

Green Space Strategy for Bath and North East Somerset

Executive Summary

Introduction

Bath & North East Somerset Council has been reviewing green space provision across the district to ensure that the supply and quality matches the needs of the community. This has included finding out about people's use and expectations of different types of green areas, including parks and gardens, spaces for less formal activities, recreation grounds, natural areas (woodland, natural and semi-natural areas), allotments and children and young people's facilities.

Having completed a comprehensive assessment and audit of these types of green spaces, the Council has now drafted a Green Space Strategy for consultation with the local community and stakeholders. A separate strategy is also being developed for built sports facilities.

Why do we need a green space strategy?

There are external pressures for the authority to produce a strategy including:

- The Audit Commission Best Value Review Inspection Report on Leisure Time in Bath & North East Somerset
- The government guidance contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17)

There are also internal drivers within the authority including

- To ensure that the standards and levels of provision across the whole district are better understood and addressed
- To ensure that standards of quality are addressed across all green spaces

How does the strategy link with other Council strategies and policies?

Community Strategy

The Community Strategy for Bath & North East Somerset recognises the contribution that parks and open spaces make to the character of the District and its local distinctiveness. It also contains key links under two of its themes - 'be safe' refers to safety initiatives in parks and 'be sustainable' to the need for a sound approach to environmental management with clear implications for green spaces.

Local Cultural Strategy

The value of parks and open spaces in relation to the culture of Bath and other parts of the District are highlighted in this document. A number of key actions link to the Green Space Strategy in terms of cultural events, activities and learning associated with green space management.

Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan

This sets out the Council's policies for land use planning and development in the District including the protection of certain safeguarded sites and requirements for the provision of children's play facilities and other recreational space with new development. The Green Space Strategy provides vital information to justify and underpin policies and proposals in the Local Plan and contains, in Appendix F, a guidance document to help implement the Local Plan through planning contributions towards the provision of green space.

Get Active: Draft Vision for Sport & Active Leisure

This document proposes improved physical activity levels for residents in the District. The Green Space Strategy will play an important role in helping to achieve this through the effective provision and management of green spaces.

Play Strategy

The Green Space Strategy will help to achieve some of the aims of the Play Strategy through the provision and management of outdoor play facilities. Outdoor play is embraced in its widest sense by recognising, in the Green Space Strategy, the value of both formal facilities and of natural play within stimulating landscapes.

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

The information provided by the BAP on sites with nature conservation value and designations has helped to inform the development of the Green Spaces Strategy. The BAP also includes a series of species and habitat action plans designed to contribute to the 2010 Global Biodiversity Challenge. The Green Space Strategy will make an important contribution to achieving these action plans by helping to ensure appropriate provision of areas of natural green space and the implementation of site management regimes that safeguard nature conservation interests and achieve future biodiversity targets.

Community Safety Strategy

The review of this Strategy will be taking into account issues relating to crime and personal safety in the District's green spaces. The Green Spaces Strategy Action Plans will provide an opportunity to consider and address such issues in the context of site design and management regimes.

How have we produced the strategy?

This has involved a number of distinct pieces of work:

- Consultation – what are people’s needs from green spaces
- Quantity audit – how much space is there in the district?
- Quality audit – what is the quality of the spaces?
- Mapping the distribution of spaces and how far they are from people
- Policy review – what national and local guidance is there?

What have we found?

Consultation

- 95% of those who took part in our on-street survey had visited a green space in the last 12 months
- Those who live in Keynsham and Bath are more satisfied with green space provision than those who live in Norton Radstock
- The results of the consultation indicate that there can almost never be enough green space provision
- There was a very low perceived need for managed natural green space amongst Parish Councils

Quantity

We have analysed all of the green space provision in a number of ways

- Firstly by type of space which we have classified as ‘formal’ (parks, gardens, open spaces and recreation grounds – areas typically intensively maintained and with the focus on human use), ‘natural’ (woodland, natural, semi natural and access land – areas typically less intensively maintained and with the focus on benefits to wildlife) or allotments
- Secondly geographically – comparing urban and rural provision at settlement, ward and parish levels. By urban we mean Bath, Keynsham and Norton Radstock, and by rural we mean all other parishes.

We have then combined these to look at how much of each type of space is located where. Using population data we have then been able to look at how much space there is per person across the district.

We found that

- in terms of formal spaces, Norton Radstock has only 2/3 of the amount of space when compared to Keynsham
- the rural parishes combined have around 3/4 the amount of formal space when compared to Bath, with 13 parishes having no provision at all
- Bath has the highest hectareage per 1000 population at 1.64 with Norton Radstock the lowest at 0.98
- the parish average is 1.18 ha / 1000 population with Corston parish having the highest at 4.31 ha / 1000 population, significantly higher than any other area
- in the rural parishes access to natural spaces tends to be via general access to the countryside

In terms of allotments we found that

- the area where the hectareage of allotments per 1000 population is greatest in Bath at 0.22 ha / 1000 population with the parish average only slightly below this figure at 0.20 ha / 1000 population.
- Norton Radstock is significantly lower than this at 0.06 ha / 1000 population and Keynsham having only 0.11 ha / 1000 population.

Quality

We assessed the quality of almost 200 spaces across the district including formal and natural spaces and allotments. We used a method derived from the national quality standard, the Green Flag Award and advice from CABE Space, the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space.

We found that:

- Overall natural spaces scored higher than formal spaces, and allotments scored below both
- Almost all sites fail to perform to their potential in terms of the educational benefits that can be derived from them

- Formal sites within Bath have the highest average quality at 53 with Norton Radstock scoring the lowest at 47. Parish and Keynsham formal sites score between the two at 52.
- Bath scores the highest average for allotment sites at 50 with Parish areas scoring the lowest at 44
- Keynsham scores the highest average for natural sites at 64 with Norton Radstock the lowest at 54.

Distribution of Green Space

As a starting point we developed a hierarchy of green spaces based on their size, their significance and the facilities they should provide. The hierarchy is based on 4 levels:

- District (serving the urban settlement and their rural catchment)
- Neighbourhood
- Local
- Doorstep

We have given each level of the hierarchy a 'catchment' based on what we consider to be a reasonable walking distance.

We found that:

- There are relatively few parts of Bath and Keynsham that do not have formal green space within a reasonable walking distance
- In Norton Radstock there are larger parts of the area that do not have formal green space within a reasonable walking distance, exacerbated by the fact that there is no district level space
- In the rural parishes there is a mixture of provision, with many residents not having formal green space within a reasonable walking distance

For natural green spaces, whilst there were some small parts of the urban areas beyond a reasonable walking distance, overall the coverage was very good.

For allotments the picture was not so good with many parts of the district being beyond a reasonable walking distance of an allotment site.

Policy Review

A policy review has been carried in order to understand the current national and local policy context. Key documents within each of these areas have been summarised and reviewed and their relevance to the Green Space Strategy discussed both in terms of planning and service delivery aspects.

National policy and guidance on the production of green space strategies has been considered and has informed the development of the strategy. Other local policy documents have been reviewed which set out the local planning context, formal designations, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and other relevant constraints and opportunities.

What have we done with the information / assessments?

We have now brought together the consultation and mapping work to develop proposed local standards for the three different types of green space. The standards are set out below and focus on:

- Quantity of green space

Type of Green Space	Standard (m ² per person)
Formal	15
Natural* ¹	15
Allotments	3

Notes on table

*1 In the rural parishes a standard for natural provision was not developed as they have access to natural spaces via the countryside

- Distribution

As referred to earlier we have produced a hierarchy of provision and some of the key factors are set out in the table below. Please see the notes below the table to see how the hierarchy will be applied to the rural parishes.

Formal Green Spaces

Hierarchy level	Walking distance (m)	Walking time (minutes)	Size (hectares)	Facilities
Doorstep	400	5	>0.1	N/A
Local	600	7.5	>1.0	Formal equipped play
Neighbourhood	1000	12.5	>2.0	Formal play and youth provision
District	N/A* ¹	N/A* ¹	>10.0	As above plus a venue for major outdoor events

Notes on table

*1 District level sites serve the urban settlement and their rural catchment

In the rural parishes it is often not possible to have the full range of site levels or for the sites to be the minimum sizes indicated. However, as parish sites tend to have either a neighbourhood function (i.e. serving the whole parish and sometimes neighbouring parishes with little or no provision) or a local function (i.e. serving a local area of a larger parish) these are the catchments that will be applied as appropriate to each site.

Natural Green Spaces

Hierarchy level	Walking distance (m)	Walking time (minutes)	Size (hectares)	Features
Neighbourhood	1000	12.5	>2.0	Significant nature interest and opportunities for volunteer involvement)
District	N/A* ¹	N/A	>10.0 (and most significant natural space in each urban area)	As above plus significant opportunities for educational activities

- Quality

The quality audits that were undertaken for the preparation of the strategy resulted in a wide range of scores, indicating a wide difference in quality across the District. To address this disparity in quality a standard of 60% has been set in the strategy as a target for all sites.

- Children's and Young People's Facilities

The strategy also sets out some specific standards for the quantity of children's and young people's facilities (distribution is already covered in the hierarchy standards for formal green space). There are also some specific recommendations about the quality of these facilities. The proposed quantity standards are:

There should be one children's play feature per 100 people with a target that 35% of features are suitable for children over 8 years old.

There should be one item of young person's equipment e.g. football or basketball goals, per 1,000 people in rural areas, and one young person's

facility e.g. multi games area, per 5,000 people in urban areas. Additionally, in urban areas there should also be a central specialist facility for skateboarding and BMX / cycling.

These quantity, distribution and quality standards for all types of green space have already been used to inform the amount of green space provided in relation to new housing developments and will continue to do so in the future. They will also be used to:

1. Identify areas of shortfall in existing provision that may not be addressed by development and will need to be resourced in different ways
2. Help support bids for external funding

Recommendations and Action Plan

The green space strategy has analysed existing green space provision, the community's views on this and has set out proposed standards for the future. The strategy also sets out recommendations and an action plan for the delivery of these new standards. The actions come under 5 main headings as follows:

1. Strategic Management – issues of a strategic nature with implications beyond this Council's own green spaces
2. Service Management – issues relating specifically to the management of this Council's own green space network
3. Site Management – issues relating to the management of individual sites
4. Community Issues – issues with a particular focus on community interest
5. Resources and Opportunities – issues around funding and other potential resources

Full detailed information and analysis of each of the points covered in this summary can be found within the green space strategy. Careful reference to the contents page will enable easy navigation around the document.

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