improving and sustaining quality

As described in the review of delivery of the previous strategy (above) it has proved difficult to achieve our aim of getting all our community parks to Green Flag standard, and keeping them there in the context of 50% budget cuts in the last 10 years. In 2018, 70% of community parks met the standard.

Access

The 2016 University of Leeds research suggests that parks in Leeds are popular with people of all ages and backgrounds. However, there are two demographics that use parks slightly less than everyone else namely people over 75, and people with disabilities. This suggests that physical access (getting to and/or around parks) might be a problem – issues could be linked to public transport, path networks, availability of toilets and other facilities like benches and accessible play equipment.

Differential experience

Although parks are popular, and satisfaction with Leeds parks is high overall, the 2016 research suggests that experiences of parks do vary somewhat across the city.

To use the extremes by community committee as an example, the number of people saying they are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their main park varies from 64% to 98% (the average across the city is 90%) and the number of people rating their park as feeling 'very' or 'fairly' safe varies from 78% to 95% (average 91%).

Further analysis of the data suggests this is linked to park quality in the different areas, with the proportion of parks achieving LQP status ranging from 50% to 100%. Other hints as to the cause of the variations may be revealed in other sections of the Leeds Parks Survey 2016. For example anti-social behaviour and greater personal safety are *more* of a priority for respondents in those areas where satisfaction with parks is lower, whereas providing events and activities is *less* of a priority. This is definitely a subject that needs further investigation during the process of putting together the next strategy.





Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour including dropping litter, dog fouling, riding motorised vehicles around parks, intimidating behaviour and other forms of crime can all be a problem in parks as they can in any public space. Although recent local research doesn't suggest this is a major problem in Leeds as a whole (for example, in 2016, 96% respondents rated their parks visits as very, or somewhat pleasant and only 1% said they felt unsafe when visiting their main park), we are aware of issues (for example litter left behind after sunny weekends) in particular locations.

These have been raised by the general public and the Parks and Green Spaces Forum – and the 2016 survey did show that feelings of safety in parks varied quite widely throughout the city. The survey also showed that tackling anti-social behaviour and crime is a top 5 priority for the public as a whole, and the perceived importance of this also varies across the city.

Staff skills

The HLF study reported in 2016 suggests that the loss of core skills and expertise in parks management, horticulture, landscape design and ecology is a cause for concern nationally, and this is something we recognise locally. Furthermore, the skills required to manage parks are changing, with financial management, working with communities, being able to use modern technology such as social media, sourcing external funding and understanding how to manage parks for climate change all being much more important than they were a few years ago.

Although we have taken steps to remedy this situation by taking on apprentices year on year since 2012, finding people with the right skills and succession planning remains an ongoing challenge in managing high quality parks for the 21st century.

Emerging Priorities

Based on our experience of delivering Parks and Countryside services and the last strategy, alongside communities, and our understanding of local and national research and policy around public green space as described above, it is proposed that the strategy for 2020 – 2030 focuses on the following priorities:

Quality: Providing good quality green space

The current strategy prioritises getting all 63 community parks (which are the city's most popular, and accessible green spaces) up to Leeds Quality Park (LQP) standard, and it is proposed that this is retained as a priority going forward. LQP is based on an international measure of a good quality park called 'Green Flag' and includes fulfilling criteria like 'welcoming', 'clean and well maintained' and 'healthy, safe and secure'.

Over the last 10 years, it has become clear that residents, volunteer groups and local ward councillors all understand and support this approach, and it is backed up by research.





The recent survey by University of Leeds showed that resident's favourite parks are more likely to have passed, than failed LQP, and that regular users of LQP parks report higher levels of satisfaction with them than do regular users of parks that do not achieve the LQP standard. This approach also fits with the top 2 resident priorities for parks which were identified in the survey as: 'keeping parks clean' and 'keep existing facilities open or improve them'.

Another top 5 priority in the survey was tackling anti-social behaviour and crime in parks. Research by CABI Space showed that the quality of a local park has an impact on the behaviour of the people using it – with anti-social behaviour increasing as the quality of a park decreases, this then puts off regular users from visiting, leading to a spiral of decline that we are keen to avoid – another benefit of aiming to provide good quality green space.

Quality case study: Cross Flatts Park

Cross Flatts Park in Beeston is a Leeds Quality Park which provides a range of facilities for visitors including a large playground, accessible paths and benches, an outdoor gym, a community café, a multi-use games area, sports pitches, a community orchard and a bowling green.

The park hosts over 1 million visits a year, and 75% survey respondents who described Cross Flatts Park as their 'main' park said they were satisfied with it. It also has a very active 'Friends' group who work alongside Beeston in Bloom, and Leeds City Council, to care for the park.

Various community events take place in the park including the Beeston Festival, a Christmas lantern festival, and annual dog show and Parkrun – these, along with the range of facilities at the park, improve local social cohesion by bringing people from the diverse local communities together.





Equality of Opportunity: Green space for everyone

For Leeds City Council, as highlighted in the 'Best Council Plan,' ensuring all residents and visitors to Leeds have equal access to our services is a priority, and it is suggested that it should also be a key theme in the Parks and Green Space Strategy.

In practice, this not only means that the council works to ensure our sites are physically accessible for as many people as possible, but that they provide something for all our communities, no matter what their background, location or cultural interests.

By doing this you are providing a shared space where people from all different backgrounds and interests can come together and make a contribution to social cohesion and its benefits.

'Inclusive Growth' (ensuring everyone benefits from economic growth in Leeds) is also a key aspect of this theme – in recent years, where possible, the Parks and Countryside service has targeted unrestricted funds (such as government grants) at green spaces in priority neighbourhoods to ensure they benefit from good quality parks since other locations can sometimes benefit more from developer contributions. The council also allows concessions at our visitor attractions for those who most need it, for example, at Tropical World.

It's worth noting, in fact, that there's evidence that parks themselves can redress inequalities in society. For example, the University of Exeter and the Fields in Trust have shown that more socio-economically deprived communities benefit most from good access to public green space in terms of health, for instance.

Equality case study: Golden Acre Park

As at all our major parks, we work hard to ensure Golden Acre Park is accessible so it can be enjoyed by everyone, no matter what their physical abilities. There are disabled parking spaces, plenty of wide, flat paths dotted with benches, toilets for disabled people, including a 'Changing Places' toilet, the café is fully accessible, and mobility scooters are available to hire for free. The goal is to make it as easy as possible for people of all abilities to enjoy this beautiful park.





Environment: Greening the city

Public green space has a lot to offer in terms of carbon storage, mitigating against extreme weather events like heatwaves, flood alleviation and building resilient habitats for wildlife and food production. Additionally, according to the University of Leeds survey findings, 2 of the top 3 reasons people visit parks in Leeds are related to the environment – to ‘get some fresh air’ and to ‘enjoy nature’.

In March the council passed a motion to declare a climate emergency in the city. In doing this the council made a commitment to make Leeds carbon neutral by 2030 in making a contribution to achieving no more than a 1.5°C global temperature increase. This is a very ambitious target and will involve many agencies and partners working together to reduce carbon emissions.

Parks and green spaces in Leeds already make an important contribution to mitigating climate change with around 2,500 of the 4,000 hectares of land managed for public access either natural or semi-natural. They help reduce carbon dioxide emissions as well as mitigate against the effects of extreme weather events and build more resilient habitats to help sustain species and food production.

The climate emergency declaration is already stimulating action to develop ambitious plans to plant more trees and create more resilient habitats that benefit pollinators and alleviate flood risks. This will be done in a way that improves the recreation value of those who visit and contribute to health, wellbeing and social cohesion.

People in Leeds are passionate about their local parks and green spaces and the climate emergency declaration has already sparked considerable interest from community groups keen to make a difference in their local area. This enthusiasm will be harnessed and informed by a wide range of views in developing a ‘plan on a page’ approach to capture key information and illustrate ambitious climate change actions.

So, given the above, and local, national and international concerns with regards to the climate emergency, clean air and decline in biodiversity, it is proposed that managing our green spaces for the benefit of the natural environment is a priority going forward. The outcome of this may be that some of our parks start to look a little different going forward (for example, there’ll be more trees in parks, and some areas of grassland will be mown less often) but, in line with some of the other priorities outlined, this shouldn’t exclude users, but make the sites and the visitor experience more diverse and interesting.

Environment case study: Moortown Park

Moortown Park is a relatively small (7 acre) local community park that was opened in December 2018. It was designed in consultation with the local community, and has aspects which benefit people and the environment.





Environmentally-friendly features include meadow areas, a range of vegetation including saplings, mature trees and scrub, bug hotels and an area to hold water after heavy rainfall. Facilities for people, which were constructed with environmental considerations in mind, include a wooden playground, picnic benches, accessible footpaths and welcome signs. Since opening the park has quickly become popular with a wide variety of local people from children using the playground to joggers and walkers.

An event to celebrate the park's opening was organised by the Friends of Moortown Park. It took place in summer 2019, and was attended by over 500 people, demonstrating how popular this kind of public green space can be.



Health and Wellbeing: Supporting healthy, active lifestyles

As described above, there is now a wealth of evidence demonstrating the health benefits of spending time in (or even just looking at!) the natural environment. Given current societal issues around non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity, along with mental illness such as anxiety and depression; one of the areas public green space can have the most positive impact is in the area of health. In particular, with the council's green spaces being free to enter and locally based, there are opportunities to address health inequalities in the city through increasing visits to them, as well as boosting the health of our communities overall.

As a result, it is proposed that facilitating more visits to, and healthy activities at, parks and green spaces in Leeds should be a priority going forward, alongside making links between green spaces to develop healthier and sustainable travel options (like walking and cycling).





These also link in with the environment theme as they provide green corridors for wildlife as well as people.

Health and wellbeing case study: Wyke Beck Valley

The 7-mile long Wyke Beck Valley runs from Roundhay Park to Temple Newsam and is connected by several other public green spaces in between.

Over more than a decade, partners including Sustrans, Leeds City Council, Friends of Wyke Beck Valley, Groundwork, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and TCV have worked to create and promote green walking and cycling routes that connect communities in East Leeds and provide healthy, sustainable and beautiful options for getting from one place to another.

By working with local people to improve the green spaces, link them up and share walking and cycling routes (e.g. a booklet of walks was produced), we've been able to increase the number of people using them for healthy recreational activity.



Sustainability: Public green space for the long term

Currently, a key consideration for Parks and Countryside services across the country is sustainability - ensuring it is possible to provide good quality public green spaces, fit for the 21st Century, in the long term. There are several aspects to this theme including financial sustainability, workforce skills and site management plans.

As described above, securing sufficient funding to manage public green space to a high standard is a real challenge at the moment. Over the last decade Leeds City Council has adapted to this by developing a creative approach based around the concept of 'civic enterprise' - where the council becomes more enterprising; businesses and partners more civic; and the public more engaged. In Parks and Countryside this has been achieved through





a range of means including enterprise, partnerships and external funding. For example, by developing a shop and café at the council's plant nursery, The Arium, an additional £1million income was generated in 2018-19 financial year compared with the best year at the previous nursery site at Red Hall. Another example is receiving £1.5 million in external funding from British Cycling, Sport England and others for the creation of Middleton Park Bike Hub (which hosted over 300,000 visits in its first year of opening!).

Leeds City Council recognises the value and popularity of public green space, and is committed to continuing to provide core funding, but given the ongoing funding challenges for local government, it is proposed to continue to explore and develop an innovative, collaborative, varied and enterprising approach to managing the Parks and Countryside service to facilitate delivery of the aim of getting all community parks up to LQP standard.

With regards to sustainability, it is also important that the Parks and Countryside service has a workforce with the skills required to look after the future parks and green spaces of Leeds, so offering apprenticeships, succession planning and upskilling the current workforce (e.g. training them in managing parks for climate change) are also important.

Another key aspect of ensuring quality green spaces are sustainable is having management plans for all parks, developed in partnership with local communities. So, it is proposed that simple management are produced highlighting priorities and potential improvements for each park.

Sustainability case study: The Arium

Most of the plants used in parks, flower beds and hanging baskets around Leeds are grown and supplied by the Leeds City Council, Parks and Countryside service at our plant nursery. When it became necessary to move the nursery, because the previous site at Red Hall was required for development, we took the opportunity to make it more sustainable in a number of ways, and we also renamed it, The Arium.

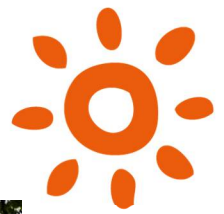
The new nursery has been designed so it is more energy efficient, re-uses the rain water gathered on site, and waste water and sewage is treated on site (which is more efficient than taking it away to do the same).

Because the Nursery uses more modern technology to assist with growing plants, more can be grown with less input from staff, which makes it cheaper to run.

Lastly, from our experience at Red Hall, we knew people were willing to buy surplus stock so we created a visitor area to make it easier for them to make purchases, and a café to enable visitors to make the most of the light and airy building. These were complimented by a play area for visitors with children.

As a consequence we have reduced costs and increased income (by over £1 million a year on the best year at Red Hall), making the production of our plants much more financially (and environmentally) sustainable for the future. We plan to start growing trees for the city at the Arium in 2020.





The Arium



Collaboration: Working as a team for Leeds

Engaging communities and partners through communication, consultation, empowerment, partnerships, public events, *friends* groups and volunteering. This ensures that the Council continues to manage parks and green spaces for local people, and also facilitates the mutual benefits that such an approach brings.

Collaboration case study: Volunteers

Without the ongoing support of an army of volunteers, the parks, green spaces and floral displays of Leeds wouldn't be the same.

We are blessed to be supported by over 100 volunteer and community groups (*Friends of* and *In Bloom* groups being the main ones, but plenty of others too) who undertake a range of activities to benefit local green spaces from litter picking to fundraising, tree planting to organising events.

We are also supported by around 1000 corporate volunteers a year who come and make improvements to an area as a team building exercise.

In total, we have estimated that the volunteer hours contributed across Leeds parks and green spaces amounts to the equivalent of 109 full time members of staff!

Research shows that, as well as improving their local environment, volunteering is good for mental health, is a good way to meet new people and volunteering at green spaces can also be good exercise.





Volunteers



Culture: Contributing to the cultural offer of the city

As described above, culture is one of the key things that make cities great and parks can be a cultural hubs.

The University of Leeds survey showed that 'events and activities for local communities' was a top 5 priority for residents in relation to parks. And a citizen's panel survey in 2013 revealed 'visiting a park' to be the most popular cultural activity in the city.

We propose that, going forward, parks endeavour to represent the culture of the communities around them, bring communities together and provide opportunities for people enjoy the cultural offer of the city.

Culture case study: Summer bands in the park

A variety of band concerts take place in parks across Leeds on Sunday afternoons throughout the summer months. They are organised by Leeds International Concert Season and enable people to enjoy brass, jazz and concert music (played by local musicians), in the fresh air, for free and are popular with people of all ages.

In 2019, concerts took place in 29 different parks ranging from Golden Acre to Gledhow Valley Woods, Meanwood to Bramley Park, Wharfemeadows to Farnley Park.





Band in the park



Have your say

Whilst we believe that the priorities highlighted above are along the right lines, parks are first and foremost about their users (both residents and visitors) so we would like to thank-you for reading this document and ask that you let us know what you think by filling in the online survey on this webpage: www.leeds.gov.uk/parksconsultations

There will also be a public consultation event on Saturday 9 November at Leeds City Museum.

Closing date for consultation: 28 Feb 2020.





Contact us

- Post: *Parks and Green Space Strategy, Parks and Countryside, Hall Lane, Leeds, LS12 5HA*
- Email: greenspacestrategy@leeds.gov.uk
- Keep in touch by following us on facebook and twitter @leedsparks

Sources of Information

The document above was informed by the following reports, plans and websites:

[Leeds City Council, Best Council Plan](#)

[Leeds Observatory](#)

[University of Leeds, Leeds Parks Survey 2016](#)

[University of Leeds, Charitable Giving to Parks and Green Spaces 2018](#)

[Government inquiry into public parks and response 2016-17](#)

[Green Flag standard](#)

[Rethinking Parks](#)

[HLF State of UK public parks 2016](#)

[Monitor for Engagement with Natural Environment 2019](#)

[Vision for Leeds 2011 – 2030](#)

[Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces 2018](#)

[Planning a Healthy City 2014 - 15](#)

