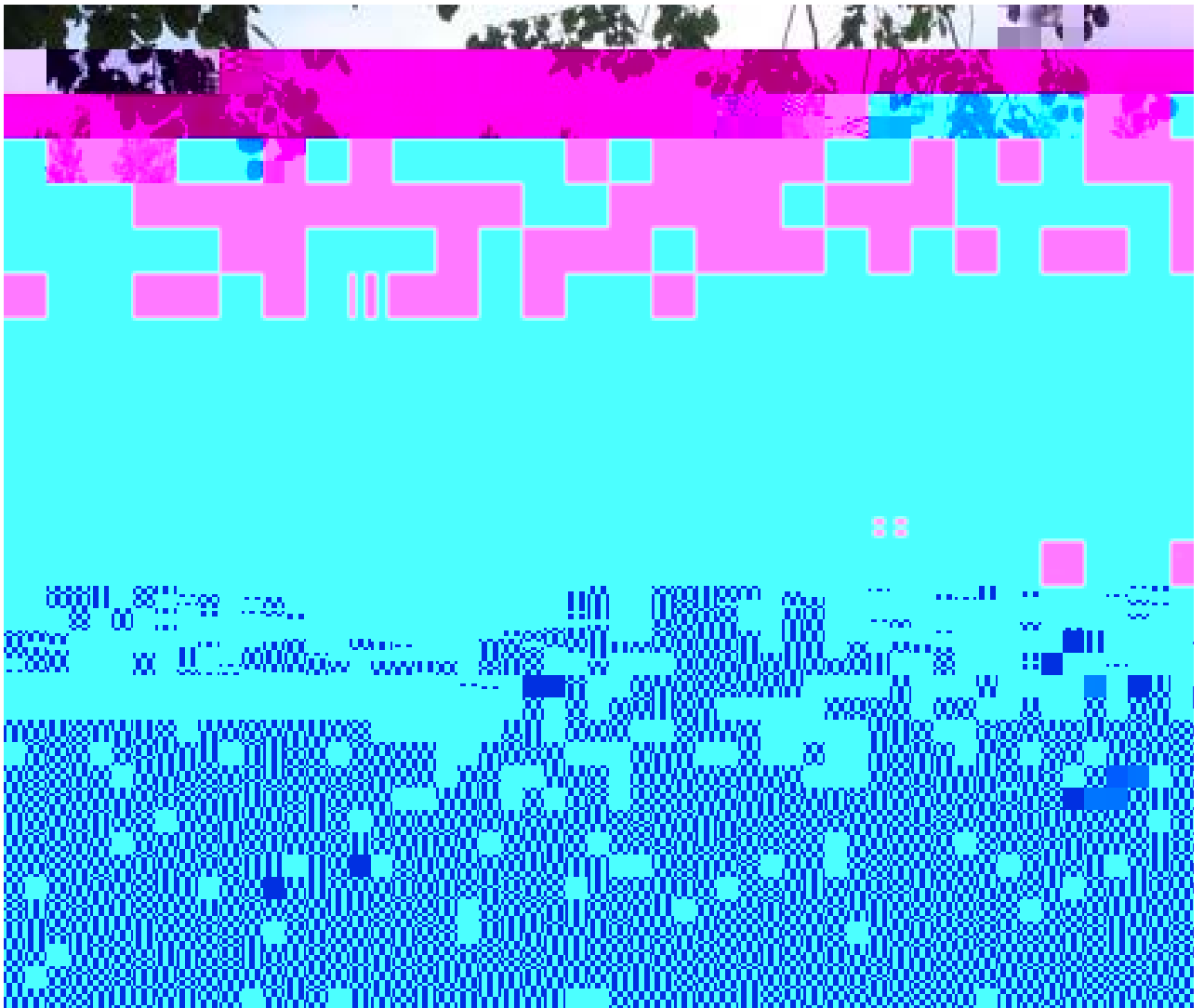


Resources for Improving Parks



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Resources for Improving Parks

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Reports that have been submitted to Council can be downloaded from www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny.

Preface

By Cllr John Alden,
Chairman, Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee



Birmingham is very fortunate in having over 450 parks and open spaces. Our first public park was Calthorpe Park opened in 1857, following a very generous donation of land by Lord Calthorpe. This was followed by Cannon Hill Park Edgbaston in 1873 and Victoria Park, Small Heath in 1876 from land donated by Louisa Ryland.

Several of our large parks are held in trust for the benefit of the Citizens of Birmingham and not owned by the City Council, but are managed by the City Council as Sole Corporate Trustee.

It is widely accepted that well maintained parks and open spaces are beneficial to local residents. Unfortunately there has, in my view, been a lack of adequate funding for maintaining our Parks for more than a quarter of a century.

Scrutiny has no powers to raise funds, or commit the City Council to additional expenditure. I am therefore limited to urging the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture and his Cabinet colleagues to make the improvement of our parks a greater priority.

I would suggest that we need substantial additional funding to make inroads into improving the quality of our Parks and Open Spaces and hope that this Scrutiny Report will help towards this end.

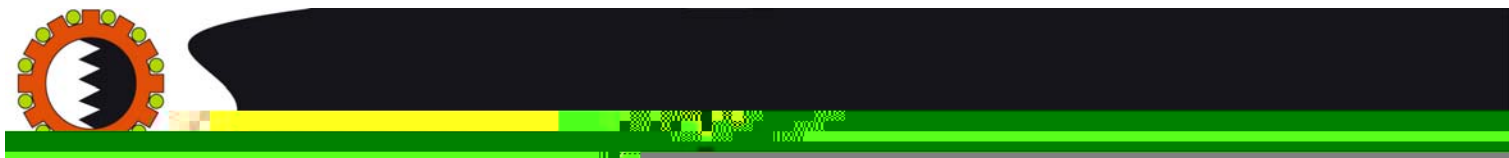
A signature of John Alden in blue ink on a white background.




Summary

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The idea for this review came from concerns expressed by Members about the ability of parks and playing fields to meet the needs of residents for sport, recreation and healthy leisure. Members are concerned about the condition of some of the city's parks and are aware that parks have not been





1.2.14 The Birmingham Environmental Partnership has the role of delivering the environmental targets of the Local Area Agreement. It is one of the seven thematic partnerships within Be Birmingham, the Local Strategic Partnership which implements the Sustainable Community Strategy. It is a multi-agency grouping, receiving £3million of Working Neighbourhoods Funds over three years to deliver agreed targets. It appears that the profile of parks within the Environmental Partnership has never been very prominent due to thfil



2 Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R1	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture convenes a partnership group to promote the importance of parks and open spaces, co-ordinate funding opportunities and involve the local community.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	June 2010
R2	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture, through the Heritage Steering Group, recommends including an exhibition on the importance of historic parks in Birmingham in the programme of the Museum and Art Gallery.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	December 2009
R3	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture produces a Capital Planning Strategy for Parks for the 2010/11 financial cycle, by November 2009.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	November 2009
R4	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture reports back to the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on the parks schemes approved by the Constituencies using the Constituency Fund for 2010/11.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	February 2010



R8

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture considers grant-aiding BOSF to enable more support to be given to Friends of Parks, in particular support in accessing funding sources.

Cabinet Member for



3 Introduction

3.1 Reasons for the Overview

3.1.1 The Leisure, Sport and Culture Review and Scrutiny Committee expressed concern about the ability of parks and playing fields to meet the needs of residents for sport, recreation and leisure and commented on the decrease in resources available for making improvements to them. The Committee agreed at their meeting on 11th June 2008 to undertake an Overview exercise.

3.2 Terms of Reference

3.2.1 The work outline for this Overview is as follows:

Our key question:	To find out more about the resources available for improving parks and playing pitches and to make suggestions to the Executive as to how resources might be increased.
1. How is O&S adding value through this work?	A series of presentations will be made to the O&S Committee to inform them of the importance of improving parks and playing pitches and to describe the resources currently available. These presentations will be written up and used as a basis for discussion with O&S members to enable Suggested Actions to be developed to assist the Executive.
2. What needs to be done?	Six presentations are proposed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of parks and the policy context • Financial resources for parks within the City Council • Financial resources for parks external to BCC • The role of the voluntary sector in levering in resources • Financing sports facilities
3. What timescale do we propose to do this in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations to Committee in July, September, October, November and December 2008 • Discussions with Committee on Conclusions and Suggested Actions in January 2009 • issue paper to be drawn up by Executive and Scrutiny officers - February 2009 • discussions with members to generate Suggested Actions - March 2009 • draft report – March 2009 • consultation with Members at informal meeting – March 2009 • discussion between Scrutiny Chairman and Cabinet Member- March 2009 • pre agenda meeting for Committee, 31st March 2009 • presentation of Overview Report to Committee 15th April 2009
4. What outcomes are we looking to achieve?	Inform4/TT12 romeos

3.3 The Definition of Resources

3.3.1 During the course of the review, the Committee concentrated on Capital Resources and did not look at City Council's Revenue Resources. Previous Overview work has been carried out by the committee on the re-tendering process for the Grounds Maintenance Contracts. In March 2009 new Grounds Maintenance Contracts were awarded by the City Council for 10 years. The Suggested Actions of the Overview were taken into account in this re-tendering process. The way that the parks are maintained through the contracts has an important impact on the appearance of the park. Where the contracts allow on-site Park Keepers, the involvement of the local community is enhanced and this in turn improves the use and appearance of the park. No evidence was collected as part of this Review on the revenue resources available to parks, nor on the Grounds Maintenance Contracts.

3.3.2 Each Constituency has a Parks Manager and the Council's Ranger Service and Tree Officers also work hard to improve the appearance, safety and use of parks. No evidence has been collected on the considerable revenue resources allocated to these services.


3.4 From Overview to Scrutiny Review

3.4.1 During discussions on the Conclusions and Suggested Actions of the Overview in March 2009, it became apparent that there were serious issues that needed to be brought to the attention of the Executive. It was decided by the Chairman of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee local council



Resources for Improving Parks

3.5.2 Following the collation of these presentations, together with the comments made by Members at



3.6.2 This review report contains 12 recommendations that the Executive should take into account when further developing the Parks Service.



4.6 National Audit Office

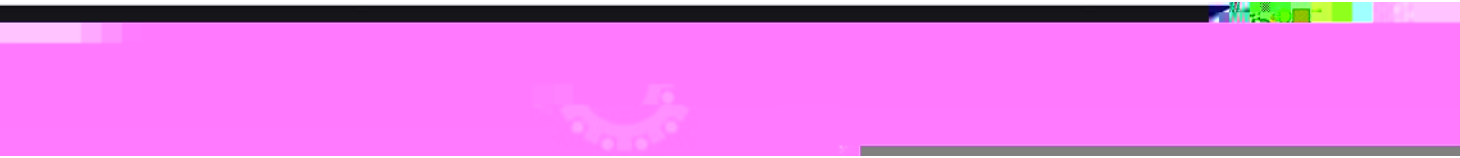
4.6.1 In March 2006, the National Audit Office published a report on 'Enhancing Urban Green Space'¹. It stressed the importance of parks "Good quality green space plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of urban life. Urban green spaces help to provide opportunities for city dwellers to relax, take exercise, play sport and meet friends and neighbours. The existence of high quality urban green space contributes to wider Government objectives such as improved health, more sustainable neighbourhood renewal and better community cohesion, especially in more deprived communities." However it recognised that "Green space is still too often treated as a Cinderella service. Its voice is often dissipated within local authorities and underrepresented in important decision making arenas."

4.7 The City Council's Parks Strategy

4.7.1 In November 2006, the City Council published *'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces'* as Supplementary Planning Guidance (part of the city's Local Development Framework under revised planning rules PPG17). The scope and depth of the strategy is rated as an example of national best practice.

4.7.2 The Strategy is intended to guide the planning, design, management, maintenance and provision of parks and public open spaces in the city over the next 10-15 years. The Strategy aims to address local concerns by promoting a comprehensive approach to park regeneration and through developing stronger partnership working and community involvement. Specific policy objectives are detailed in later sections of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and address the following issues of concern:

- Deliver peoples' visions for their parks and green spaces and respond to community need.
- Guide future provision and improvement of parks and open spaces through the planning process.
- Following adoption of the Parks Strategy as a Supplementary Planning Document, develop a prioritised list of open space improvements through the production of Local Open Space Action Plans which will guide the future allocation of resources.
- Publish a 'Sustainability Checklist' for Parks, to cover all aspects of park design, management and maintenance.
- Promote urban regeneration and socio-economic development.





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'Birmingham 2026 Our vision for the future' was published in September 2008. It has five clear outcomes:

- Succeed economically
- Stay safe in a clean, green city
- Be healthy
- Enjoy a high quality of life
- Make a contribution

4.9.2 Under Outcome 1: Succeed economically, within the section on 'The Environment and Climate Change', reference is made to Birmingham's parks and open spaces and to the need for environmental improvements to help raise the profile of the city.

4.9.3 Under Outcome 2: Stay safe in a clean, green city, one of the early priorities for action is to 'tackle serious acquisitive crime and increase public and investor confidence in neighbourhoods. We will do this by dealing with local crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour and creating cleaner, greener and safer neighbourhoods and public spaces.'

4.9.4 Under Outcome 3: Be healthy, one of the early priorities for action is to 'increase the physical activity of people in groups and in areas with poor health outcomes, including their use of leisure facilities and access to physical training and exercise programmes' - parks offer locations for sports pitches and playing fields.

4.9.5 Under Outcome 4: Enjoy a high quality of life, one of the criteria for a high quality of life is that 'more people will be satisfied with our parks and open spaces and will have access to cultural activities (such as libraries and museums) and enjoy our leisure and entertainment facilities at a time and place that suits them.' One of the improvement targets under this outcome is 'By 2026 Birmingham will achieve the best parks in the UK and will measure this by resident satisfaction with parks and open spaces.' One of the early priorities for action is to 'create recreational havens; improving access to recreational facilities and raising the quality of, and satisfaction with, local parks, open spaces and waterways (including canals). We will create a new city park and involve the public in its design.'

4.9.6 Implementation of the Community Strategy is to be achieved through the Local Area Agreement.

4.10 Local Area Agreement 2008/11

4.10.1 The LAA is the delivery mechanism within Be Birmingham for the delivery of the Community Strategy. It is an agreement between Central Government and Birmingham - its people, communities and partners within the public, private, community, voluntary and faith sectors. It represents a three-year programme to transform the city and to deliver the first steps of 'Birmingham 2026', our new sustainable community strategy. The LAA consists of two parts - the





5 Findings - The Importance of Parks

5.1 The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces





5.5 Members Views Raised in Discussion

- 5.5.1 Several Members confirmed how important they thought parks were to the quality of life of the citizens of Birmingham. Two Members pointed out that parks in their Ward needed more resources

Recommendation 1:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture convenes a partnership group to promote the importance of parks and open spaces, co-ordinate funding opportunities and involve the local community.

- 5.6.6 Many of Birmingham's parks are historically very important and contribute significantly to the city's heritage. Some of them were closely associated with city fathers such as the Calthorpe Estate and

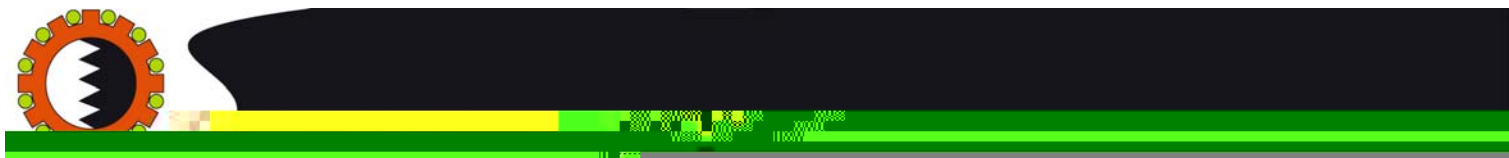




Figure 2: City Council Capital Resources as at September 2008

6.2.2 The total resources identified above are £9,876,564.

6.3 Key Issues


6.3.1 The figures above demonstrate that recent investment in parks is determined through



Resources for Improving Parks

securing of this level of match funding is often hampered by competition from higher priority projects and bids from other sections of the City Council for the very limited capital resources pot.

- 6.3.5 The new and additional revenue consequences associated with capital improvement projects in parks and open spaces is another challenge facing the City Council. There are often more opportunities to secure capital resources for projects rather than revenue for aftercare, so it is vital that when capital resources are earmarked for new improvements, the revenue increases are secured at the same time either from corporate and service resources or alternative streams of



regeneration projects have received more open spaces funds than other areas. It was suggested that BCC internal funds should be prioritised in areas where external funds were not available.

- 6.4.3 The importance of BCC funds being available for 'match-funding' external resources was emphasised. Revenue funding to maintain schemes funded with external capital was acknowledged as really important.
- 6.4.4 Members asked for more details of the revenue monies available.
- 6.4.5 One Member stressed the importance of the Ranger Service in looking after parks and they needed more funding. Another stressed the importance of toilets in parks.
- 6.4.6 The Chairman suggested that the Cabinet Member should strongly lobby for additional corporate resources for parks in the future.



Resources for Improving Parks

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- 6.5.12 The Parks Service Strategy is supported by a schedule of project options put forward by service managers. Both Strategic and Constituency service managers contributed to the Parks Service Strategy. This Strategy was used as a basis for resource allocation decisions.
- 6.5.13 The 2009/10 capital resources for Leisure, Sport and Culture have been allocated as illustrated in Figure 4 below - parks schemes comprise 21% of the portfolio's resources; this is £5,752,000.

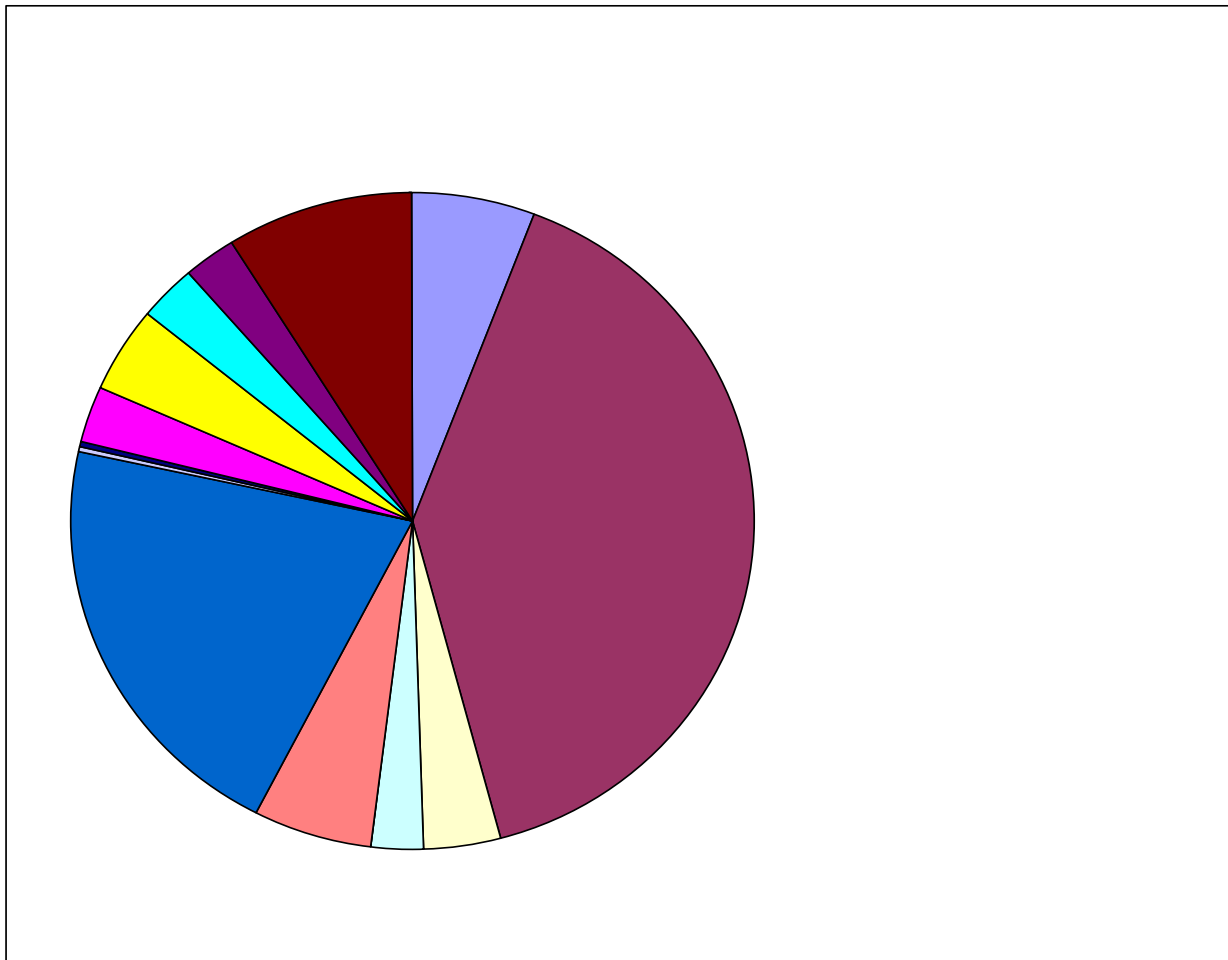





Figure 5: Parks Capital Expenditure Plan 2010-2012

6.5.14 The £5.8m parks allocation is derived from a number of sources as set out in Figure 5 above. This shows: third party contributions have been received to complete payments for Noble House and Westminster public open spaces (£99,000); earmarked



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- 6.5.18 Finance from Section 106 Agreements has been a very significant source of funding for park improvements over the last few years. When planning permission is granted for certain developments, a legal agreement requires funds to be paid to the City Council when the development is started. For 2009/10 it is estimated that nearly £5m will be generated in this way. It is to be hoped that the current recession does not result in developments being put on hold with payments therefore not due to be paid.
- 6.5.19 More detailed figures for Section 106 were obtained from the Planning Obligations Officer of the



front line facilities managed in Constituencies, mainly relating to Community Libraries but also touching on Community and Leisure Centres, and Neighbourhood Offices. Most of the issues reflected serious problems with the fabric of buildings ie they were no longer weather proof or presented significant health and safety risks such that the closure of facilities and loss of service to local communities was a distinct possibility. The key point is that no capital resources were available within the Strategic Services to fund such repairs and, obviously, the costs were outside the scope of individual Constituency annual capital “allocations” of £0.1m, or repairs and maintenance revenue budgets.

6.5.23 Consequently, a proposal was developed to “pool” the £3m of resources to address the immediate priorities in a more strategic manner - rather than giving each of the ten Constituencies a nominal annual “allocation” as is the usual practice. Following discussion with Constituency Chairmen, Cabinet approved this approach in October 2008 and agreed to match the Constituencies £3m resources with a further allocation of £2.95m to enable the most immediate priorities to be addressed. The list of priorities included in the overall £5.95m programme was drawn up in light of Constituency Committee priorities, intelligence from the Local Property Management Team, and following consultation with the strategic service leads. In the case of Libraries, the evidence base was supported by individual building condition surveys.

6.5.24 Two schemes relating to Parks are incl



6.5.28 The annual £1m capital allocation to Constituencies is a small element of the city's overall capital programme and the Strategic Parks service is able to make bids for specific projects, along with all other City Council services. However, it is likely that funding will be very limited in future and parks will be in competition with all other services for these scarce resources. In order to ensure best value is achieved in the use of the resources, decisions about which schemes are funded will be guided by service ten year strategic capital strategies."

6.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

City Council Capital Expenditure Plan

6.6.1 The evidence received by Committee in September 2008 leads to a number of conclusions:

- The multi-funded nature of capital investment in parks

- 6.6.8 This further work will be undertaken for the Leisure, Sport and Culture Portfolio by the newly established (May 2009) Environment and Culture Capital Strategy Group. In addition the group will ensure that the City Council's Projects and Programmes process is effectively embedded in the Directorate as well as exploring funding issues for services. The group will include Constituency representation.

Recommendation 3 :

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture produces a Capital Planning Strategy for Parks for the 2010/11 financial cycle, by November 2009.

Constituency Capital Expenditure Plan

- 6.6.9 The priorities in the Constituencies are to carry out urgent maintenance works to buildings, such as libraries and swimming pools in order to keep local services running. Especially urgent are those repairs needed for safety reasons. Therefore improving parks is not a high priority for local resources, except where there are statutory safety requirements for example park pools. As stated in 6.5.26, "it is likely that priority will need to be given to maintaining those services open to the public, and which generate income".
- 6.6.10 This again emphasises the importance of external sources of funds for improving parks.

Recommendation 4 :



7 Findings - Financial Resources External to the City Council

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 8 October 2008, the Head of Landscape and Contract Development gave a presentation on how the City Council secures funding for its parks and playing fields from external sources; to provide a general summary of the levels of funding and the specific funding sources; and to set out how future financial resources for parks may be secured within the context of a corporate capital strategy and the Parks Service Strategy. Her presentation is set out here.

7.2 Source of the Capital Budgets Funded from External Resources

7.2.1

Funding type		Outturn 2005-06	Outturn 2006-07	Outturn 2007-08	Budget Forecast 2008-09	Budget Forecast Future years	Total for funding type
New Deal For Communities 1 Funding *4		497,879	364,353	164,293	79,000	-	1,105,525
New Deal For Communities 2 Funding *5		-	872,875	1,404,784	912,866	-	3,190,525
Neighbourhood Renewal Funding	Capital	1,979,272	668,632	669,102	-		3,317,006
	Revenue	467,064	240,159	342,535	-		1,049,758
Community Chest Funding	Capital	667,757	133,366	181,535	52,440		1,035,098
	Revenue	40,004	56,920	113,303	31,800		242,027
Neighbourhood Elements Funding	Capital	-	-	68,987	-		68,987
	Revenue	-	-	16,134	-		16,134
Total for period		8,232,189	6,665,348	6,199,327	8,989,348	2,407,718	32,493,930

Figure 6: External Capital resources as at October 2008

*1 This relates to grants for restoring contaminated land.

*2 This relates to funding from other private organisations for example SITA (Landfill Tax Credit), Sutton Municipal Charities or other stakeholders.

*3 This relates to funding from other public organisations for example Natural England, Forestry Commission or other public grantors.

*4 Kings Norton.

*5 Aston Pride.


7.3 Key Issues

7.3.1 The figure of £32,493,930 above, compared with the figure of £9,876,564 for internal resources previously reported to the Leisure, Sport and Culture Review and Scrutiny Committee on 10th September 2008, demonstrates that recent investment in parks and playing fields has been dominated by external factors, mainly through developments generated by the housing market, Government investment programmes (such as New Deal for Communities and the Single Regeneration Budget) and specific needs identified within the Constituencies through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.



Resources for Improving Parks

- 7.3.2 As previously reported it should be noted that the City Council has limited discretion on how and where these external funds are spent. Section 106 contributions and Government programme grants must be spent on specific items related to a legal agreement or programme objectives. Proposed developments often must relate to a specific geographical area that falls within a Regeneration Action Zone.
- 7.3.3 Work is currently underway in Parks and Nature Conservation, based on both existing asset management data and the Parks Strategy Action Plans, to identify capital funding requirements for projects that support the service's strategic priorities. These projects may not attract external funding but where they do they often require the assembly of grants from several different funding organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund or European Regional Development Fund. Often there is a requirement for the City Council to secure match funding either from its own limited resources or seek contributions from other organisations.
- 7.3.4 As previously reported it is prudent to target internal capital resources at those areas within the city which are unlikely to attract external funds but which do support the service's strategic priorities. However there are occasions when the service's priorities coincide with the objectives of an external funding organisation or Government programme and here the City Council can secure significant resources to deliver its own strategic objectives.
- 7.3.5 The use of Section 106 Agreement funds are restricted through the planning process, but can be directed to contribute to multi-funded capital schemes which can be delivered in a single parks refurbishment contract. Assembling funds for larger schemes over £1,000,000 can be a complicated and lengthy process, for which there is often few resources available at the outset. Internal capital resources directed towards the feasibility and bidding stages of a project can lever in significant sums that will in the medium to long term move the service forward.
- 7.3.6 Funding from Capital receipts following the sale of City Council owned property was covered in the previous report. However it is worth noting here that where tenderers bid to purchase City Council owned land, the sum they offer should fully reflect the impact of any planning obligations, including Section 106 agreement contributions, triggered by their development proposals.
- 7.3.7 The new and additional revenue consequences associated with capital improvement projects in parks and open spaces is another challenge facing the City Council. There are often more opportunities to secure external capital resources for projects rather than revenue for aftercare, so it is important that when capital resources are secured for new improvements, every opportunity is investigated to secure the revenue funding at the same time, either from corporate and service resources or alternative streams of external funding, such as Section 106 agreements or grant award bodies. An increase in revenue support from external funding sources invariably results in an equivalent reduction in the capital sums generated. If this issue is not resolved then potential capital investment could be lost.
- 7.3.8 Traditionally the process for bidding for external funds has been driven by local community groups campaigning for improvements to their parks and playing fields, or where additional funds are



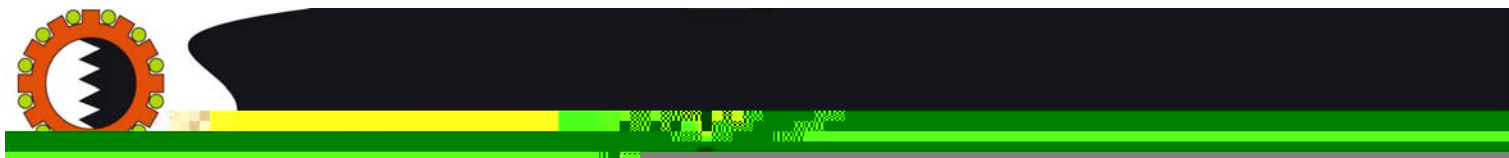
required to match an existing capital pot to deliver the full requirements of a project. This is perceived as having tended to result in a relatively ad hoc range of external capital bids. It is important that the capital planning process, including bids for external funding, is integrated with the Council's overall business planning (service, budgets and assets) processes to which end a new



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BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL - HERITAGE STRATEGY 2007-2012

Historic Parks		
Project	Project Summary	Status
Calthorpe Park	Landscaping works; replanting; refurbishment/improvements to facilities.	Future proposal. Costed feasibility study required
Cannon Hill Park	Landscaping works; replanting; refurbishment/improvements to facilities.	Future proposal. Costed feasibility study required.
Edgbaston Reservoir	Landscaping works, refurbishment of Lodge.	Feasibility study completed for Lodge. Funded from SRB6 and BCC.
Highbury Park	Park restoration and landscaping.	Costed feasibility study completed. Historic conservation study published.
Highgate Park	Big Lottery / HLF (Parks for people) project.	Feasibility study completed. Big Lottery application submitted March 2007. Unsuccessful.





8 Findings - The Role of the Constituencies


8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 12th November 2008, a Senior Constituency Manager from the Directorate of Local Services gave a presentation on the role of the Constituencies in planning open space improvements and in securing resources to fund them. His



8.3 Comprehensive Assessment Tool

8.3.1

- 
- 8.4.6 Significant levels of capital funding are needed to upgrade Birmingham's parks and playing field facilities. The provision of new and improved facilities will almost certainly have additional revenue implications that could put additional pressures on the current revenue budgets available. The voluntary sector and community groups can bring significant added value in this respect. However, to facilitate this requires extended periods of support and input from existing City Council Constituency, Parks and Sports staff.
- 8.4.7 Constituencies have contributed to improvements to parks and playing pitches across the city. On going partnership work between representatives of Parks and Nature Conservation, the Constituencies and the voluntary sector is vital to secure further improvement."

8.5 Members Views Raised in Discussion

- 8.5.1 At the meeting of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 12th November 2008, several Members said that they were not aware of the process outlined on the report for creating local Action Plans to implement the Parks and Playing Pitches Strategies. As a result Members from one



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The Green Flag Award scheme is run by the Civic Trust. It is a national annual award scheme for parks, which recognises good environmental management.

Birmingham currently has six sites with Green Flag status:

Lickey Hills Country Park was the first to earn the Green Flag award and has now held an award for ten consecutive years and has impressed the judges with its conservation of flora and fauna, the high level of community use, Ranger led educational and activity sessions and demonstrable community consultation.

Cannon Hill Park which has been praised for its helpful and well-informed staff and was recognised as providing a welcoming site for diverse communities and people experiencing difficulties with mobility.

Kings Heath Park pond restoration project was singled out for praise by the judges, as was the helpfulness of the staff.

Castle Vale Centre Park is an excellent local park, which is clearly valued. It has benefited from a very high level of community involvement that has created an exemplar of what can be achieved when local people are involved at the outset.

Handsworth Park. This Park is at the heart of its community, responding to different needs and benefiting from its liveliness. With the Leisure Centre and Play Centre, the play and sporting facilities, the lakes and the boathouse, the Sons of Rest Pavilion, the Bandstand, and the natural beauty of the trees, shrubs, views and wildlife, this is a park that offers something for all.

New Hall Valley Country Park. A stunning piece of "captured" Midlands countryside. The great thing is that this Country Park has turned out like it was supposed to be, following a genuine and effective partnership between local people and their Council. Here achievement is driven by an enthusiastic partnership of local people and Council Officers: each doing what they do best.

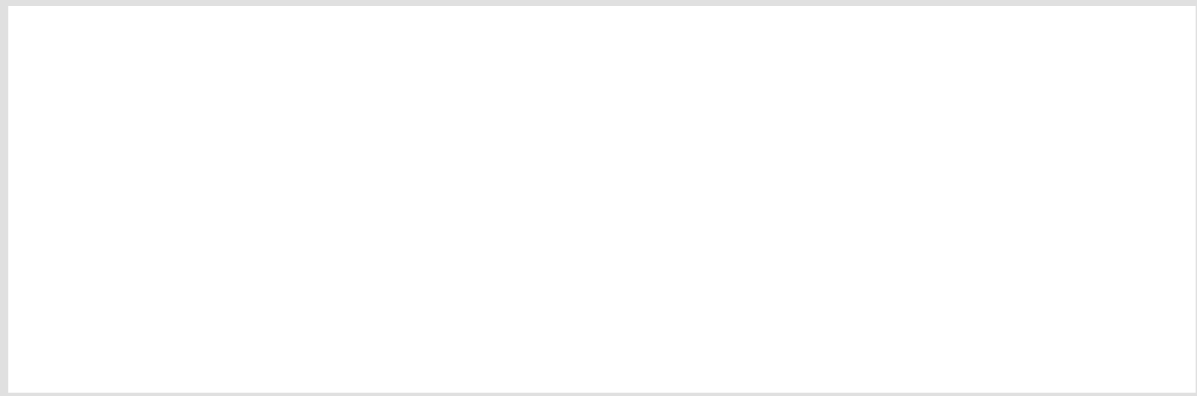


Figure 8: Green Flag Awards

8.7 Comments by Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) on the Comprehensive Assessment Tool (CAT)

- 8.7.1 The Birmingham Open Spaces Forum was invited to comment on the draft report of this review and made the following written representations:
- 8.7.2 "The CAT Tool was originally our idea and was worked up with a team lead by a consultant in partnership with Landscape Practice Group (a division of the Environment and Culture Directorate) and the Parks Department. We developed it as a partnership to be a tool to be used to evaluate our parks and open spaces and score them depending on their condition and facilities present. The field survey is done in partnership with a member of the Friends' Group and a Parks professional working together. They do a walkabout of the site and mark it according to the sheet.
- 8.7.3 There is then the desktop survey to complete with visitor surveys and community consultations. We originally piloted this by doing a field survey on one park per constituency. The Housing Department then used the CAT tool to help them in North Birmingham with the Housing Market Renewal Area (HMRA) survey. The Landscape Practice Group lead on this, a Consultant was contracted to organise it, BOSF and other local people helped out as did the Park Managers. Whilst some of these areas were parks, others were open spaces (not owned by the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture) and small areas of grass. We became involved with the HMRA survey to make sure that the community view was included in to the Housing survey as we do not want to lose any good quality open space, especially if it is valued by the local community.
- 8.7.4 We now want to continue the CAT across other parks and open spaces in Birmingham and we will be writing to the current Head of Parks to ask about continuing this good work."

8.8 Comments by BOSF on Local Resources

- 8.8.1 The Birmingham Open Spaces forum was invited to comment on the draft report of this Review and made the following written representations:
- 8.8.2 "We have a concern here as funding for the parks budget is cut annually centrally in line with all other budgets, some of that reduced money goes down to constituencies to manage some facilities locally and these funds are then cut again as constituencies find the cuts requested of them. The poor park managers are therefore asked to cut the work on the parks again and try to find savings. Some parks are now down to core standard only and other parks are below. Our parks cannot survive these constant cuts in budget!"



8.9 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.9.1 Constituency Parks and Open Spaces Action Plans are the vehicle Constituencies use for identifying action needed, prioritising projects and seeking funding. They were initiated by the publication in 2006 of 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks and open Spaces' policy document. The way that these plans are used and incorporated in the Constituencies' processes varies across the city. The Chairman of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee, as part of this scrutiny work, wrote to each Constituency Chairman to enquire about the processes used in each Constituency. To date replies from three Constituencies have been received. It became apparent that there was considerable variation across the city as to the importance attached to the open space planning processes.

Recommendation 6:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture works with Constituency Committees to co-ordinate the production of Constituency Parks and Open Spaces Action Plans (having regard to the Parks and Open Spaces policy) and that once a year, commencing in October 2009, the ten plans are published together and presented to the O&S Committee.

8.9.2 The financial planning process in the Constituencies is set out in section 6.5 of this report. The

- 8.9.5 The advantage of a local award would be that more parks would get a chance to be recognised and the process could involve many more Friends of Parks in championing quality and improvement. As the Civic Trust is the umbrella for Civic Societies, it would seem logical that any local scheme should involve The Birmingham Civic Society. The Society has had an important role in the past providing quality open spaces in the city.

Recommendation 7:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture discuss with the Birmingham Civic Society and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) the feasibility of creating a local Green Flag Award scheme.



9 Findings - The Role of Community Engagement: Birmingham Open Spaces Forum and the Friends of Parks

9.1 The Government View

- 9.1.1 The March 2006 report 'Enhancing Urban Green Space' states that "The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sees the voluntary and community sector as having a vital role to play in the delivery and management of good quality, well designed, safe pu





Resources for Improving Parks

- \$1.1billion in cost savings for citizens

Their value in health promotion – the effect of the exposure to natural environments on health inequalities

- 9.2.6 November 2008 saw the publication of a report in *The Lancet* (*Mitchell R and Popham F 2008 Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study. The Lancet, 372 (9650); 1655-1660*) that showed that just living near a good quality open space (you don't even have to visit it) reduced the health inequalities between rich and poor in all causes of mortality, except lung cancer.

What Friends Groups Can Contribute – Tangibles and Intangibles

- 9.2.7 Birmingham's open spaces users and Friends Groups know that even with all the evidence in the 9.2.6



Case Study 2 – Raising Money for Cotteridge Park


Cotteridge Park in south west Birmingham has had a Friends group for 11 years (FoCP). They undertake a mix of environmental and social projects using the park as a focus for community activity. All funding raised is used to make improvements to the park's infrastructure or to organise events and activities for local residents. As you can see from the table below, funding comes from a variety of sources. Funding comes from private trusts and national bodies, but also once the group gets active and

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The Intangibles

9.2.9 Beyond sweat and cash, Friends Groups add to the value of Birmingham's parks and open spaces

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- BOSF is a founder member of a national network of Friends Groups – the National Open Spaces Forum (NOSF) - putting Birmingham at the forefront of national policy making and community development.
 - BOSF was set up because those of us in established groups knew we had experience and knowledge that we could share – we improve our effectiveness through meetings and using the internet and newsletters.

9.2.11 The organisation is currently run entirely by volunteers and needs to identify funding to allow it to continue to offer support and services to communities in Birmingham.

9.3 The Conclusions of Birmingham Open Spaces Forum


9.3.1 BOSF suggest the following actions:

- Given the value of Birmingham's open spaces to us



9.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.5.1 The voluntary and community sector has a vital role to play in the delivery and management of good quality, well designed and safe public spaces. The involvement of Friends of Parks not only accesses local skills but also facilitates community engagement. Much private and public sector funding is not available to local authorities but can be accessed by local community organisations. The case studies presented by BOSF confirm that income generated by Friends is very significant to achieving quality parks; however it is not easy for small community groups with limited experience to access funds. If all areas of the city are to benefit from the funds available, then more support for less experienced Friends of Parks is needed. In addition, there are some parts of



10 Findings - The Birmingham Environmental Partnership

10.1 Introduction

10.1.1 At the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee on 14 January 2009, the Nature Conservation and Sustainability Manager gave a presentation on the role of the Partnership's plans to deliver the environmental targets of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). His edited presentation is included here:

10.1.2 "The Birmingham Environmental Partnership (BEP) is one of the seven thematic partnerships within the framework of Be-Birmingham, the Local Strategic Partnership. It is a multi-agency grouping, receiving £3million pounds of working neighbourhoods funds over three years from Be-Birmingham 2008-2011 to deliver agreed targets of both National and Local Indicators. The BEP

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in the Government's Performance Framework with its 198 Indicators. Therefore parks do not feature prominently in the LAA Action Plans.

- 10.2.2 Improvements to parks are subsumed within the 'Adaptation to Climate Change' sub-partnership. One action that the Environmental Partnership is pledged to implement within this programme is Green Infrastructure Planning.
- 10.2.3 Lobbying has taken place at a national level through the Core Cities Parks Group to introduce a National Indicator on Parks in order to raise the profile of the importance of parks and release more resources. A pilot indicator has been developed and trialled by Leeds City Council, based on the criteria from the Green Flag assessment. Other Core Cities are now trialling this system. "

10.3 Challenges Affecting Parks

- 10.3.1 "The Parks revenue budget is totally stretched; it can only barely cope with the increasing demands of maintaining the city's parks. All possible synergies and service improvements have been built into the new grounds maintenance contracts as from April 2009. This is without producing significant additional savings. The over-stretched Parks revenue budget cannot possibly address the capital infrastructure repairs and maintenance. Parks own over 300 buildings, and miles of pathways and driveways that were never built to withstand regular motorised vehicle traffic. Many structures are still the original Victorian or Edwardian, at best.
- 10.3.2 A new national demand upon parks is that of flood risk management and flood prevention, as detailed in the *Pitt Review 2008*, with its 94 recommendations for Local Authorities.
- 10.3.3



10.3.7



10.5.3 Membership of the Green City Core Priority Group included:

- Birmingham City Council
- Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust
- CSV Environment
- Groundwork Birmingham & Solihull
- Birmingham Open Spaces Forum

10.5.4 However as from October 2008 the Environmental Partnership has a refreshed structure comprising a strategic board (meeting 3-4 times per annum) an Executive (meeting monthly) and four delivery partnerships (to implement the Local Area Agreement targets):

- Low Waste
- Clean City
- Adaptation Partnership (i.e. climate change readiness)
- Low Carbon

10.5.5 Parks and open spaces are included in the Adaptation Partnership group. The Delivery Plan for this group includes the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy. The national indicator that drives the work of the group is N188 which measures the city's readiness to deal with climate change. There are no national indicators to measure parks.

10.5.6 Climate Change and Adaptation to Climate Change are corporate Strategic issues which need a single central lead.

10.6 Comments by Birmingham Open Space Forum on the Birmingham Environmental Partnership (BEP)

10.6.1 The Birmingham Open Spaces Forum was invited to comment on the draft report of this review and made the following written representations:

10.6.2 "As far as we are aware, we (BOSF) now have no input into the BEP and BEP is not interested in parks and open spaces. We were involved before and it was very useful for us and our groups (the Friends of Parks). However as parks are no longer in the LAA targets they seem to be being ignored. We did try to show them how important parks are and how they do fit in with current targets, but nothing seems to have happened. We made a submission to Be Birmingham last year to point out why parks are so important to the current targets and why they need to be included."





Resources for Improving Parks

Delivery Plan for this group includes the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy, there is concern that this will emphasise the importance of river corridors as flood plains, rather than urban parks being important places for local residents.

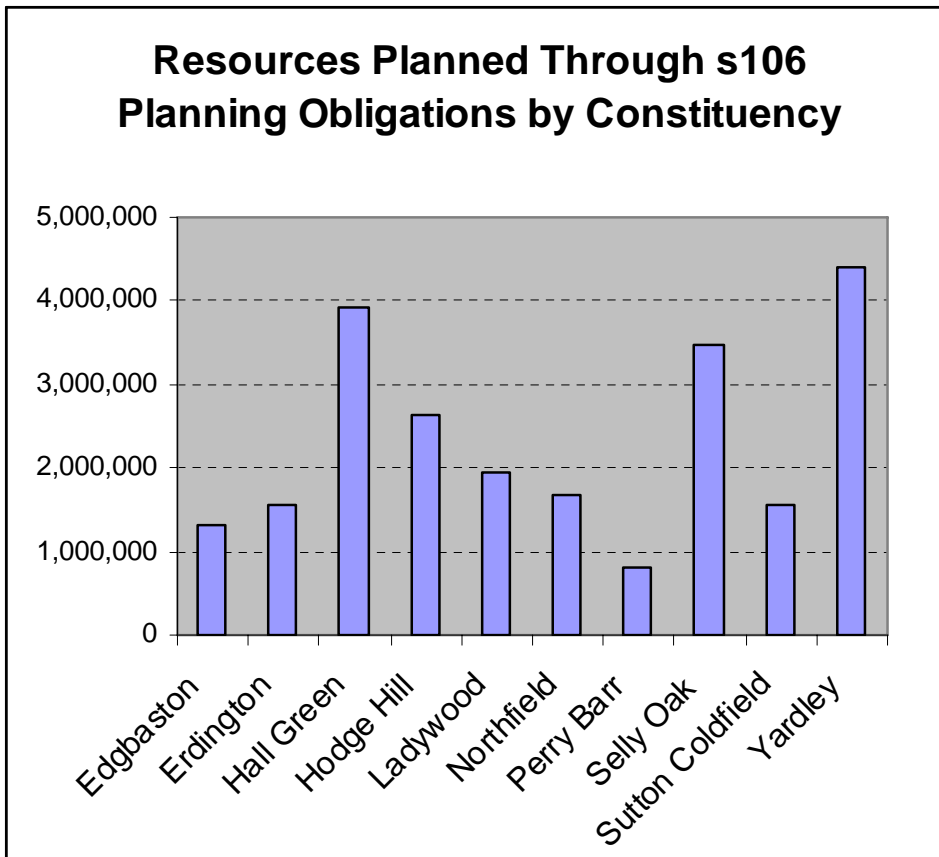
- 10.8.2 Evidence suggests that the revised structure also appears to give less chance for voluntary groups such as BOSF to be involved.
- 10.8.3 It is possible that the importance of parks could be emphasised in other areas of Be Birmingham activity, so that they are included in a number

Appendix 1 - Live Section 106 Agreements for Parks and Open Spaces Since 2000 by Constituency

	Value £ of Completed since 2000	£ Rec'd and not committed	£ Rec'd and committed	£ due (not guaranteed)	TOTAL £
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Resources for Improving Parks




Appendix 2 – Meetings with Constituencies

Constituency	Local Structure to address Parks and Playing Pitch issues	Reviewed Parks and Playing Pitches Action Plans	Date of Meeting with Constituency Director (or their representative*)
Edgbaston	No – uses BOSF to discuss priorities	Yes	5/09/07
Erdington	Yes – Open Space Group	Yes	11/09/07*
Hall Green	Yes - Moseley and Kings Heath Environment Group	Yes	21/09/07
Hodge Hill	Yes – Open Space Forum group	Yes	18/09/07
Ladywood	Yes – Environment Sub Group	Yes	04/04/08*
Northfield	Yes - Intention to form sub group to Environment Group	Yes	04/02/08
Perry Barr	Yes – No Open Space forum. Approach		



Appendix 3 – Friends and Neighbourhood



Lickey Hills Consultative Committee

Summerfield/Rotton Park Friends

Appendix 4 - Example of Constituency Action Plan

PERRY BARR CONSTITUENCY OPEN SPACES ACTION PLAN as at February 2009



Site	Ward	Action Initiated	Promoter	Action Initiated 2005/6	Action Update 2007/8	Action Update 2008/9	Action Status	PI-Needs Play Investment C-Capital bid HLF Potential Bid
Aldridge Road Allotments	Oscott	2008	Allotments Officer			Capital bid security works	Seeking funding	C
Aldridge Road Recreation Ground	Oscott	2005	CPM Peter Short	Seek funding eg Section 106 agreement	NRF bid has been approved for fencing works. Deed of covenant to provide secure boundaries. Completed 2007 CPM		Achieved	
Booths Farm Recreation Ground	Perry Barr	2005	CPM Peter Short/Ward	Improve Access	Possible site for MUGA or goal end. Ward have had costings		Awaiting ward response	
Booths Farm Recreation Ground	Perry Barr	2008	Constituency			Capital bid for security and drainage works	Seeking funding	C
Bridgelands Way Play area	Lozells and E Handsworth	2009	Nigel Cartwright			Play area substandard. Query refurb. proposals. Possible nominate Playbuilder funding. Site in HMRA area	Seeking funding	PI
Carlyle Road Play Area	Lozells and E Handsworth	2009	LPG			Play area substandard - check refurb. proposals. Possible nominate Playbuilder funding. Site in HMRA area	Seeking funding	PI
Finch Road Park	Lozells and East Handsworth	2006	Groundwork/L PG/CPM Peter Short		Works to construct new site in hand. 2 MUGAs and play area, site furniture, fencing etc. Funded SRB6, city capital, NRF and S106. Completion due June 2007 Groundwork.	Complete 2007. No further work planned. Site in HMRA area	Achieved	
George's Park	Lozells and East Handsworth	2008	Mark English Housing/LPG Rupi Chawlis			Scheme to be managed by LPG to fence off eastern section of park for housing development (Grant works £54K Urban Living). Tree and shrub work completed Dec 2008 on western boundary. Site in HMRA area	In hand	



Site	Ward	Action Initiated	Promoter	Action Initiated 2005/6	Action Update 2007/8	Action Update 2008/9	Action Status	PI-Needs Play Investment C-Capital bid HLF Potential Bid
Perry Hall Playing Fields	Perry Barr	2005	CPM Peter Short	Changing facilities, toilets, access concerns, wild life features. SMURF FUNDING	Sustainable Management of Urban Rivers and Floodplains works complete funded by Environment Agency. New Park keeper employed autumn 2006. Birmingham Trees for Life site completed Feb 2007	Achieved	Achieved	
Perry Hall Playing Fields	Perry Barr	2008	Constituency			Capital bid for path works.	Seeking funding	C
Perry Park and Alexander Stadium	Perry Barr	2005	Lee Southall/Gary Peal Sports	Traffic management issues	Traffic management work ongoing - NRF funded - awaiting funding to complete. Tree planting ceremony for European Games 55 oaks completed Feb 2007. GMAC Construction to commence on site June 2007. Part of transfer of Birmingham Sports Centre facilities. On site Jan 2008 (CPM)	GMAC Centre complete but ongoing issues with contractor ref poor reinstatement. BMX track in design (JW - LPG). Cross country cycle course through derelict tree nursery proposed	Ongoing	
Perry Park and Alexander Stadium	Perry Barr	2008	Constituency			Capital bid for footpath and safety works. Potential S106 earmarked as of March 2009 LS935 £10,000 Perry Hall Playing Fields Feasibility study, LS018 £3,080		



