

Decision Session - Executive Member for Leisure, 8 December 2009  
Culture and Social Inclusion

Report of the Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

**Improving York's Green Spaces:  
Response to the PPG17 Open Space Sport and Recreation Study**

**Summary**

1. This report provide a response to the Open Space Sport and Recreation Study undertake as part of the Local Development Framework process. The Study gives a position statement of the amount and condition of recreational land in December 2008. A series of short reports are provided in response to the issues raised. The Executive Member is asked to:
  - a) note the current actions
  - b) agree the future actions as set out in the report
  - c) suggest possible further areas for action

**Background**

2. The Policy Planning Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) – Open Space Sport and Recreation Study (The Study) was commissioned as part of the Council's Local Development Framework evidence gathering exercise. Over an eighteen month period open space consultants, PMP, surveyed and assessed open space across the city with the outcome presented to the Local Development Framework (LDF) working group in December 2008. The results of the Study inform both Core Strategy and Allocations development plan documents.
3. The Survey also has a range of other key outputs which help support and drive the Lifelong Learning and Culture agenda, including providing a full audit of all accessible open spaces in York. To be included the Study land must have relatively unhindered access and a recreational value. Management or ownership arrangements are not significant so for example land owned or managed by the City and Local Councils, Housing Trusts and management companies, Churchyards, Wildlife organisations and benevolent private individuals are included.
4. Land was then categorised according to the primary purpose of the site in line with the nationally agreed typologies of a) city parks, b) local parks, c) natural and semi natural greenspace, d) amenity green space, e) provision for children, f) provision for young people, g) outdoor sports facilities and h)

allotments. This audit is stored on the Council's electronic mapping system, and linked Access database and can be updated annually.

5. The final exercise was the production of local provision standards (quantity, quality and accessibility) for each type of open space. These were set in accordance with local needs of people living, working and visiting the City of York which was established through a series of consultations, including household surveys, workshops and stakeholder meetings
6. Plans detailing open space provision in December 2008 will be on display at the meeting. A copy of the report can be found at:

[http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Planning/Local\\_development\\_framework/LDF\\_Evidence\\_base/2007OpenSpaceStudy/](http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Planning/Local_development_framework/LDF_Evidence_base/2007OpenSpaceStudy/)

### **Where we are now and response**

7. When the local standards were applied to the existing open space provision a range of issues emerged. These are set out below categorised by type of open space. For each category the executive summary statement from page v. of the Study is reproduced followed by a comment on current and future actions.

#### Parks and Gardens

8. *“There is a general perception that the quantity of City parks is about right, with 60% of residents holding this view. Residents in the more urban areas of the City have higher expectations in terms of provision and are more likely to suggest that there are insufficient parks in their locality. While the overall level of satisfaction is about right for parks, there were some residents who expressed dissatisfaction, particularly with regards the quantity of local parks in their area. Just over 50% of residents perceived the quantity of local parks to be insufficient. The quality of parks is perceived to have improved over recent years, reinforced by the achievement of several green flag awards across the City. Residents highlighted that improvements to the ancillary provision within parks would further enhance their quality. Maintaining and enhancing the quality of the parks was of greater importance than increasing the overall quantity of facilities”.* City Parks include both the major venues like Rowntree Park and the Homestead and small sites like Glen Gardens.
9. The local quantity standard was set at the existing level of provision so there are no issues of over or undersupply. Quality issues were raised, with St George's Field (Tower Gardens) and Hull Road Park being specifically mentioned as needing improvement.
10. Recent and current actions:
  - Three of the Council parks and gardens now have green flag awards – Rowntree Park, West Bank Park and Glen Gardens. Since the study the remaining tennis courts at Rowntree Park have been upgraded and further improvements are scheduled with refurbishment of the toilets at West Bank Park in January / February 2010.

- Clarence Gardens will be entered for a Green Flag award in 2010 and in preparation for this the pavilion is being redecorated, railings will be painted and landscape improvements made to the area adjacent to Haxby / Wigginton Road. Much of the work is being undertaken in partnership with the Probation Service Community payback scheme.

11. Future actions:

- Hull Road park will be entered for a Green Flag award in 2011 and in preparation for this the pavilion is being redeveloped, beck side railings painted, and play provision expanded.
- St George's Field was identified as a low quality local park in need of improvement. In response, a specific development plan for that site could be drawn up to identify investment priorities and actions to introduce more colour and vitality to the site including the removal of unnecessary vegetation.

Natural and semi natural open space

12. *"There are variations in the perceptions of the quantity of natural and semi natural open space across the City. The quality of natural sites is important to residents and the wider benefits of these sites were recognised. Natural sites were perceived to have a particularly important role in enhancing biodiversity and developing habitats".* Locations include the strays, riverbanks and nature reserves.

13. Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows that there is sufficient provision. Efforts are therefore being concentrated in raising the quality of existing sites.

14. Recent and current actions:

- A project is currently underway to enter Walmgate and Bootham Strays, Clifton Backies and the Hob Moor section of Micklegate Stray into Environmental Stewardship. This is a Natural England scheme which offers grant aid in return for meeting a series of the objectives The Council's Countryside Officer is currently preparing a Farm Environment Plan which is the first step in being considered for Stewardship. The objectives are:
  - a) conserve wildlife (biodiversity)
  - b) maintain and enhance landscape quality and character
  - c) protect the historic environment and natural resources
  - d) promote public access and understanding of the countryside
  - e) protect natural resources.

15. Future actions:

- We will work with the Wild Flowering of York Project (a community partnership to improve and expand the range of wild flower sites in York) to identify areas of Council land which would benefit from enhancement and encourage diversity.

### Amenity greenspace

16. *“Amenity green spaces were perceived to be particularly important for the qualities that they bring to the landscape and character of the local area. The quality of provision was perceived to be as important as the quantity and there is a greater variation in the current quality of these open spaces than in any other type”.* Locations include Acomb and Clifton Green.
17. Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows a city wide sufficiency of provision; however, this masks a shortfall in the amount of amenity greenspace in specific areas including Heworth Without, Huntington and Acomb. (Amenity spaces are informal, often smaller sites used by local people e.g. Acomb Green, Clifton Green, Poppleton Village Green).
18. Recent and current actions:
  - A Friends Group has been established for Acomb Green, which working with the Parks and Open Spaces staff, are drawing up a development plan for the site.
  - Section 106 moneys have been transferred to Parish Councils to improve their amenity spaces including Osbaldwick, Strensall and Earswick.
  - In summer 2009 Rawcliffe County Park was awarded a Green Flag, recognising the quality of the site.
19. Future actions:
  - Development plans could be drawn up for high profile sites such as North Street Gardens and Monk Bridge Gardens working with the community to identify investment priorities and new ideas to improve the sites.

### Children and young people

20. *“The quantity of provision for children and young people was the overriding theme of the consultation with the majority of residents highlighting that the quantity of provision is poor. Several issues regarding the quality of existing provision also emerged. The majority of comments focused around the need for provision to be more challenging and innovative”.* Children’s facilities are defined as the “traditional playgrounds”; young peoples facilities include skateboard sites and older age group playgrounds.
21. Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows a shortfall of children’s playgrounds and young person facilities. Specific areas with no provision for children include Skelton, middle Strensall, south Haxby / Wigginton, Monk Stray, Woodthorpe and Dringhouses, Bishopthorpe, Naburn and Elvington. Young peoples facilities are in particularly short supply with only 5 sites in the city.
22. Recent and current actions:
  - Since the production of the report the City has been awarded £1.2m Playbuilder funding spread over 2 years to develop public, open access, outdoor play spaces close to where children live that are safe, exciting,

stimulating and accessible to all, as well as promoting active, imaginative and adventurous play and targeting predominantly the 8-13 age range. This will directly link into York's play strategy 'Taking Play Forward', and assist in our aim to raise the standard of play provision.

- The primary tool for the selection of the recommended sites has been the Study. Accordingly 22 new sites will be build or expanded and refurbished to cater for an older age group and so reduce the deficiency in teenage facilities.
- To date play areas have been built and opened to the public in Elvington and Naburn. Bishopthorpe has the builders on site, Skelton and Huntington have agreed final designs, Copmanthorpe, Barfield Road, Viking Road, Chesney's Field, Ashton Avenue, Sowerby Road and Balfour Street are out to tender. Haxby is undergoing consultation.
- The Leaside play area has recently undergone a total re-development with a range of new play equipment funded by the Big Lottery Children's play. The play area offers risky and challenging play opportunities for children up to 16 years.
- Early in the new year Park Grove school will be enhancing its outdoor provision, offering adventurous and risky play to be enjoyed by the children of the school and to provide open access free play for the community.
- The Rawcliffe Boulder project is a unique development to provide the city with its first freestanding open access climbing structure, due to be installed by spring 2010. The boulder is to be situated in Rawcliffe country park and has been designed to ensure that children of all ages and abilities will have the opportunity to experience the challenge of climbing.
- The Running Wild project is ran by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and funded by the BIG lottery fund delivering outdoor natural play opportunities at 5 outdoor green spaces around the city. Children and young people have been developing their own ideas to build permanent structures at the sites as a legacy, this includes the tree house at the Moorland nature reserve.
- In the spring of 2009 a dedicated maintenance and inspection post was created for playgrounds within the Parks and Open Spaces service. This is raising the quality of care and reducing down time for repairs. The possibility of offering a similar service to local councils is being investigated.

23. Future actions:

- The Year 2 Playbuilder programme will see a further 11 sites built or upgraded.
- The possibility of offering a dedicated maintenance and inspection service to local councils could be investigated. Those local councils who choose to buy into the service would do so instead of receiving certain double taxation payments.

### Allotments

24. *“Analysis of demand for allotments highlights that some sites are nearing capacity and that there are waiting lists at some existing facilities. The quality of allotments is also varying”.*
25. Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows there is a shortfall of about 1 hectare. Specific areas with no provision include Skelton, south Strensall, south Haxby / Wigginton, Clifton Moor, Westfield, Woodthorpe and Dringhouses, Wheldrake and Elvington.
26. Recent and current actions:
- Since the survey new sites have opened at Strensall and Wheldrake which created 80 new plots.
  - Take up on CYC sites has risen with a further 100 new tenants over the last twelve months. Glen and Carr allotments are now full, old sheds have been removed and vacant areas cleared of brambles.
  - More CYC sites now have toilet facilities, children’s gardens, notice boards and site cabins / secure storage. Invested has taken place at CYC sites of Howe Hill (£6k) and Bootham allotments (£3k) to improve drainage.
  - Allotment Garden competition has restarted with a celebration event hosted by the Lord Mayor in September.
27. Future actions:
- Continue to investigate possible new sites in urban and rural areas.
  - Protect existing non CYC sites and work with parish councils and other site managers to improve quality in order to reduce waiting lists and increase occupancy.
  - At Bootham further investment is needed over the next 2 years to increase security.

### Outdoor sports facilities

28. *“There is high demand for outdoor sports facilities across York and the existing facilities are perceived to be of varying quality. An increase in the level of provision will be required over the LDF period to 2029 to facilitate higher levels of participation in sports. There is potential for this to be delivered to an extent through community use at school sites”.* Facilities include grass and synthetic pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens .
29. Applying the local quantity standards to existing provision shows a shortfall of nearly 16 hectares, this is equivalent to about 8 full size football pitches. Specific areas of the city have specific shortfalls for example there is a shortfall of pitches in Fulford and Dringhouses.

30. Recent and current actions:

- The findings of the study are totally consistent with the research carried out by Active York, the city's sport and active leisure partnership in 2005. Since 2005 the council and other Active York partners have been working with community clubs, schools and developers to make a start on addressing the qualitative and quantitative shortfalls. It is also recognised that if the challenging targets for increasing participation in sport and physical activity are to be met then the city must offer high quality facilities for these new participants.
- The council have successfully applied for part funding for a football facilities project officer post from the Football Foundation. This role was filled in May 2009 and since then the officer has been working on 11 football facility projects which will increase the number or quality of pitches in the city.
- The football facilities project officer has established and is working with a steering group of local league officials, the county FA and school sport representatives to develop a football facilities development plan. This is due to be submitted to the Football Foundation early in 2010.
- A partnership has been established between the council, Manor School and Poppleton Tigers Junior FC to acquire additional land to develop new pitches and hard court space and to create associated changing and club facilities. The council have committed a capital sum of £200k to this project which is estimated to cost approximately £1M.
- Since the publication of the study the council has negotiated community access to an additional four school sites through the development and adoption of community use agreements.
- As part of the LDF land allocations process Active York consulted community clubs about their aspirations for additional pitches and facilities. A number of clubs and sites have been requested for additional sporting open space. The need for additional sports space has been identified in the core strategy documents and will continue to be included in planning documents.

31. Future actions:

- Implement the priority projects in the plan following sign off by the Football Foundation.
- Continue to get areas of land which were formerly used as playing fields but are now disused and in poor condition back into playable condition and managed by community sports clubs e.g. Melrosegate Playing Field
- Assist schools to offer community access to their sports facilities and where possible to assist with facility improvements in return for guaranteed community access.

Cross Cutting issues

32. The Council continues to obtain Section 106 contributions from new housing developments and these are used to improve capacity, access and standards

of open space across all 8 categories. Depending on the locality of the development the money is either spent by the Council or passed on to third parties who manage open space including parish and town councils, voluntary sports clubs and community groups. The Study, supported by service and site development plans, helps direct the use of these funds.

33. York, for the third year in a row, has received a Yorkshire in Bloom Silver Gilt Rose Award. Judges visit the city in spring and again in mid-summer, combining the scores from the two visits to give the overall standard. This year York scored silver gilt for the spring judging, and, for the first time, gold for the summer. The judges see sites from all of the eight categories so improvements made to any individual site can have an impact on the overall perception of the appearance and quality of the City's landscape.

### **Consultation**

34. Considerable consultation was undertaken to produce the Study. Site specific improvements are in most cases undertaken in consultation with local users, friend groups or associations. or sporting organisations as appropriate.

### **Options**

35. The options available for the Executive Member are:
- Option 1: Agree the future actions suggested above in Paragraphs 11, 15, 19, 23, 27 and 31.
- Option 2: Suggest further and/or alternative actions.

### **Analysis**

36. Options 1 offers a means of continuing to respond to the challenges raised by the Study. Many improvements rely on funding becoming available and therefore a degree of flexibility is required as to which project can move forward at any given time; however the Executive Member may be able to be able to suggest further areas for consideration.

### **Corporate Priorities**

37. The actions and initiatives set out in the report relate to several of the Council's corporate priorities including :

*Sustainable City* : We will improve the quality of the local environment and the condition of York's public spaces.

*Inclusive City* : We will improve opportunities for third sector involvement in the shaping, influencing and delivery of services through consultation and partnership working to deliver open space improvements

*City of Culture* : By providing safe, well maintained and fit for purpose venues capable of holding city wide and local events

*Healthy City* : By providing safe, well maintained and fit for purpose venues which support the Just 30 campaign



## Implications

38. **Financial** – There are no specific financial implications of the report's recommendations. Where any individual project has financial implications it will be approved through the scheme of delegation and monitored by appropriate budget managers.
39. **Legal and Property** - Where specific projects have property implications e.g. lease or lettings Legal Services will be involved in any arrangements
40. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology or Property Implications arising from this report.

## Risk Management

41. Failure to continue invest in existing and new open space will mean that the ambitions of the Local Development Framework will not be met.

## Recommendations

42. The Executive Member is asked to:
- Note the work currently being undertaken
  - Agree the proposed actions in paragraph 36
  - Agree any additional projects and priorities
- Reason: To develop sufficient high quality open space that meets the needs of the City's residents and visitors.

## Contact Details

<b>Author:</b>	<b>Chief Officer Responsible for the report:</b>		
Dave Meigh Head of Parks and Open Spaces Learning Culture and Children's Services Tel No. 01904 553386	Charlie Croft Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)		
	<b>Report Approved</b>	✓	<b>Date</b> 23.11.09.
<b>Specialist Implications Officer(s):</b> N/A			
<b>Wards Affected:</b>			<b>All</b> ✓
<b>For further information please contact the author of the report</b>			

## Background Papers:

The Open Space Sport and Recreation Study can be found at:

[http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Planning/Local\\_development\\_framework/LDF\\_Evidence\\_base/2007OpenSpaceStudy/](http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Planning/Local_development_framework/LDF_Evidence_base/2007OpenSpaceStudy/)