

Mayor and Cabinet			
Title	Lewisham Open Space Strategy 2012-17		
Key decision	Yes	Item no	
Wards	All		
Contributors	Executive Director of Customer Services, Head of Law		
Class	Part 1	20 June 2012	

1. Report Purpose & Summary

The Open Space Strategy has been developed in order to understand the supply and demand for open spaces and identify ways of protecting, and improving the quality through better management. The Strategy is to be read in conjunction with its companion study the Lewisham Leisure & Open Space Study (May 2010). This study, compiled by Strategic Leisure Ltd on behalf of the Council, sets out the national, regional and local strategic context in relation to open space together with an analysis for supply, demand and needs for open space. The study makes recommendations on supply and demand looking forward to 2025. The Open Space Strategy builds on the findings of the study setting it in context for delivery over the next 6 years in the form of two 3-yearly implementation plans.

2. Policy Context

2.1 Shaping the Future – the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the broad themes that describe a 'sense of place' that all Council services aspire to. It has six priority areas to which open space contributes to:

- **Ambitious and Achieving** – where people are inspired and supported to fulfill their potential
Celebrate local achievement so people feel proud of their area and eager to be a part of its success
- **Safer** – where people feel safe and live free from crime, anti-social behaviour and abuse
Tackle antisocial behavior and ensure that people feel confident and safe throughout the borough
Keep our children and young people safe from harm, abuse and criminal activity
- **Empowered and responsible** - where people are actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities
-Empower citizens to be involved in their local area and responsive to the needs of those who live there.
-Champion diversity and the contribution everyone makes to the borough's quality of life

- **Clean, green and livable** – where people live in high quality housing and care for and enjoy their environment
- protect and enhance our parks, open spaces and local biodiversity
- **Healthy, active and enjoyable** – where people can actively participate in maintaining and improving their health and well-being
-improving the well-being of our citizens by increasing participation in healthy and active lifestyles

2.2 The Council has outlined ten corporate priorities which enables the delivery of the Sustainable Community strategy. The renewal of the Green Space Contract addresses the corporate priorities and Local Area Agreement targets of Delivering the Open Space Strategy for Lewisham 2005-2010 and increasing park usage and user satisfaction."

2.3 The Council's Cultural Strategy 2009-13 sets out the following key themes:

- Place making – develop high quality leisure, heritage and cultural facilities that contribute to the borough's physical character and sense of place
- Community – Build vibrant and cohesive communities by encouraging participation in cultural and leisure activities
- Health – Build healthy communities through culture, sport and leisure

2.4 The Core Strategy is the key document in the Lewisham Local Development Framework (LDF). It sets out the overall ambitions and priorities for the borough, sets out the vision, objectives, strategy and policies that will guide public and private sector investment to manage development and regeneration in the borough over the next 15 years. Strategic objective 7 sets out to protect and enhance the borough's open spaces and environmental assets. Strategic objective 5 to address climate change issues and Strategic objective 6 to contribute to flood risk reduction and water management.

3. Recommendations

That Mayor and Cabinet approve

3.1 The adoption of the Open Space Strategy 2012-2017 and 3 year action plan (appendix A)

4. Background

4.1 The Strategy has been developed in order to understand the supply and demand of open spaces and identify ways of protecting, creating and enhancing them and improving the quality through better management. It is to be read in conjunction with its companion study the Lewisham Leisure & Open Space Study (LLOSS).

4.2 The study, compiled by Strategic Leisure Ltd on behalf of the Council, sets out the national, regional and local strategic context in relation to open space together with an

analysis for supply, demand and needs for open space. The study makes recommendations on supply and demand looking forward to 2025. The Open Place Strategy builds on the findings of this study setting it in context for delivery over the next 6 years in the form of two 3-yearly implementation plans.

4.3 The Lewisham Leisure and Open Space Study (LLOSS) identified five key stages to undertaking an assessment of open space. These are broadly:

- Step 1 – Identifying Local needs
- Step 2 – Auditing Local Provision
- Step 3 – Setting Provision Standards
- Step 4 – Applying Provision Standards
- Step 5 – Policy Options

4.4 The LLOSS audit and assessment of parks and open spaces identified several issues relating to the provision, quality and accessibility of open space, outdoor sports and recreation facilities across Lewisham and the Open Space Strategy assesses these issues and makes recommendations for actions relating to specific sites in general.

4.5 To achieve the vision for open space in Lewisham, *‘to protect, enhance and cherish open space for the benefit of local people, the wider community and for future generations’* and to address the issues raised during the initial consultation, seven key themes have been identified:

These broad themes and their objectives will give a clear strategic direction for contractors, organisations, developers, investors, private businesses, the voluntary sector and the wider community.

Theme 1: To promote and support urban renaissance

Theme 2: To promote social inclusion and community cohesion

Theme 3: To promote healthy lifestyles and well-being

Theme 4: To promote a sustainable environment

Theme 5: To protect and enhance open space

Theme 6: To promote a safe and secure environment

Theme 7: To empower and support the local community

4.6 In order to deliver the objectives set out in the strategy two three-year Implementation Plans will be developed, the first of which, the plan for 2012-2014 is set out in this document.

Consultation phase one

4.7 In addition to the LLOSS consultation exercise a parks and open space survey was undertaken in the spring of 2011 and the outcomes have influenced the key themes and implementation plan. A total of 301 web surveys and 130 postal surveys were completed.

4.8 Reasons for visiting the park or open space.

The most popular reasons stated for visiting our parks and open spaces were to relax, to walk, to see the birds and wildlife, to enjoy the peace and quiet, to walk for exercise and to visit the playground.

- 4.9 Frequency of visit
47% of users visited the park or open space on a daily basis in the summer months with a further 44% on a weekly basis. This figure dropped to 29% visiting on a daily basis and 42% weekly during the winter months.
- 4.10 Method of Transport
88% of visitors walked to their local park or open space with 8% travelling by bicycle
- 4.11 Distance from park
47% of visitors lived less than 5 minutes walk time to get to their local park with a further 34% living less than 10 minutes walk time
- 4.12 Customer satisfaction
38% of users were very satisfied that their local park or open space was clean and cared for, with a further 46% of users saying they were satisfied.
- 4.13 Protecting open space
An unsurprising 95% of responders strongly agreed that the Council should protect parks and open spaces from development such as housing.
- 4.14 Feeling safe
28% strongly agreed that they felt safe using their park or open space with a further 52% agreeing that they felt safe.
- 4.15 Events
74% would like to see more farmers markets with 61% liking to see more concerts/music festivals and community festivals. 57% would like to see more children's activities.
- 4.16 Difficult choices
When it came to protecting or improving the service the majority said that they would like to see the recent reduction in the operational hours of the Park Keeper service reversed when circumstances allow.

Consultation phase two

- 4.17 Meetings with officer groups have formulated the seven key themes and populated the draft 3-year implementation plan. The Officer groups included members of Green Scene, parks/nature conservation and allotments; Planning Policy, Sport and Leisure; Culture; and the Council's parks contractor Glendale Grounds Management.

Consultation phase three

- 4.18 Following approval by Mayor and Cabinet on 7th December 2011 more in-depth consultation was held in the form of focus groups, including young people, the elderly, people with a disability, and current volunteers. Additional survey responses were received from friends and amenity groups and fed into the consultation process.

Young Mayors Focus Group March 19th 2012

- 4.19 All members of the group knew the whereabouts of their local parks and several members used more than one facility. The general consensus was that there was not enough facilities for their age group as many of the playgrounds were targeted at the under 13's. They suggested more large slides and outdoor gyms. They felt that Blackheath didn't offer facilities for them but liked the events such as fairgrounds and space to fly kites. Some members felt that adults were wary of them and preferred they were not there. They suggested that more inter-linked activities. Some concerns were raised about the perception of safety, good lighting in 'open' parks was seen as important. Members suggested that the more a space was used the safer it felt. All members agreed that a good quality park improved their local area, they were nice places to meet people and everyone should take pride in and look after their local park. The group wished to have more facilitated activities, one member had joined the *Rivers and People project* in Ladywell Fields. All agreed that toilets and café's were a good thing to have and made the space feel safer. There appeared to be a general lack of understanding about natural areas such as meadow grasslands. Long grass was seen as an inconvenience and they preferred close mown grass for sports and games etc. There was an overwhelming view that all parks and open spaces should be protected. The group said they might get involved but it would depend on what was required. Some members were aware that parks had friends group but no one attended. When it came to managing cuts to services the retention of toilets was seen as the most important followed by more events and activities.

Pensioners Forum Group 27th March 2012

- 4.20 All attendees knew where their local park or open space was and all used these spaces. In terms of meeting user needs transport to parks was seen as an issue. Additional seating would be welcomed particularly at certain sites such as Blackheath. A major area of concern was the lack of accessible toilet facilities and more café facilities would be welcomed. The group welcomed the park keepers as they felt they made the park a safer place however some members were not aware of the keeper and they should be more high profile. Some spaces were said to be uninviting and 'empty', good lighting in open parks was essential. Dogs off the lead were seen as a barrier to access, there was a real fear of being knocked to the ground by loose dogs. Groups of young people were viewed by some as overwhelming and they often avoid parks at school closing times. Most members said that a good quality park made their area better, they would like more music events and suggested brass bands in the band stand. Music could be a good inter generational activity. The group welcomed the introduction of more meadow grasslands however they liked a mixed approach to management.. When it came to managing cuts the group didn't feel it was right for them to suggest what should and should not be cut. They did however suggest that additional income generation could be explored.

Disability Forum 14th March 2012

- 4.21 All attendees knew where their local park and open space was however many highlighted dogs off a lead as a major barrier to access. Wheelchair users appreciated that not every area could be accessed however the condition of some pathways was a concern. Users were apprehensive during school holidays when there is an influx of teenagers who tended to gather in groups. Certain entrances were cited as invoking fear and clear sightlines were requested. Facilitated activities were most welcomed and

one member had been able to take part in the *Rivers and People project* and was able to get out to the park for the first time in 8 years! When asked about how the natural environment should be managed a mixed approach allowing some areas to be meadow grassland was preferred. There was a good degree of interest in community gardens and a general concern about the protection of nature reserves. All parks and open spaces should be protected at all cost. Members found it difficult to be actively involved, due to their disability, however facilitated events were welcomed. In terms of managing cuts the protection of toilets, café's and maintenance was requested.

Current Volunteers

- 4.22 As regular volunteers all members had an excellent knowledge about Lewisham's parks and open spaces. Members felt that the spaces met their general needs however more educational facilities for children would be welcomed. Toilets were seen as essential and café's helped to make the space feel safer by attracting more users. The group felt that open space could be more 'multi-functional', by providing food growing opportunities, orchards and demonstration of green technology. When it came to barriers to access masses of fencing was seen as giving the wrong impression. Ladywell was highlighted as a good example of removing unnecessary fencing. However dogs off a lead were viewed as a problem and exercise areas could be helpful. The group liked the idea of outdoor gyms, but this should depend on the suitability of the space. They viewed that self-led activity was better such as healthy walks programme and Walk 4 life. The group liked the introduction of additional meadow grassland, parks in their view shouldn't be 'over managed'. The group viewed that it was never appropriate to build on open space and that space in Lewisham should have more protection. Green space was seen as good for mental health. When it came to getting actively involved the volunteers did not feel there were any barriers to them doing so. However they said that activities and events could be better advertised. They agreed that generally people were only interested in their 'own patch'. They suggested however that it was hard to get commitment from users to sit on group committees, such as friends and user groups. They agreed that the local assemblies had been good at giving funding to local groups. They felt the Council should give more support to groups bidding for external funding. When it came to managing cuts they felt the protection of the park keepers should be paramount. They also wanted protection for facilitated activities in particular Natures Gym.

Friends and Amenity Groups

- 4.23 Many groups and individuals responded to the survey questions. A summary of their responses is attached as appendix B

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 The need to make significant savings has impacted on the revenue budgets available for improvements to the boroughs green spaces. Therefore the 3 year implementation plan must be tempered by the knowledge that not all actions will be possible during this period and many will remain as desired objectives. However the challenge for all

involved with delivering quality open space will be to continue to seek and secure alternative funding during these difficult times.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The general intention from PPG17 (removed now by the National Planning Policy Framework) was that open space standards should be decided locally, from a strategic base assessing the Borough's open space. The Strategy should be compliant with and compliment applicable Development Plan Documents under the Councils Local Development Framework, while also tying in to the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy.

7. Crime and disorder implications

- 7.1 Key theme number six sets out to promote a 'safe and secure environment'. Key objectives include the recommendation to tackle anti social behaviour and reduce the fear of crime. Proposals include increasing the visible presence in parks and open spaces through more on-site staff, café and other concessions.
- 7.2 Key objectives also include designing out crime at the planning stage, building on the toolkit completed for the QUERCUS project at Ladywell Fields.

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 Implicit within the strategy is the commitment to ensure that public open space is accessible to all members of the community. Key theme number two sets out to "promote social inclusion and community cohesion". Recommendations include undertaking an Equalities Analysis for parks and open spaces, monitoring the profile of users at specific parks, reaching out to hard to reach communities by means of focus groups, events and other measures.

Equality Analysis

- 8.2 The questions raised at the focus groups discussed pertinent issues under the Equality Act 2010. The Equality analysis has three main aims, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations. Target groups within the 9 protected characteristics were asked about potential barriers to their use of open space; whether parks and open spaces met their wants and needs; whether they felt they could become actively involved in their local space; and the impact of the need to make significant savings to their use of spaces. A proportionate approach has been undertaken and not all of the nine groups were contacted direct as this was not felt to be necessary for this service. However members of the black and ethnic minority community, for example, were represented at all groups with the exception of the volunteers focus group. The response to the focus groups and the parks and open spaces surveys has been fed into the 3 year implementation plan.

9. Environmental implications

- 9.1 The Open Space Strategy is an environmental strategy. The protection, enhancement and improvement of open space is a fundamental principle of the strategy.
- 9.2 The Children and Young People's directorate are undertaking a review of the protection of open space including children's play areas in their remit. This is an ongoing piece of work which will input into the three year implementation plan on completion.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 Both central Government and regional Government have recognised the need for all local authorities to prepare an Open Space Strategy which sets out to gain an understanding of the supply and demand of open spaces and identify ways of protecting, creating and enhancing them and improving quality and accessibility through better management.

11. Background documents and originator

- 11.1 The background documents, including notes of meetings are attached as appendices.
- 11.2 If you require any further information about this report please contact Martin Hyde on 020 8 314 2034.

- (a) Lewisham Leisure & Open Space Study 2010
<http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/planning/policy/LDF/evidence-base/Pages/LDF-evidence-base-environment.aspx>

Appendix 1

Open Spaces Strategy 2012-2017

