

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

DRAFT

**Green Spaces
Strategy
Executive Summary**

2005 - 2015

Leisure, Culture and Amenity Services Department



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1. Purpose of this document

This document is intended to provide an executive summary of Southend on Sea borough council's green space strategy. It will explain what the strategy is, why it is needed and how it will be delivered.

The strategy will explain why good quality green space is important to everybody and how the reasons for this link in to a range of existing council policies.

2. What is a Green Space Strategy and why do we need it?

The Green Space strategy aims to guide the development of green space to fulfil its role in supporting and promoting the social, recreational and economic development of the town for the benefit of residents, business and visitors up to the year 2015. It sets out to formulate a holistic vision for all green spaces, their use and how future demands and pressures can be met. It will link to existing local, regional and national policies.

Nationally, funding for parks and open spaces has been in decline for more than twenty years. In some areas parks are seen as "no go areas" where the fear of crime discourages people from visiting. Facilities have been closed down where the lack of maintenance has left them in an unsafe condition. Park keepers are no longer employed. The numbers of gardeners and maintenance staff have been reduced which has led to a decline in standards in some areas. The government has now recognised the growing problem and has lent support to the creation of an offshoot of the Commission for the Built Environment (CABE) known as CABE Space with the intention of raising the profile of public parks and encouraging improvements in the condition of these important spaces.

Part of that process is to formulate a green spaces strategy which will analyse the quantity and quality of green space and identify ways to improve public parks and green spaces.

The Green Space Strategy will be an important component in securing external funding to make this aim achievable.

3. Council Objectives

The vision for the future of Southend on Sea is guided by three core principles centred on sustainable development, equality of opportunity and social inclusion.

Put simply the Council sees Southend-on-Sea as.....

“A vibrant coastal town and a prosperous regional centre where people enjoy living, working and visiting.”

(Community Plan, Southend together, Local Strategic Partnership 2003)

4. Policy Context

In order to deliver this vision Southend on Sea Borough Council has developed a range of policies and strategies. These include the emerging Local Development Framework, Southend on Sea Design and Townscape Guide, Local Transport Plan, Cultural Strategy, Local Bio-Diversity Action Plan, Crime and Disorder Strategy as well as the Community Plan.

The Green Spaces Strategy interlinks with each of these policies informing and being informed by each in turn. It positions good quality green spaces at the heart of this hierarchy.

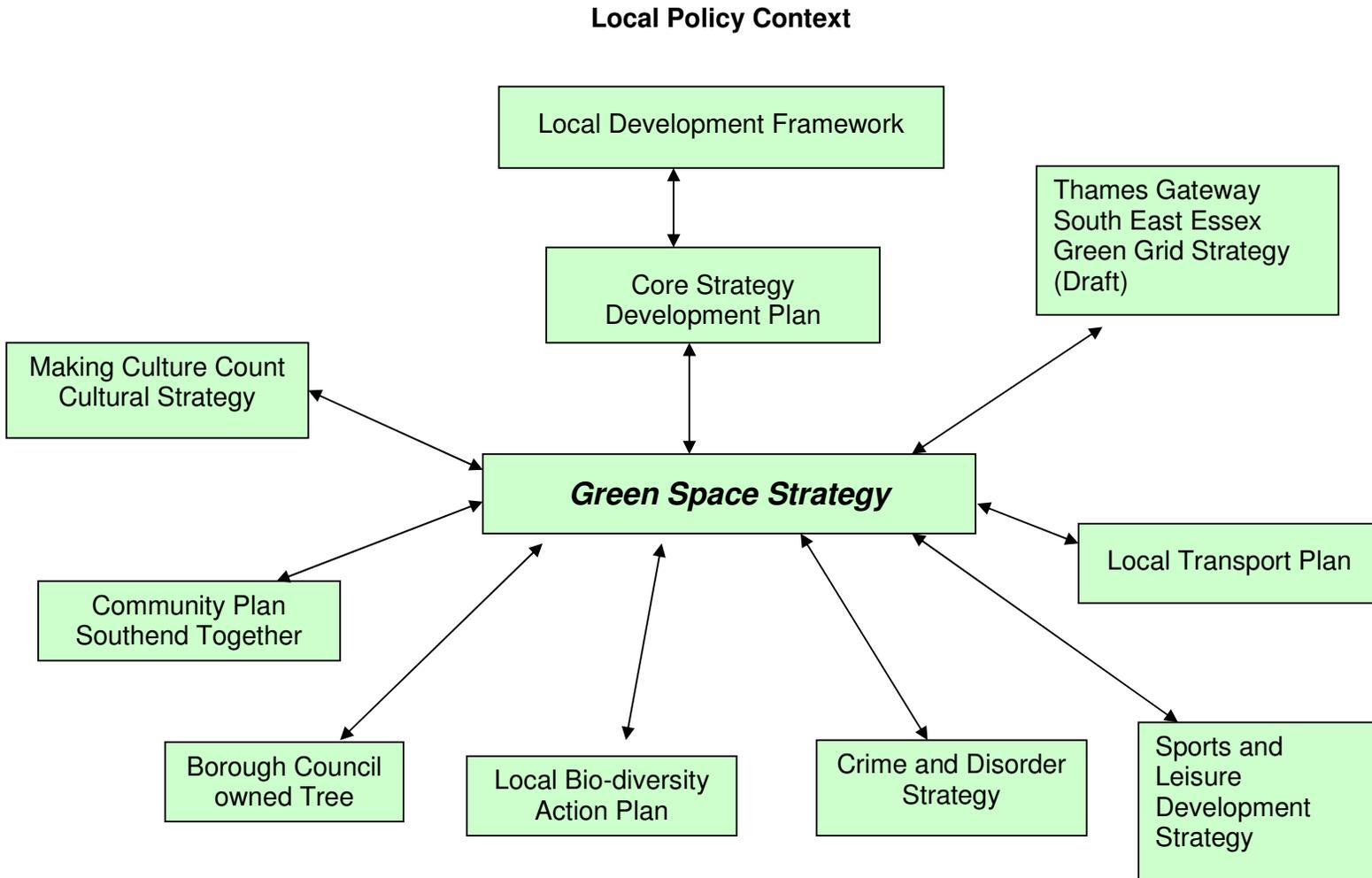
The Green Space Strategy is also informed by regional and national policies. The town is active in the Governments Thames Gateway project. This project focuses on the regeneration and economic development of the Thames corridor. At the heart of this project is the recognised need to ensure functional green infrastructure to provide a sense of place, environmental protection and to enhance the quality of life for communities within the

Gateway. This policy is detailed within the document ***Creating sustainable communities: Greening the Gateway a greenspace strategy for Thames Gateway.***

Regional development policy is set out in the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England (RSS14). This sets the principles for the regeneration of the region in a manner specific to the needs of the local area. The key requirements are achieving employment led regeneration, wealth creation and growth whilst maintaining a sustainable balance between jobs, housing and the environment.

National policy guiding the development of greenspace is covered within the ***Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Recreation and Sport (PPG 17)***. This guidance note describes the need to define and audit parks and open spaces. It also promotes the use of planning agreements (S106 agreements) to ensure developer contributions to enhance existing or establish new open spaces. In addition, the note presumes against the disposal of existing sports and recreational facilities unless a significant improvement in existing facilities can be achieved.

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) diversified in 2002 to establish CABE Space. CABE Space has been established to promote the benefits of public open space, to encourage best practise, involve the local community and to emphasise the need for more strategic planning within the context of green spaces.



5. Benefits of good quality green space

There are many and varied benefits to be gained from the presence of a high quality network of green spaces particularly within a densely urban environment such as Southend-on-Sea.

5.1 Quality of life

In May 2002 the government appointed Urban Green Spaces Taskforce made its final report on the condition and impact of public parks and green spaces across the country. The report repeatedly made the key point that high quality green spaces are...

“an essential element of liveable towns and cities in which people want to live”

*(Green Spaces, Better Places.
Department of Transport and
Local Regions DTLR May 2002)*

This point is supported by local research carried out in 2003 by MORI on behalf of the authority. Respondents to the survey rated parks and open spaces as the fifth most important factor in making somewhere a good place to live. Low crime, clean streets, health services and affordable decent housing topped the priority list. Green space was considered more important than education, shopping, public transport, pollution, wage levels and the cost of living amongst a number of other factors.

5.2 Urban renaissance and economic regeneration

Recent studies have demonstrated the central importance of green space to economic regeneration and urban renaissance by...

- creating a sense of place
- making towns more attractive to visitors
- building business and community confidence

- helping to increase property values in some instances by up to 34% but more normally by 5 – 7% for properties adjacent to parks
(*“Does Money Grow on Trees, CABE Space 2005”*)

5.3 Health



Shoebury Park

Good quality parks and open spaces provide a range of health benefits for residents by....

- promoting healthy living and preventing illness
- providing places for walking, exercise and physical activity
- helping to reduce stress related illness and providing a place to relax

5.4 Community development

Green spaces promote social inclusion and community development by...

- providing opportunities for voluntary and community activities
- providing a welcoming environment for all aspects of society but particularly vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and wheelchair users
- providing a venue for events, festivals, concerts and entertainments

- free access to all regardless of income, social status, gender, or race

5.5 Education and learning



Pond-dipping session in Chalkwell Park

Here again parks and open spaces contribute to education and lifelong learning by...

- the increasing use of parks as outdoor classrooms
- providing interpretation of flora and fauna
- promoting a greater understanding of the natural world

5.6 Ecology and Bio-diversity

As you would expect green spaces contribute by...

- supporting and promoting a range of plants and animals
- playing a key role in providing a sustainable urban drainage system
- providing pollution control through the actions of parks trees filtering air pollutants



St Laurence Orchard



Heath Fritillary

5.7 Heritage and Culture



Chalkwell Hall, Grade II listed building

Public parks are an essential component of our heritage and culture by...

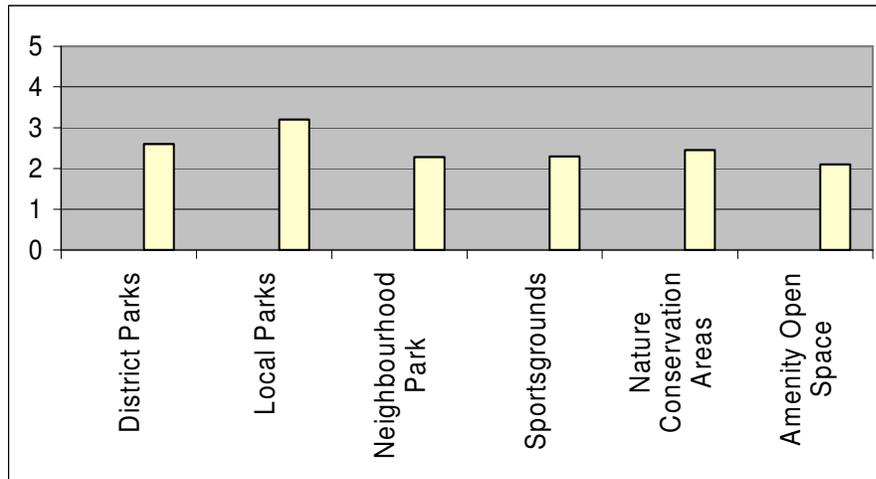
- providing a venue for local events
- commemorating important historical events with monuments and memorials
- providing a venue for art

6. Where are we now?

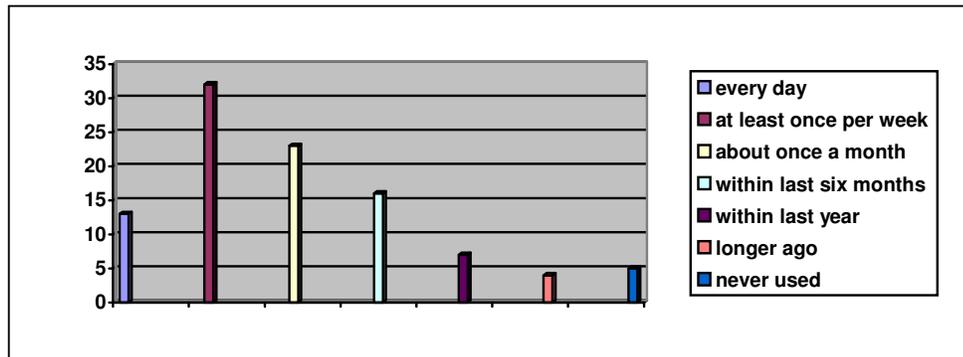
An extensive assessment of open spaces and sports facilities was carried out in 2003/04 in consultation with community and sports groups by consultants Leisure and the Environment. This audit concluded that parks and open spaces are popular and well used by residents. While there was not seen to be a quantitative deficiency in provision at that time (despite the fact that Southend-on-Sea compares unfavourably with many other local authorities in the amount of open space provided per head of population) it further concluded that any increase in population would require an increase in the quantity of open space to meet the increased demand.

As part of the preparation of this strategy all parks and open spaces have been audited. The audit considers the accessibility, landscape quality,

general facilities, maintenance, management, safety, natural and cultural heritage, health and educational opportunities as well as assessing how the site meets the needs of visitors. The highest possible score is five, the lowest zero. The results of this audit are shown in the following table.



The results demonstrate that there is an effective hierarchy of parks with five sites of the highest standard and in receipt of Green Flag awards supported by a range of other sites.



Parks and open spaces are highly popular with residents. The 2003 MORI poll reported an 84% satisfaction rating with the service. This compares very favourably with the national average of 66%. The survey also reported that green spaces are regularly used with one in ten (13%) visiting every day and a further 32% visiting at least once a week.

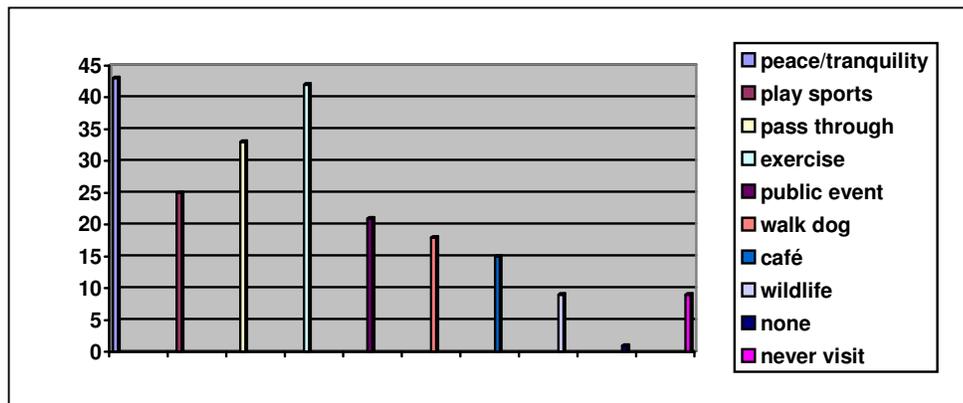
7. What do residents want?

Residents state their key requirements from green spaces as...

- clean
- safe
- free from dog fouling
- improved playgrounds

These key points have been recorded in the 2001 and 2003 MORI surveys, in the Best Value Review survey work carried out in 2000 and also in on site surveys carried out in 2004

Further results from the 2003 MORI survey show the main reasons for visiting parks and open spaces.



8. Implementing the strategy

As a result of the audit of sites, an independent assessment of the quality and quantity of recreational and sports facilities and from the results of consultation work some key conclusions have been reached. A number of specific actions are required to maximise the social, recreational and economic benefits of green spaces.

The current provision of parks and open spaces is adequate for current demand but a growing population will need additional green space to satisfy increased demand.

The quality of sports facilities, changing accommodation, parks toilets, and the infrastructure of some parks and open spaces must be improved.

Developing effective partnerships with other organisations, agencies, schools and working with residents will help to drive improvements.

To seek developer contributions to provide new open spaces or where this is not possible to contribute to improving existing green spaces.

- Improve accessibility to all green space:
 - creation of the Prittlebrook Greenway
 - entrances to parks welcoming
 - safe road crossing points

- Ensure that all green spaces are healthy, safe and secure:
 - regular maintenance of sightlines
 - work with partner organisations such as the Primary Care Trust to maximise the health benefits of green spaces
 - seek to create outdoor gyms, trim trails and cycle ways
 - reduce anti-social behaviour by working in partnership with relevant agencies

- Ensure that green spaces are clean and well maintained:
 - introduce a dedicated team to keep green spaces and facilities safe and clean
 - revise and update grounds maintenance contract specifications
 - provide the highest quality planting schemes

- Employ sustainable working practises and materials:

- promote recycling of waste materials
- reduction in the use of peat
- minimise the use of pesticides and herbicides
- use locally sourced products where possible

- Implement the Local Bio-diversity Action Plan:
 - maintenance of areas specifically for the encouragement of bio-diversity
 - by working in partnership with local wildlife groups and organisations represented on the Bio-diversity and Environmental Awareness party

- Emphasise and celebrate local heritage :
 - develop restoration project for Southchurch Hall Gardens
 - develop Belfairs Woodland Resource Centre
 - complete delivery of Southend Cliff's restoration project

- Maximise the educational benefits of green space:
 - by working with local schools and partner organisations
 - providing appropriate interpretation of natural features
 - introduction of a Community and Education Officer post

- Encourage more community involvement :
 - through the creation of 'Friends' groups, voluntary work and further consultation
 - through the creation of the Community and Education Officer post
 - encourage more public events in parks

- Working in partnership with relevant organisations and agencies:
 - Council departments
 - Essex Police
 - Government departments and agencies
 - Groundwork Trust
 - Residents Associations
 - Sports Clubs

- community and voluntary organisations
- Maximise external funding through grants and development contributions:
 - extend Shoebury Park, Cockethurst Park and the creation of New Gunners Park
- Develop management plans for all parks by 2015
- Improve the quantity and quality of children’s playgrounds across the town
- Improve the quality of sports pitches across the town