

REPORT OF LIVING IN HACKNEY SCRUTINY COMMISSION		
REVIEW OF GREEN SPACE IN HACKNEY 7TH OCTOBER 2008	Classification Decision	Enclosures Appendices 1-5 AGENDA ITEM No 9

1. CHAIRMAN’S FOREWORD

- 1.1 The Commission agreed to review the Council’s provision of green spaces at a time of considerable change, when a Parks Strategy was being produced, Open Spaces strategy being drafted, and new challenges relating to the Olympic and Paralympic Games faced the Borough.
- 1.2 The aims of the review included helping Members to gain an understanding of issues related to provision and management of green spaces in the Borough of Hackney (including arboriculture), and discussing how community involvement in green spaces can be supported best.
- 1.3 We have spoken to a wide range of people during this review, including residents, Parks User Groups, various arms of the Council, our partners and also reviewed national best practice from organisations like CABI Space. We completed site visits to both green spaces within the Borough and innovative spaces in a neighbouring borough.
- 1.4 We broadly support the management and direction of the Parks Service, and hope that the proposed restructure leads to increased capacity for roles such as promoting biodiversity and publicising local spaces. The Commission felt that more could be done to ensure effective performance data is collated and used, and that the Council could do more to promote the value of volunteers.
- 1.5 I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Commission for their interest and commitment, and to the officers and stakeholders that provided evidence and support to the review.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 *Why*

The preservation of public green space in urban boroughs such as Hackney is of clear importance. In an area where a large percentage of the population have no access to private gardens, the provision of parks and other open spaces is vital for a variety of social, health and other considerations. In built-up city surroundings, parks are often considered the 'lungs' of a local community.

There is considerable evidence of the value of maximising green space in cities. CABI Space (part of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) is an organisation that champions excellence in the design and management of parks, streets and squares in our towns and cities, and produced a report in 2004 called 'The Value of Public Space'. This drew together evidence from research that found excellent local green spaces had a positive impact on property prices, supports local business, can lead to improvement in people's mental well-being and health, reduces crime and fear of crime, promotes neighbourliness and social inclusion, and maximises access to nature and wildlife.

Hackney has a considerable amount of green space across the Borough, and compares favourably to neighbouring boroughs. 467.27 hectares of green space across 255 sites is available to residents, with the Council managing 62 parks. In total Hackney has twice as much green space as some of its larger neighbouring boroughs. Green space in Hackney accounts for 16.9% of the total area of the Borough.

In 2004 the consultants Atkins were invited to assess the green spaces in Hackney, including an assessment of open space quality and usage. These findings were used as the basis of the Parks Strategy, and the surveys completed by Atkins formed much of the consultation for the strategy's direction.

The introduction of a Parks Strategy comes at a time of considerable change for the management and development of parks across the Borough, as well as the approach to engaging local volunteer groups. The Scrutiny review had intended to include consideration of wider green space management and the anticipated Open Spaces Strategy (of which the Parks Strategy will form a chapter), however the drafting of this has been delayed to an as yet undefined time in 2009. It is therefore anticipated that some of the recommendations from this review will help to guide its production.

The Commission chose to focus its review on the areas they could actively influence. These included the Borough's parks, housing green space, provision of play facilities and wider arboriculture.

2.2 *Terms of Reference*

The proposal to review Green Spaces was put forward by the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission. It was welcomed as an opportunity to maximise the benefit

from and support the implementation of the Council's Parks Strategy, and the future development of an Open Spaces Strategy into which the former will be incorporated.

The Commission's terms of reference were as follows:

- To enable Members to gain an understanding of issues related to provision and management of green spaces in the Borough of Hackney, including the specific issue of arboricultural management;
- To consider the extent to which the full range of green spaces in the Borough meets the needs of residents and the wider community;
- To contribute to the implementation of an open spaces strategy for the Borough by proposing effective ways of involving Hackney's communities in the use and management of all green spaces;
- To consider specifically how community involvement in and effective use of green spaces managed by bodies external to the Council can be achieved;
- To contribute to the process of defining appropriate local performance indicators for the management of Hackney's green spaces.

The aims and objectives were achieved through a series of evidence gathering sessions at which Commission Members were joined by relevant Council Officers, Parks User Groups, and community representatives (including residents, parents/carers and Housing Associations). In addition Members carried out a series of site visits which were instrumental in identifying many of the issues around provision of green space and allowing the Commission to see first hand the problems faced. A list of the organisations and individuals involved in the evidence gathering are listed in Item 8.

3 Summary & Recommendations

We have divided the recommendations into seven clear areas which we believe would benefit from greater consideration by relevant decision-makers. Some of the proposals were implemented during the course of the review which we regard as a positive approach, demonstrating the organic nature of good overview and scrutiny. We have chosen to re-state our priorities throughout the report, to ensure they are recorded. Those areas that have already led to changes are referred to in the findings section of this report. It is anticipated that the outcome of the review and recommendations made will influence the drafting of the Open Spaces Strategy.

The Commission were largely supportive of the current management, access and aspirations of the Parks Service. Some of Hackney's parks have been nationally recognised for their management and community involvement. Seven of Hackney's parks have been awarded Green Flag status, including Clissold, Haggerston and Springfield Parks and Hackney Downs. Three new flags were recently awarded to green spaces across the Borough (Shoreditch Park, London Fields and St John's Churchyard), recognising each space as being a welcoming place, well maintained and clean, healthy, safe and secure. It also recognises achievement of national standards relating to sustainability, conservation and heritage, community

involvement, marketing and management¹. Mayor Pipe said in a recent edition of Hackney Today that “these prestigious national awards are only given to those parks that rank alongside the best in the country... My priority is to maintain these as safe, clean and attractive places that local people use and enjoy. Whether you want to practice a sport, take up a cultural interest or simply enjoy being outdoors, there’s something for everyone going on this summer and throughout the year”².

The Parks Service is involved in several high profile projects, such as the renovations of Clissold Park & House, Springfield Park and Hackney Marshes. They will also have an important contribution to make in the years running up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012.

Management & Publicity

The Commission broadly support the Parks Strategy (agreed by Cabinet on 31st March 2008) and the Action Plan, particularly the restructured divisional format. This focuses operational staff into geographical areas, and provides a new resource with responsibility for wider parks development including biodiversity and community engagement. As noted in the recent call-in decision by OSB, however, ongoing consultation is needed to ensure some of the strategy’s specific references (such as the creation of a Green Spaces Forum) are properly introduced.

The Commission also supports the decision to produce individual management plans for each of the 62 spaces within the remit of the Parks Strategy, believing this to be the best approach to recognise and promote the specific features and biodiversity of the various green spaces.

Recommendation 1

(i) **The Commission recommends** that as part of the Open Spaces strategy wider publicity be produced for all green spaces, that clearly outlines which organisation is responsible for specific operations, and how to get in contact with them- especially for housing green space. This should be completed in close working with Parks User Groups and Tenant Management Organisations, so they clearly understand how to resolve issues.

(ii) More broadly the Council should consider refreshing the information on the Council’s website to include all information relating to play provision, accessibility and transport links, providing a more effective web presence. This should be linked to the planned drafting of a Parks Marketing Strategy.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing improvements to the publicity of responsibilities and access to information via the internet by no later than July 2009.

Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that the individual park management plans are produced in consultation with Parks User Groups, regularly reviewed to ensure they remain relevant, and are both widely publicised and readily accessible.

¹ More information on Green Flag criteria is available at <http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/award/key-criteria/>

² Hackney Today- Issue 188 (21 July 2008)

Consideration should also be given to including links to each of the management plans in the anticipated Open Spaces Strategy, to ensure they retain links to relevant services and their surroundings.

Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that the Council consider how best to use ward Members as champions for local parks and green spaces.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing developments on utilising Members by no later than July 2009.

Community Involvement & Consultation

The Government is keen for community groups to have greater engagement and control over how the local environment is managed and improved, through initiatives such as the Green Flag Awards, and where possible the Commission agrees that the Council should maximise such input into maintenance and localised decision making.

Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends that consideration should be given to options for appropriate organisational administrative support to replace the recently-ceased external support for the Hackney Parks Forum (HPF). It has been suggested that this would be part of the role of the new Development Team, who have community engagement within their remit. The Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission would like to see this explicitly linked to the roles of the relevant managers, and that the Parks Service aim to produce a statement of intent for future working arrangements with the HPF to ensure both are aware of expectations.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing arrangements for supporting the Hackney Parks Forum by no later than July 2009.

Recommendation 5

The Commission recommends that the Council also support Parks User Groups to develop and formalise into organisations that can be considered operational stakeholders. This can be achieved through learning from initiatives such as Groundwork East London's work with LB Haringey (to help such groups become more representative of their local community), and publications like 'It's our space: A guide for community groups working to improve public space' by CABE Space.

Recommendation 6

The Commission recommends that the Parks Service should continue to learn from national and local good practice, such as the recent work completed in developing Shoreditch Park (notably on the involvement of young people and focus on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design).

Recommendation 7

The Commission recommends that the Parks Service strengthen ties with the Corporate Consultation and Communications teams, to ensure maximised success

of any publicity and surveys used to develop the service (such as the imminent PCT-funded survey of parks users and non-users). The Consultation team includes an events officer, and best practice should be sought ahead of the new Development team becoming responsible for parks events.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing changes in the approach to consultation by no later than July 2009.

Housing Green Space

As a Borough with high density housing and a significant percentage of residents living in social housing with no access to private gardens, the need for well-maintained local green space is obvious. The Commission received evidence of how Hackney Homes aim to achieve this, and examples of good practice from local charities like Groundwork East London.

Recommendation 8

(i) **The Commission recommends** that consideration is given to the adoption of an holistic approach across all housing spaces to the improvement of green space, through the application of common standards. The focus of these standards should be on development principles rather than actual designs, as each green space should respond to its locality. It should also have regard for the new boroughwide Enforcement Strategy, which aims to encourage an appropriate balance between compliance with relevant legislation, support for economic progress, and the protection of public health and local environmental quality.

(ii) It is also felt that an officer from Hackney Homes and a nomination to represent Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) should be included in the new Green Spaces Forum. Dependant on capacity and maintaining a manageable membership size, this forum could also be extended to the Private Landlords Forum.

We recommend that a report should be produced by the Community Services directorate outlining how the Green Spaces Forum will operate by no later than July 2009. This should incorporate how the forum plans to engage the Neighbourhoods & Regeneration directorate, and potential benefits from linking with the Better Homes Partnership.

Arboriculture

The Borough has a fantastic tree stock (both in green spaces and in the wider streetscene), recently informally valued at around £200m by local arboricultural experts. However the increase in disease and the added pressures applied through housing development are threatening their long-term health. The Commission welcomes the news that the Council's Planning division are due to recruit a dedicated arboricultualist to oversee planning applications that threaten the Borough's tree stock, as this is recognised as one of the most significant risks to this important resource.

Recommendation 9

(i) **The Commission recommends** that the Council consider how best to maintain and develop the Borough's tree stock. With arboricultural management spread across two teams in different Directorates and a separate team in Hackney Homes it is felt that expertise and funding opportunities may not be maximised, and that feasibility of bringing responsibilities for arboriculture into a single team should be explored (though not at the cost of existing budgets). This would then unite management of all trees into one team, with the exception of those maintained by Transport for London (TfL) on the Borough's 'red routes'.

(ii) The Commission also recommends that the Council should publicise the importance of its tree stock (both to the public and to local decision makers), review the capacity of relevant teams to protect the long-term health of trees and develop approaches to harnessing local expertise and enthusiasm to ensure they are maximised.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report considering publicity of the value of trees, the feasibility of operating a single Arboriculture team and addressing local capacity, benchmarking with other local authorities on how the Biodiversity action plan were produced and maintained, and recognising local volunteering by no later than July 2009.

Biodiversity

The need to balance popular parks used as social spaces with the protection of thriving local wildlife was universally accepted. The Mayor's London Plan recommends that local authorities produce a Biodiversity Strategy, and 29 of London's 33 boroughs currently have a Biodiversity Action Plan³.

Recommendation 10

(i) **The Commission recommends** that the Parks Service continue its work to produce a Biodiversity Strategy, in partnership with local organisations and experts, as a priority for the new Parks Development team. The Commission considers the best approach to maximising local biodiversity would be to include the final strategy as a chapter of the Open Spaces Strategy.

(ii) The Commission recognises that funding may not currently be available for the recruitment of a dedicated Biodiversity officer, but remains firmly of the view that recruitment to such a post would represent the best approach to delivering a Biodiversity strategy and action plan. At a minimum, the Commission recommends that officers complete a benchmarking exercise with the other London local authorities who have produced a Biodiversity action plan, so that they may understand how this was produced and maintained with a view to developing a local approach toward implementation.

Play

Developments in the research and approach to play provision have significantly altered the way many organisations nationally consider the best way to help children

³ London Biodiversity Partnership- <http://www.lbp.org.uk/takeactionboroughs.html>

and young people play independently. It seems that the initial health and safety fears (linked to a perceived 'compensation culture') have abated somewhat, with many supporting less formal play provision, and greater use of natural resources.

The Commission received useful presentations about the importance of independent play in the development of children, and noted the work of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission on offering age-appropriate risks to young people. Members of the Commission were also invited to attend the Play Partnership, which brought together relevant partners from across the Borough to discuss provision of facilities. Included in this were discussions of the changing theories about play, the need to be less risk-averse and the challenge to provide creative play facilities in suitable settings.

Recommendation 11

The Commission recommends that the Parks Service actively encourage more informal play provision within areas of their remit, and that all relevant stakeholders improve consultation with one another when considering play facilities throughout the Borough. This is particularly important following the award of Play Pathfinder funding. The Commission also recommends that the Play Strategy 2007-2012 be included as a chapter in the Open Spaces Strategy.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report outlining a formalised approach to engagement with play stakeholders by no later than July 2009.

Performance Management & Understanding the Community

The importance of effective performance management systems is now widely accepted, as data monitoring can drive change and improve the performance of a service, focus the organisation's work on its priorities, identify success as well as failure, and align strategic objectives and priorities across a division. In the past the Parks Service have received inspection concerns about their approach to performance management, and as such there is a need to ensure this is given greater consideration during this time of change.

The Parks Strategy's indicative action plan notes that there is need "investigate the Social Needs of Hackney's various communities and build responses to those into site Management Plans"⁴. The Commission welcomes such research, as this will be central to the ability of the Parks Strategy to deliver the social spaces it aspires to.

Recommendation 12

The Commission recommends that the Council consider the implementation of an appropriate continuous-improvement performance management tool (such as "Towards An Excellent Service for parks and open spaces"), and report back to the Commission on how this might be achieved, by no later than July 2009.

⁴ 'Social Spaces: A Parks Strategy for Hackney' Indicative Action Plan 2008/2009 to 2012/2013 (Key Aim 5, Objective 4) p.42

Recommendation 13

The Commission recommends that the Parks Service should also seek to identify relevant data from existing consultation not directly relating to Parks but which still holds relevance, and ensure that lines of communication are strengthened to make sure this sort of information is both received and used whenever produced. Recent examples the Commission considers relevant include the Children and Young People's Plan, Audit of Young People's Service Providers in Hackney, and consultation completed ahead of the draft design plans for Shoreditch Park.

4.0 Comments of the Monitoring Officer

- 4.1 The recommendations set out in the Report are not inconsistent with any of the legislation currently in place for the protection of open spaces or common land. Sections 9 – 18 of the Open Spaces Act 1906 regulates the powers of local authorities with respect to open spaces while the Commons Act 2006 regulates the type of works that can be carried out on common land and also provides local authorities with powers of intervention over unclaimed land.
- 4.2 The recommendations in the Report and the adoption, where possible, of a co-ordinated management approach will flow directly into the national and local initiatives for providing safe, clean and attractive urban green spaces for local people.
- 4.3 The guiding principle in relation to common land is that anything carried out on the land must generally be for the benefit of the community. The recommendations in this Report appear to satisfy that principle.

5.0 Financial Comments

- 5.1 The majority of the recommendations of this review have been discussed with Management and can be implemented and funded from existing approved budgets. Where the implementation of a recommendation is likely to have a financial impact that cannot be contained within existing budgets then a proposal for funding will be put forward as part of the Council's budget development process.

6 Findings

6.1 Benefits of Quality Public Green Spaces

As mentioned before, considerable research has been undertaken into the varied benefits associated with the provision of decent public spaces. The Atkins study of Hackney's provision suggests that local authorities should recognise that most open space, with good planning and management, can perform multiple functions. Amongst the most important are:

6.1.1 Recreation

Parks and open spaces provide the setting and facilities for formal and informal recreation. From walking the dog to playing football or bowls, it is important that people have a wide range of activities to choose from.

6.1.2 Culture, Education and Tourism

Many spaces form an important part of London's cultural heritage and are places where cultural activities take place. These activities can include community events, shows, carnivals and firework displays. The educational value of parks is also important. Many schools make use of nearby open spaces for ecology and sporting purposes.

6.1.3 Economic Development and Regeneration

Relevant council programmes should be including green space as an essential aspect of neighbourhood regeneration. Such space can significantly enhance the quality of life, promote community spirit and attract business and residents to an area.

6.1.4 Visual Amenity

Neglect can turn green spaces into eyesores. However, well maintained green spaces can provide variety in the urban scene and provide an outlook for those living nearby. They also contribute to a general appreciation of a local environment.

6.1.5 Community Identity

Parks and other open green spaces can contribute to a sense of community ownership, pride and belonging.

6.1.6 Health

Parks can be promoted to encourage exercise and as places for quiet and relaxation, they also provide a 'lung' of fresh air away from the traffic and pollution of the roads.

6.1.7 Environment and Biodiversity

There are possibilities for biodiversity in even the most built up areas of the Borough. Some sites may have potential to be corridors for flora and fauna. Green space also plays a role in collecting water run-off from developed sites helping to mitigate against flooding⁵.

⁵ 'Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1' (Atkins) June 2004 p.2-13

6.2 Current Provision

6.2.1 Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17, 2002) encourages local authorities to adopt a methodology which assesses the wider recreational needs of the local community and make appropriate provision for sport and open space facilities in light of those assessments. In order to assess the local provision of green space and sports provision, the consultants Atkins were enlisted to produce a report outlining the Borough's existing spaces.

Volume 1 of the study includes an assessment of the quantity, quality and value of parks and open spaces in Hackney and identifies whether provision is meeting local needs. It develops local standards and measures to address deficiencies in open space provision. Those areas of the Borough which are deficient in public parks are defined as those which are further than 400m from any public park. This assessment takes account of areas which are served by public parks located beyond the Borough boundary⁶. In Hackney there were three areas that fell into this definition of deficiency: Stamford Hill, Dalston and Leabridge. A map outlining the areas of deficiency are included as Appendix 5.

The study found that there are 249 green space sites in Hackney (which has since increased to 255), of which parks are just one component. 16.9% of Hackney's area is made up of green space, which is significantly more than in surrounding London boroughs. This is important, given the great density of housing.

6.2.2 The report recognises that open space needs and priorities are varied across the Borough. Differences in population density, the proportion of flats & terraced dwellings, child densities and indices of deprivation generally correspond to those areas where large scale housing developments exist, such as public housing estates. Atkins recommend that:

- (i) Areas of high population density (gross residential densities >50 dwellings per hectare) and wards with a high proportion of dwellings which are terraced or are flats should be prioritised for improvements to the provision of small local parks, local parks, children's play areas, amenity greenspaces and allotments where there is an identified deficiency in either the quantity or access.
- (ii) The range and quality of open space provision within these open spaces should also reflect the increased range of functions which these spaces are required to fulfil which would normally be performed by back gardens. Such functions include children's play, informal games, sitting out/relaxation, picnics/outside dining, gardening and family/community gatherings.

6.2.3 This report formed much of the consultation used to guide the 2008 Parks Strategy, including a telephone survey of 1,000 residents, parks user surveys at the 5 largest parks within the Borough, street focus survey to identify non-users, and focus groups & workshops with 'hard to reach' groups, including Turkish and Jewish minority ethnic groups, older people and young people.

⁶ 'Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1' (Atkins) June 2004 p.x

The report also gauged residents' perception of parks and green spaces in the Borough. This found that the majority of respondents consider the parks and open spaces they use to be good quality (73% good or very good). Perceptions of large parks including Lee Valley Regional Park were most positive with 78%, smaller parks receiving slightly less positive quality scores (67%). Of the other open spaces, children's play provision also received 67%, canal/riverside walks 60% and outdoor sports facilities 63%. Only 10% of respondents considered the Borough's parks and open spaces to be poor or very poor⁷.

The consultants felt that the Borough's "lack of coordinated and accessible information on the type and quality of facilities is preventing an informed assessment of these formal and informal recreation needs and opportunities"⁸. This was also noted in the CPA Culture Inspection.

6.2.4 The Atkins report made several recommendations, relating to a wide variety of green space provision, and identified 12 green spaces as priorities for investment. The recommendations include:

Play:

- Create five new play areas
- Improve facilities on six existing play areas
- Introduce new pieces of equipment on seven existing play sites
- Upgrade facilities in nine existing play sites to 'Local Equipped Areas for Play' (LEAP) standards
- All residents within the Borough should have access to areas of formal and informal play provision for children and teenagers within 400m from home

Housing Development

Proposals for new housing development should be accompanied by proposals to improve open space provision. The nature of such improvements should reflect the additional open space needs generated as a result of the proposed development.

If the proposed development is located within an identified area of deficiency for public park, children's play, playing pitch, natural greenspace or allotment provision, it should be necessary for additional land to be brought into the relevant open space use. The developer could be asked to make a contribution towards the provision of the open space. It may be appropriate for such provision to be incorporated within the curtilage of the development. Alternatively a contribution to off-site provision may be appropriate.

Local Standards

'Assessing Needs and Opportunities', the companion guide to PPG17, recommends that local authorities set local provision standards which incorporate a quantitative, qualitative and accessibility component. The purpose of these standards is to afford adequate levels of provision for each type of open space within the Borough based upon existing needs and the future needs of the Borough up to 2016.

⁷ 'Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1' (Atkins) June 2004 p.3-4

⁸ 'Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1' (Atkins) June 2004 p.1-1

Whilst planning policies are an effective mechanism to deliver an appropriate level of open space provision and to improve access to open space within the Borough, it is also necessary to prepare an open space strategy to secure improvements to the quality and value of open spaces.

Atkins do not recommend that a quantitative standard is adopted for the provision of amenity greenspace or civic spaces. However, it is expected that a design led approach would be used to identify the level of provision appropriate to the context (i.e. levels of overall open space needs, whether the site is located within a conservation area) and the scale and type of the development.

Supplementary planning guidance should be prepared identifying the design criteria to be used to incorporate amenity greenspace appropriate to particular types of development.

A summary of local required standards for provision outlined by Atkins is included in Appendix 2.

6.3 Recent Inspections

The significant progress made by Hackney was recognised in the report of the CPA Culture Block inspection undertaken in late 2007. It noted that “over the last three years the Mayor has placed the focus on raising the standards and quality of what had been some poor services in leisure centres, parks and open spaces, and libraries, in order to increase access, drive increased participation/usage and improve user satisfaction”⁹. Culture services in general were assessed as a fair service with promising prospects for improvement.

However the inspection did note that “detailed, prioritised and resourced plans underpinning the sport and physical activity and Green Spaces strategies are under-developed” (p.6) and that there was “a lack of clear coordination and prioritisation of activities to date to develop sufficient community and organisational capacity to drive increased participation in sport and active recreation, volunteering, and use of parks and open spaces” (p.35). The report made 3 recommendations, based around strengthening strategic planning and performance management, and developing the approach to achieving value for money.

As previously mentioned, seven of the Borough’s parks have been recognised through the Green Flags award initiative. Each of these easily achieved the 66% rating that is required to achieve the award, with recognition of managerial direction and focus on sustainability among the criteria. Particular praise was given to the attendance of a representative from the relevant Parks User Group for each of the seven parks, which highlighted engagement with volunteer groups in these specific spaces. The seven awards now places Hackney as the joint fifth highest-achieving boroughs in London.

⁹ ‘Cultural Services Inspection Report’- Audit Commission, Dec 2007 (p.5)

6.4 Parks Strategy & Action Plan

6.4.1 To address some of the concerns from the Atkins assessment and Culture Block inspection the Council produced a Parks Strategy in March 2008 entitled 'Social Spaces: A Strategy for Parks in Hackney'. This includes the new vision for Hackney's parks, which is:

"To ensure that all residents of the Borough have access to safe, well maintained and welcoming parks which enhance their quality of life and increase enjoyment opportunities whilst contributing to health and environmental improvement."¹⁰

Originally billed as the Green Spaces Strategy, the Parks Strategy was agreed by Cabinet on the 31st March. Due to a concern raised by a cross-party group of non-executive Members in relation to the consultation completed in production of the strategy it was called-in, but the decision was later confirmed by OSB (with some expectations relayed to Cabinet). The indicative Action Plan is yet to be agreed by Cabinet, and the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission have had an opportunity to influence the final version.

The Parks Strategy is due to form a chapter of the wider Open Spaces Strategy, which is being produced by the Neighbourhoods & Regeneration directorate. Much of the focus of the strategy is on the use of parks as social spaces that promote community cohesion, provision for young people and safe environments, whilst protecting natural heritage and biodiversity.

6.4.1 To achieve the vision the strategy separates responsibilities into 7 Key Aims, which are:

- To provide children and young people with parks that meet their needs and enhance their quality of life
- To protect and develop high quality parks and enhance facilities across the Borough
- To ensure Parks make a significant contribution to conservation and biodiversity
- To protect and enhance the Borough's tree stock
- To ensure that Hackney residents of all ages and abilities have the opportunity to enjoy a range of activities and events in Parks
- To provide Parks that are welcoming and safe to use
- To link Parks with other green spaces so as to assist in the development of green corridors

6.4.2 The indicative Action Plan outlines the projects and schemes needed to enact the aims of the strategy. The Commission considered the indicative action plan in detail at their meeting in June 2008, and were grateful for the opportunity to raise questions and suggest amendments. Among these suggestions, the following has now been included in the action plan:

- Develop, implement and maintain under review a boroughwide Diversity Action Plan over the next five years

¹⁰ 'Social Spaces: A Strategy for Parks in Hackney' p.5

- That the indicative Action Plan be amended to include acknowledgement of the valuable contribution made by voluntary sector organisations
- That the indicative Action Plan be amended to include reference to the Parks Conference due to take place in Spring 2009

Consideration of the changes suggested through the strategy and action plan are considered in further detail under item 6.6, relating to parks management.

6.5 Open Spaces Strategy

6.5.1 An Open Spaces Strategy is a requirement of the existing London Plan. It had been hoped that the Commission would receive a draft copy of this strategy during the production of the Green Spaces review, but this was not possible. As such, the following are considerations arising from the Commission reflecting on national research and guidance.

6.5.2 In November 2000 the Government published its Urban White Paper “Our Towns and Cities: The Future – Delivering an Urban Renaissance” (which led to the 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan). This identified the need for more imaginative thinking about open space planning and design and proposes three key areas of action¹¹. This includes:

- Development of a shared vision for the future of parks, play areas and open spaces;
- Improved information on the quality and quantity of parks and open spaces and the way in which they are used and maintained;
- Improved planning and design of new parks, play areas and public spaces and the management and maintenance of existing ones.

The Urban Green Spaces Task Force Report states that “strategic planning for parks and green spaces must take place alongside strategies for housing, community development and safety and economic regeneration”¹².

It was explained to us at a meeting in December 2007 that key owners of green spaces in Hackney included:

- LBH Parks Service: Parks and open spaces
- LBH Neighbourhoods and Regeneration Directorate: Verges and Highway Sites
- Transport for London
- Hackney Homes and other registered landlords
- Lee Valley Park Authority
- British Waterways
- Railtrack

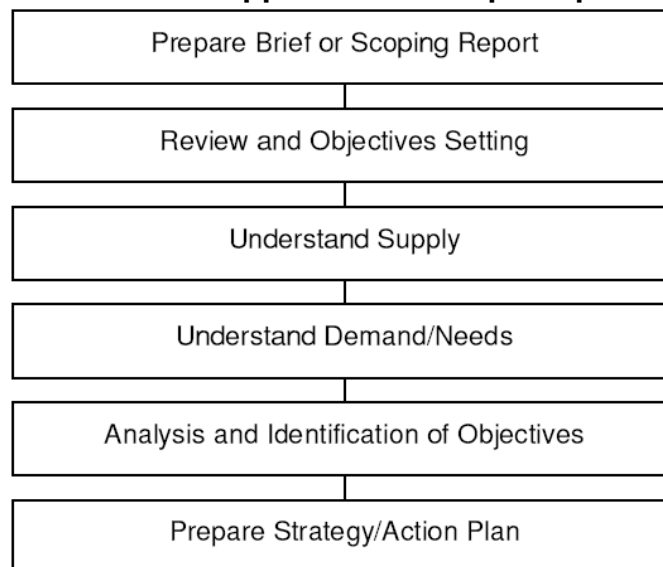
¹¹ ‘Our Towns and Cities: The Future - Delivering an Urban Renaissance’ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Nov 2000 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/citiesandregions/ourtowns>

¹² ‘Our Towns and Cities: The Future - Delivering an Urban Renaissance’ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Nov 2000 (p.10)

All of these stakeholders will need to be involved in agreeing the final Open Spaces Strategy, to ensure a shared vision and united approach to maintaining the Borough's green spaces.

- 6.5.3 As previously noted, “the results of (the Atkins) study and the open space consultation should inform the preparation of an Open Space Strategy and a Playing Pitch Strategy. These strategies will include action plans to identify timescales, relevant stakeholders and potential funding sources”¹³.
- 6.5.4 The Greater London Authority's guide to preparing Open Space Strategies, which was published in March 2004, recommends the following framework for the preparation of an Open Space Strategy:

GLA Recommended Approach to an Open Space Strategy



The Commission considers that the Open Spaces Strategy should draw on existing relevant policies and strategies that can add value to the wider strategy. An obvious example of this is the Play Strategy, which has clear relevance to many of the areas covered by a traditional Open Spaces Strategy.

Atkins recommends a playing pitch and sports facilities strategy should also be produced, which presumably would also be most effective as a chapter of the Open Spaces Strategy¹⁴.

6.6 Management & Publicity

Management

- 6.6.1 Green spaces across the Borough are managed by a wide variety of stakeholders, including (though not exclusively) two directorates in the Council, Hackney Homes, Registered Social Landlords and private landlords, British Waterways and various Trusts. This makes a united approach to management difficult, though the Parks

¹³ 'Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1' (Atkins) June 2004 p.xiv

¹⁴ 'Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1' (Atkins) June 2004 p.xiii

Strategy goes some way to recognising this issue, and an aim of the Open Spaces Strategy will be to strengthen these ties.

Parks and Leisure services are managed as part of the Council's Culture Division of the Community Services directorate. The new Parks Strategy recognised a need to change the way parks were managed, and to address existing issues that restrict the Council's ability to develop these spaces. At present the service includes a single Head of Service dealing with two operational areas, an arrangement which apparently is at variance to the majority of London Boroughs and which leads to significant capacity issues for the holder of that post (particularly with regard to sport & physical activity development in the run-up to London 2012). Among other issues recognised by the Parks division was a perceived lack of clarity with regard to responsibility for the Ranger Team who are involved in day to day cleaning and similar basic activities, as they report to the Ranger Manager and not the Area Parks Managers. The Commission understands this was particularly apparent in the Hackney Marsh area and, to a lesser extent the Haggerston area, as a result of the hire of pitches and Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) in these areas.

- 6.6.2 The Parks Strategy recommended a restructure of the service to address such matter. This created new roles and capabilities, including addressing the need for capacity in areas of development (including biodiversity, education and liaison with user groups) and a new area-based focus on operational management. A paper produced by the Parks division management that outlines the rationale for restructure is included in this report as Appendix 3.

The Commission supported the aims and aspirations of the restructure, and were particularly supportive of the creation of the Parks Development Manager post, which we believe will provide capacity for projects in areas that until now have been difficult to resource. The Commission noted that there would be considerable demand on this capacity however (especially in the first few years), and hoped that budgets and support would be appropriately apportioned to ensure their early success.

The Commission feel that the new management structure may allow greater opportunities to engage with internal partners as well as external stakeholders. To this end, the Parks Service should identify the various existing partnership groups relevant to their service, and use them to consult on future strategies and champion Parks Services. These include (though not exclusively): Safer Cleaner Partnership, the Community Sport & Physical Activity Network, and the Play Partnership (as well as the Play Pathfinder Steering Group). It should also include stronger links with internal stakeholders such as Planning, Enforcement and Licensing. An example given at a Commission meeting of successful internal partnership working relating to local parks was the involvement of social services to support street drinkers, diverting them away from a refurbished park space.

Design

- 6.6.3 In 2002, CABI produced a brief report summarising evidence from research which supported the importance of positive and appropriately-resourced design in public spaces. This noted that "collectively the studies provide evidence of the value of

design in the areas of healthcare, educational environments, housing, civic pride and cultural activity, business and crime prevention”¹⁵.

The Commission received a presentation from the Shoreditch Trust, outlining some of the work they have completed in redesigning Shoreditch Park. The Trust worked closely with a Crime Prevention Design Advisor for the Metropolitan Police when initially agreeing the designs for the park. They talked about some of his priorities and the way it had influenced plans for the park. Among others, they focused on:

- Natural Surveillance- the ability to ‘see and be seen’, avoiding surprises caused by high walls or other obstructions to sight lines
- Territorial Reinforcement- visible statements about what the space is used for, and what is/isn’t allowed
- Maintenance- ensuring cleanliness, but making sure problems that may influence use of the space are dealt with quickly

This makes up part of the initiative ‘Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design’ (CPTED). The concept of designing against crime has existed for many years, but came to the fore in the late 1990s. Relating specifically to parks, In the UK this was best endorsed by CABA Space (in their ‘Decent parks? Decent behaviour?’ report¹⁶) and the work of the Design Against Crime Research Centre¹⁷. The ‘Decent Parks’ report provides evidence that good design and management, not just heavy handed security measures, are the key ingredients for safer parks.

The Parks Service confirmed in response to Commission questions raised in regard to the Parks Strategy action plan that the Secured by Design principles “will be taken into in the design and development of new landscaping schemes within sites. Safety related user comments with regard to existing schemes and sites will be considered against the ‘Secured by Design’ principles in determining whether changes should be made”¹⁸.

6.6.4 The Shoreditch Trust noted that maintenance cost had been an issue for projects in the past, and that lessons had been learned. This included the need to produce a business plan to sit alongside the design plans, to highlight what the significant costs are at each stage of the project. This has already guided several decisions- notably the selection of materials (that require considerably less upkeep) and low-electricity lighting.

6.6.5 Similar to the concerns about risk aversion’s impact on play, the Commission also support a sensible approach to health and safety. Evidence from the Play Partnership noted that natural resources such as trees that have collapsed make for excellent play spaces, and so shouldn’t immediately be removed. Reference was also made during the Commission’s site visit to Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park,

¹⁵ ‘The value of good design: How buildings and spaces create economic and social value’ CABA, Nov 2002 (p.2)

¹⁶ ‘Decent parks? Decent behaviour? The link between the quality of parks and user behaviour’ CABA Space, May 2005

¹⁷ Design Against Crime is a socially responsive, practice-led research centre located at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London. <http://www.designagainstcrime.com>

¹⁸ Parks Service response to Commission Parks Strategy action plan questions- 29th August 2008

about perceived concerns relating to dilapidated gravestones in public spaces. Whilst personal safety is clearly of great importance, a common-sense approach to maintenance is preferable to knee-jerk reactions (an example being Stockport Council, who flattened 3,000 gravestones only to be made to replace them at a cost of £500,000).

- 6.6.6 Finally, the Commission noted the positive approach taken by Bristol City Council, who during the production of their Open Spaces Strategy also drafted a Green Space Design Guide. Whilst not formally implemented as an overarching policy for future design, it is widely used as a discussion document and consultation tool. This notes that “Whilst *Planning Policy Guidance 17* acknowledges that 'it would be wrong to impose standard approaches' it asserts that 'carefully developed urban and landscape design guidelines can help ensure that developers take full account of the need for 'placemaking', and do not simply seek to comply with accessibility, quality and quantity standards at the lowest possible cost”¹⁹, and that it is important to consider (whether from a design, planning or management point) an individual green space to be part of the city’s overall green infrastructure. It promotes best practice including earliest engagement of local people and green space stakeholders, involvement in overall spatial planning, particular attention to ensuring that residential development addresses (rather than turns its back on) green space, careful assessment of existing policy, and an assessment of historical development. It also raises specific issues for design for varied green space types.

The Commission feels that the Council might like to consider following such an approach during the production of its own Open Spaces Strategy.

Wider Community Involvement & Engagement in Design

- 6.6.7 Shoreditch Trust’s representatives explained that there had been considerable consultation on their plans with residents, stakeholders and analysis of MORI statistics (notably local fear of crime). They used a standard list of consultees, including all local Tenant & Resident Associations and Tenant Management Organisations. This survey laid out the core priorities (including the importance placed on the implementation of street lighting, a desire for an informal performance space and park ranger facilities such as offices that could be used as shared spaces with other linked services), which were published in Shoreditch magazine, Hackney Gazette and at the Shoreditch festival.

The Trust’s representatives also explained that they had worked closely with the Shoreditch Park User Group through the process. From 2010/11 the Trust’s funding could no longer support the park development, so it was crucial that local residents ‘owned the legacy’.

The Commission feel that this is a particularly positive approach to engaging the local community in designing their local green space, and believe the Council could learn from such an approach.

- 6.6.8 During the course of the review, the Commission’s Chairman was contacted in his role as ward Member for a local park, to consult him on the Springfield Park and Spring Hill Master Plan. This outlined key items for consideration in the Master Plan,

¹⁹ ‘The Bristol Green Space Design Guide’ Bristol City Council, July 2007 (p.7)

dates for consultation drop-in sessions, and an outline of how wider consultation would occur.

Members welcomed this approach (together with the request for further information about relevant local stakeholders), but raised concerns that this was an activity which the Parks Service should be highlighting as a matter of course to the Commission during a review of green spaces. There were wider concerns raised about how the division celebrated its successes and engaged with the Commission's review- an example being the lack of contact made following the successful award of three new Green Flags. At the Commission meeting in June 2008 it was requested that the Parks Service endeavour to engage the Commission in any further consultations relating to specific parks for the duration of the Green Spaces review. At the time of publishing the final report no further consultation papers had been received, though this is probably because none had taken place.

Publicity

6.6.9 Promoting local green space is crucial to ensuring that parks and green spaces are as widely-used as they deserve to be. The Council has many varied ways of publicising services and engaging with residents, and the Commission would like to see these avenues maximised.

Throughout its guide to preparing Green Space strategies, CABI Space repeatedly recognise the importance of parks and open spaces receiving the backing and support of local political leaders²⁰. The Commission consider that an easy way to promote local green spaces is to allocate ward councillors to their area's parks, and keep them regularly updated on developments. This could mean including them in individual parks' management plans, involving them in decision-making, briefing them to offer regular updates to residents at neighbourhood committees, and ensuring they have accurate contact details for parks managers.

6.6.10 The Parks Strategy action plan notes three activities that will be employed to raise awareness of parks in Hackney, which we feel offer a positive start to widening publicity. These are:

- Develop a Marketing Strategy for Parks in Hackney which links with Hackney's emerging work on the Visitor Economy in the Borough;
- Develop information materials about Parks in all appropriate media; and
- Ensure the provision of Press Releases & Parks Interest Stories to the Corporate Communications Unit.

Events in Parks

6.6.11 CABI Space recognise that "well managed festivals and other events can have a very positive effect on the urban environment, drawing the community together and bringing financial, social and environmental benefits. They can, in particular, reintroduce the kind of civil society that has been lost in too many of our urban areas"²¹.

²⁰ 'Green space strategies: a good practice guide' Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2006

²¹ 'The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value' CABI Space, March 2004 (p.13)

6.6.12 The CPA Culture Inspection noted that “coordination of the cultural events programme for parks and open spaces is underdeveloped”²². This was recognised by the Parks Service, and the rationale for restructuring the service report noted a “public demand for more interpretive/educational activities in parks & open spaces”. The proposal is to convert the current Sports & Events Booking Officer post to an additional Back Office Support post to be located within the new Back Office Team.

The restructure paper also noted that there was a need for “a revised approach by the Council to the staging of outdoor events so as ensure that its Duty of Care and Health & Safety positions are not compromised”. Clearly this is an activity that should be prioritised to ensure that events recognised by the Council avoid accident or controversy.

6.6.13 During the site visit to Mile End Park, the park’s Director felt that the park had built a relationship with the local community through smaller events, such as the long-standing ‘Park After Dark’ event, that takes place on Halloween and last year attracted 300 people. The Director was also particularly keen on dog shows, which he felt generated considerable interest in the park and had cross-community appeal.

6.6.14 The Commission recognised the need to balance promotion of events (linked to the desire for parks as social spaces) with the need to minimise impact and protect biodiversity.

6.6.15 Recommendation 1

(i) **The Commission recommends** that as part of the Open Spaces strategy wider publicity be produced for all green spaces, that clearly outlines which organisation is responsible for specific operations, and how to get in contact with them- especially for housing green space. This should be completed in close working with Parks User Groups and Tenant Management Organisations, so they clearly understand how to resolve issues.

(ii) More broadly the Council should consider refreshing the information on the Council’s website to include all information relating to play provision, accessibility and transport links, providing a more effective web presence. This should be linked to the planned drafting of a Parks Marketing Strategy.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing improvements to the publicity of responsibilities and access to information via the internet by no later than July 2009.

Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that the individual park management plans are produced in consultation with Parks User Groups, regularly reviewed to ensure they remain relevant, and are both widely publicised and readily accessible. Consideration should also be given to including links to each of the management plans in the anticipated Open Spaces Strategy, to ensure they retain links to relevant services and their surroundings.

²² ‘Cultural Services Inspection Report’- Audit Commission, Dec 2007 (p.25)

Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that the Council consider how best to use ward Members as champions for local parks and green spaces.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing developments on utilising Members by no later than July 2009.

6.7 Performance Management

- 6.7.1 The Atkins report noted that “the lack of coordinated and accessible information on the type and quality of facilities is preventing an informed assessment of these formal and informal recreation needs and opportunities”²³.

The Audit Commission’s 2007 inspection of the Council’s Cultural Services noted:

“Indicators of quality are improving with four parks now holding Green Flag accreditation. However, without more detailed information on usage and quality of service provision across all parks and open spaces, and assessment of the Council’s performance, costs, and quality relative to others, it is difficult to make an overall judgement on Value for Money”²⁴.

More recently, the Parks Strategy recognised that “the service cannot demonstrate a history or culture of benchmarking or comparison with other organisations. Consequently, it is difficult to comment on its delivery in VFM terms”²⁵. This has been recognised as an issue and the Parks Service recently joined the London Parks Benchmarking Group so as to be able to properly compare performance data both with other organisations and also over time. As feedback to this report is received the Commission would appreciate information about the analysis received through this group.

- 6.7.2 The Commission were informed at their meeting in June 2008 that all performance management requirements for the Parks Strategy action plan would be covered by reporting through annual Service Plans. There was some concern that this might not adequately support the ambitious programme of works, at a time of new management structure. It was also noted through the Parks Strategy that “Service standards which detail what users can expect are displayed in each park and performance is monitored quarterly”²⁶, though it is not explained how this data is published.
- 6.7.3 The Community Services Storyboard (which list all centrally-stored council data) lists the number of parks’ hectares under it’s Key Activity Data, a commitment to continue to invest in Hackney’s parks and open spaces, various sporting projects in the priorities for 2008/09-2011/12 (including ‘Activity For All’, ‘Bringing Through The Talent’, and ‘Remaking The Marshes’), and several outcomes relating to the

²³ ‘Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1’ (Atkins) June 2004 p.1-1

²⁴ ‘Cultural Services Inspection Report’- Audit Commission (December 2007) p.28

²⁵ ‘Social Spaces: A Strategy for Parks in Hackney’ p.9

²⁶ ‘Social Spaces: A Strategy for Parks in Hackney’ p.5

Olympics. As with previously-mentioned reports it also aims to strengthen service planning and performance management framework for the Culture division.

Relevant to this review, the Community Services Story Board references adult participation in sport as a performance target for accelerated improvement. There are no relevant local parks indicators.

- 6.7.4 The IDeA run a Beacon Scheme that identifies good practice across specific topics. In 2003 one of the topics selected was titled 'Improving Urban Green Spaces'. Inspectors commented on one successful applicant by noting that "use of effective environmental management systems and performance management systems ensure continuous improvement and maintenance of parks and open spaces in Brent. The value of these systematic tools ensures consistent sustainable management and maintenance regimes which in turn ensure continuous improvement and safer, brighter and more user friendly public open spaces"²⁷. CABE Spaces also offer useful information in the report 'Urban parks: Do you know what you're getting for your money?'²⁸.

The Parks Service may like to consider some of the evidence received through the Beacon Scheme initiative, and the research collated in the CABE Space report.

- 6.7.5 In August 2007 a joint briefing was produced entitled 'Parks and open spaces: Towards An Excellent Service' (TAES). This version of TAES was developed specifically for parks and open space services by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, the Institute for Sport, Parks and Leisure (ISPAL) and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and various industry practitioners through a consultation, piloting and evaluation process.

TAES is a self-assessment based improvement tool designed to improve performance management. Although originally developed for Sport and Recreation, TAES is adaptable for use across cultural services and includes a framework for continuous improvement.

Based on the existing TAES model, this version has been developed specifically for the parks and open spaces sector, and is based on existing good practice and products operating in other sectors. These include the European Foundation for Quality Management, Chartermark, Quest, Investors in People, Commission for Racial Equality & Equality Standards, The IDeA's Beacon Scheme, Best Value Inspections, Comprehensive Performance Assessment, OFSTED and Joint Area Reviews. Several of these are already used in Hackney, across different services.

The joint briefing paper explains that TAES offers local authorities the opportunity to "choose to adopt the concepts, values, habits, process and practices involved in working towards an excellent service. This is much more challenging than merely adopting a scheme or achieving a badge; however it is significantly more valuable in

²⁷ IDeA Beacon Scheme- Improving Urban Green Spaces (2002-03)
<http://www.beacons.idea.gov.uk/idk/tio/82976>

²⁸ 'Urban parks: Do you know what you're getting for your money?' CABE, 2006

achieving successful results for your communities”²⁹. The Commission feels that the self-assessment framework is something the Council’s Parks Service (and possibly wider cultural services) might consider implementing.

6.7.6 Recommendation 12

The Commission recommends that the Council consider the implementation of an appropriate continuous-improvement performance management tool (such as “Towards An Excellent Service for parks and open spaces”), and report back to the Commission on how this might be achieved, by no later than July 2009.

Recommendation 13

The Commission recommends that the Parks Service should also seek to identify relevant data from existing consultation not directly relating to Parks but which still holds relevance, and ensure that lines of communication are strengthened to make sure this sort of information is both received and used whenever produced. Recent examples the Commission considers relevant include the Children and Young People’s Plan, Audit of Young People’s Service Providers in Hackney, and consultation completed ahead of the draft design plans for Shoreditch Park.

6.8 Community Involvement & Volunteering

6.8.1 Maintenance of parks and other green spaces need not be solely completed by Council staff- in many areas local people will happily volunteer resources to ensure these spaces are kept to the best possible standards. For a council this can be invaluable, as volunteers are not only an excellent way to bolster scarce budgets but are motivated to do the best job.

6.8.2 The Institute for Volunteering Research produced a literature review in June 2007, which focused solely on volunteering in the UK’s open spaces. The report explains that:

“Volunteering has never received as much support from a government as it has since the Labour government was elected in 1997. In such a context, the conservation and environmental sectors have become increasingly receptive to the concept of involving people in the management of nature and the provision of opportunities for volunteers. People are increasingly playing a central role in the management of environmental and conservation problems, providing a solid foundation for the involvement of volunteers in the natural outdoors”³⁰.

According to the report, a wide range of motivational factors operate to encourage people to volunteer in the natural outdoors, including a love of nature, environmental awareness, social and cultural factors, learning new skills and improving employability. The report also notes the value and impact of successful local volunteering, which range from economic and financial benefits, environmental,

²⁹ ‘Parks and open spaces: Towards An Excellent Service’, IDeA, CABE and ISPAL, August 2007 (p.6) For more information on TAES visit <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=7921064>

³⁰ ‘Volunteering in the natural outdoors in the UK and Ireland: a literature review’ Nick Ockenden, Institute for Volunteering Research, June 2007 (p.3)

social and cultural improvements, to stronger political ties (from the growth of formalised opportunities for participation in policy-making as well as the development of more informal decision-making opportunities through radical engagement).

The report also considers some of the challenges and issues facing volunteering in public spaces. It finds that there appears to be a lack of diversity in the age and ethnic background of volunteers in the natural outdoors, with a tendency to involve older volunteers more frequently. It also notes that the structure and formalisation of organisations and groups within the environment and natural outdoors sector often face issues associated with a lack of sustainable funding, problems associated with volunteer management and occasionally a lack of central, coordinated infrastructure in many cases. Finally, it notes that “despite the long involvement of volunteers in conservation and nature, there is still some confusion and debate surrounding the relationship between people and nature. It has been argued that this has contributed to problems in the implementation of community-based conservation programmes”³¹.

6.8.3 The Council is currently actively involved in seeking volunteers to help with the Olympics in 2012. At an event entitled ‘Get Set Hackney’ around 240 people signed up to become volunteers, which will increase as the dates draws nearer and add to the 70,000 people needed from across all boroughs. The Council’s website has a dedicated page on its website for other volunteering opportunities, though Parks User Groups are not publicised.

6.8.4 Evidence was received throughout the course of the review that suggested the Council currently were not doing enough to recognise the expertise and value of local parks volunteers, and that communication with both the individual Parks User Groups and the umbrella Hackney Parks Forum could be greatly improved.

At our Commission meeting in April 2008, a representative of the Hackney Parks Forum highlighted a considerable list of achievements that had been realised through the efforts of local volunteers. These included:

- Securing many thousands of pounds in funding from external sources to benefit parks and green spaces in Hackney, including £8m of Heritage Lottery Funding for Clissold Park
- Providing ongoing liaison for park managers to discuss maintenance and other issues
- Donating thousands of voluntary hours- with the exception of the part-time support worker everything done by Park User Groups is voluntary
- Supporting the 20 existing user groups, and establishing 6 new user groups
- Designing, sourcing and planting 7 new orchards in Hackney green spaces, planting over 1km of new native hedges, and planting many thousands of trees and bulbs, involving hundreds of local people and school children
- Advising and supporting park staff in securing Green Flag status for parks

³¹ Volunteering in the natural outdoors in the UK and Ireland’ Institute for Volunteering Research, June 2007 (p.7)

- Organising numerous activities and events every year to promote parks and green spaces

It should also be noted that the Tree Nursery on Hackney Marshes and Core Gardens in Homerton recently achieved Green Pennant awards – given to community and voluntary groups who successfully manage their own public spaces.

The Commission received passionate feedback at both this meeting and throughout the review from members of the Hackney Parks Forum, individual Parks User Groups and Tenant & Resident Associations that proved their commitment to improving local green spaces.

- 6.8.5 Members learnt on their site visit to parks in Hackney that a social enterprise called Growing Communities operate from Allens Gardens (and two other Hackney parks), which includes a classroom for school visits. The Operations Manager was very positive about the arrangement, describing them as “eyes in the parks”, as they are able to offer informal staffing of green spaces that aren’t big enough to require rangers or other parks staff. However the Interim Head of Parks and Leisure explained at a Commission meeting that at present the Parks Service did not work closely enough with Growing Communities. He felt that this needed further development, and that they should be regarded as stakeholders.

Representative Volunteers

- 6.8.6 The primary focus of the Parks Strategy is on using them as ‘social spaces’, recognising that “parks have no cultural boundaries and positively encourage social interaction and a sense of inclusion”³². However the Parks Service recognise that at present they do not know enough about the specific needs of residents from different communities, or how to promote wider use. In response to a question from the Commission relating to this, it was explained that a detailed survey of park users and non-users would be commissioned. This would be completed in partnership with the PCT, site-specific user groups, by subscribing to the web based Greenstat survey system and by making direct contact with representatives of specific communities. The Commission welcome this approach, together with the assurance that data of this sort will be collected in a similar manner to the consultation completed by the Atkins consultants, to ensure the information is comparative.

The Interim Head of Parks & Leisure noted in December 2007 that “the degree to which these user groups are fully representative of the whole community is being examined”. The representative nature of the Borough’s Parks User Groups has been considered several times during this review, though it was felt that to some extent this further failed to recognise the value of these active volunteers. It was noted at the Commission meeting in April 2008 by a representative of HPF that “those involved were the users who have a particularly strong interest in the upkeep of their local green spaces, whilst having the time and the expertise to volunteer their service”. All meetings were publicly advertised, and the HPF noted that they would welcome any approaches to help attract a wider membership from the Borough’s communities.

³² ‘Social Spaces: A Strategy for Parks in Hackney’ p.3

- 6.8.7 In March 2008 the Commission received a presentation from the Executive Director of Groundwork East London (GWEL), a regeneration charity working across the borough to support a range of activities and projects to improve local public space. GWEL have worked in Hackney since 1994, and continue to promote environmental education and awareness. Among other schemes they have helped the London Borough of Havering to increase the scale and representative nature of the borough's Friends of Parks groups.

The Commission also recognised the positive projects GWEL had funded through their 'Our Space, Our Say' programme, which distributed small grants for community-led projects. This ranged from very simple (filling an unused space with grow bags) to more comprehensive (like the Stamford Hill Sculptures, which were designed and agreed by local residents).

GWEL's Executive Director noted that there is a belief that, in terms of public services, people in deprived areas want more than they are willing to give- but that much of GWEL's experience counters this, arguing that there is an untapped resource of people keen to give something back.

- 6.8.8 The Commission's site visit to Mile End Park highlighted their approach to engaging local communities through events- the park's Director found that many of the local communities were uninterested in the wider strategic management of the park, but were eager to get involved and volunteer for short-term projects. Considering these difficulties in engaging a representative section of the Borough, the Commission agreed that this was a positive approach to consulting the wider community.

Engaging with the Council

- 6.8.9 Throughout the review the Commission received feedback from Parks User Groups expressing their concern about the perceived difficulties of communicating effectively with the Parks Service. This in part led to the call-in that was triggered by a cross-party group of non-executive Members, following a lack of clarity around how consultation has been undertaken in producing the Parks Strategy (and previously mentioned in 6.4.1).

As a result of this call-in, it was agreed that a selection of relevant Council Officers and Members (the Cabinet Member for Community Services, the Assistant Director of Culture, the Interim Head of Parks and Leisure and Cllr Taylor, who was representing the Overview & Scrutiny Board) would start regular consultation meetings with the Hackney Parks Forum, and provide feedback to the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission. The first of these took place in June 2008, which was felt to have been a useful meeting and a positive start to negotiations. It was agreed that a Parks Conference would take place in Spring 2009 to highlight issues and engage with a wider group of stakeholders. Cllr Rathbone (a member of the Hackney Parks Forum) thanked the Commission for considering the issue of Green Space provision.

Information received as part of the call-in explained that the new Green Spaces Forum would focus on local owners of green spaces (including Lea Valley and British Waterways) but that they would welcome a representative from HPF. For this to be effective the umbrella organisation must be appropriately supported and

respected by the Council, to ensure their involvement in the Green Spaces Forum is valuable.

6.8.10 During the Commission's site visit to Mile End Park it was noted that they employ a scheme of corporate volunteering. For this, large local companies fulfil their corporate social responsibility through providing employees as volunteers. Firms are charged at least £10 per head, and the scheme is part coordinated by CSV (community service volunteers). They have received very positive feedback on this, though the Director noted that it can be resource intensive for staff. The Commission feels this is an approach that the Council could gain significant benefit and recognition from.

6.8.11 Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends that consideration should be given to options for appropriate organisational administrative support to replace the recently-ceased external support for the Hackney Parks Forum (HPF). It has been suggested that this would be part of the role of the new Development Team, who have community engagement within their remit. The Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission would like to see this explicitly linked to the roles of the relevant managers, and that the Parks Service aim to produce a statement of intent for future working arrangements with the HPF to ensure both are aware of expectations.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing arrangements for supporting the Hackney Parks Forum by no later than July 2009.

Recommendation 5

The Commission recommends that the Council also support Parks User Groups to develop and formalise into organisations that can be considered operational stakeholders. This can be achieved through learning from initiatives such as Groundwork East London's work with LB Haringey (to help such groups become more representative of their local community), and publications like 'It's our space: A guide for community groups working to improve public space' by CABI Space.

Recommendation 6

The Commission recommends that the Parks Service should continue to learn from national and local good practice, such as the recent work completed in developing Shoreditch Park (notably on the involvement of young people and focus on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design).

Recommendation 7

The Commission recommends that the Parks Service strengthen ties with the Corporate Consultation and Communications teams, to ensure maximised success of any publicity and surveys used to develop the service (such as the imminent PCT-funded survey of parks users and non-users). The Consultation team includes an events officer, and best practice should be sought ahead of the new Development team becoming responsible for parks events.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing changes in the approach to consultation by no later than July 2009.

6.9 Housing Green Space

6.9.1 The value of green space and the benefits that can be given to residents has already been discussed in this report, and in no area is this more apparent than housing estates. Despite this, Neighbourhoods Green (a partnership project created to champion the need for better amenity green space) felt that nationwide “the quality of open spaces within and around social housing has, by and large, declined dramatically since their creation, to the effect that many are in a state of neglect, under-used, or have even become no-go areas”³³. They also felt that, as focus increasingly grows on the need for improved parks and green spaces, “there is concern that social housing spaces have yet to merit the attention they deserve, and consequently the focus of these initiatives is largely elsewhere, or does not address the sector at all”.

6.9.2 The Atkins consultant report found that amenity green space in Hackney was of a fair quality, noting that “within certain areas of the Borough amenity greenspace... form an integral part of the urban fabric and contribute towards local character and distinctiveness”³⁴. Interestingly they found that users of amenity green spaces were least likely to stay for a long period of time, with 0% of survey respondents staying more than 2 hours and 45% staying for less than 30 minutes.

6.9.3 The Head of Estates Environment gave a presentation at a Commission meeting in February on his services’ responsibilities and priorities. He offered an overview of his service, noting:

- The service covers 276 Estates with 15,606 properties at present (due to increase to 26,885 by June 2008)
- They Currently employ 159 staff (and seasonal staff dependent upon funding)
- Typical works include programmed grass cutting, winter works (including shrub pruning, hedge trimming, bed clearance and redefinition), Landscaping, Bulb and shrub planting, Tree maintenance and planting
- They also support the London In Bloom campaign and Greening Hackney
- The service receives most of its funding through Council’s delegated budget, capital bids, Estate Improvement Budgets, Resident Led 184 Budget (a resource used to address physical improvements to estates), Recreation and Environment Action Programme (REAP) bids, Team Hackney funding, Resourcing Our Priorities (ROP) bids, and Section 106 funding (Planning Gain)

A recent successful project took place on the Gascoyne Estate, which benefited from a share of the REAP fund, created as a result of land negotiations between the Council and London Development Agency. Green space on the estate now offers more than 30 different types of trees, shrubs and flowers planted by Hackney Homes. The estate is the first of six in the area to be improved by Hackney Homes’ estate environment special projects team, which was responsible for the work from planning to planting.

³³ Neighbourhoods Green website- <http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/ng/intro/about/index.asp>

³⁴ ‘Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1’ (Atkins) June 2004 p.4-11

The Commission also learned that in October 2007 a new service was launched for Tenant & Resident Associations (TRAs), which greatly improved responses to their queries. In particular, assigning a dedicated officer to these requests had increased responses within agreed timelines from 60% to 90% (though Members reported that this was not their understanding from individual ward work). An Information Book for TRA Chairs had been launched and distributed, as had an Estate Management planned maintenance timetable. The Estates Environment service had also increased their attendance at TRA meetings, with Estate Managers increasingly seeing the value of these events.

The Head of Estates Environment noted that some housing green space suffered from dilapidated shrub beds and hedges, general abuse (dog fouling, football etc), encroachment from private gardens, overgrown trees and a lack of investment.

- 6.9.4 The Commission were interested to know how information was shared with residents to outline which organisation was responsible for different tasks. The Head of Estates Environment agreed that the separation of services between the Council (or Hackney Homes) provided, RSLs and contracted out services could be confusing to residents, and accepted that to date they had not been successful at promoting their services. However certain services (including Estate Cleaning and Parking) were due to return to in-house management, that would hopefully help residents to make contact if necessary. Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) still operate independently, so are responsible for informing their residents of relevant service providers.

This issue was highlighted during the Commission's site visit to Primrose Square, a space which is enclosed by the New Kingshold estate. When the community centre was redeveloped the space in Primrose Square was also improved, though local residents felt that no one took responsibility for its upkeep. The local primary school uses the space on a daily basis, and the Chair of the Parent-Teacher Association had championed much of the improvement works. She felt that Hackney Homes were not fully engaged, and as such approached Sanctuary Housing, a local housing association. Among other exercises, in October 2007 around 230 pupils from the Primary School joined Sanctuary Housing for some bulb planting. The event was the first planting at the Primrose Square Community Garden, a flagship project for Sanctuary's Heart of Hackney scheme to help establish community initiatives through partnership working with local organisations. Sanctuary Housing spent about £5,000 on the community development project, and worked with the local gardening club to make improvements. As this support occurs on a voluntary basis it is not a sustainable approach to maximising upkeep.

Hackney Homes have now agreed to clear rubbish and empty bins, though they are still not officially responsible. The Chair also raised concerns about communication, and explained that it could be hard to find out which organisations is responsible for different works.

A particular concern for those involved in the development of Primrose Square was dog fouling. A lack of signage was a specific concern, as residents were unaware of the enforcement policies that can be used against those responsible. It was also felt

that the Council and Hackney Homes could do more to recognise and publicise the importance of local volunteers.

The Commission are therefore keen to see that the Council and Hackney Homes agree how best to publicise who is responsible for the various works that are required to maintain high levels of quality on shared spaces, and that this is fed back to relevant local groups such as Tenant Management Organisations and volunteer groups.

- 6.9.5 It was also discussed at a Commission meeting that a specific concern related to the number of different stakeholders with responsibility for maintaining housing green spaces, including Hackney Homes, RSLs and private sector landlords. This meant that not only was it difficult for residents to know who can be contacted but that service standards were unlikely to be shared across the Borough. The Commission felt that there would be value in investigating a system of shared standards that could be implemented in all amenity green spaces, which recognise the individual nature of such provision but ensure that maintenance and development are completed to locally-agreed levels. It is also hoped that Housing amenity space is explicitly recognised in the anticipated Open Spaces Strategy.

Estates Plus Strategy

- 6.9.6 As part of the review it was agreed that the Commission would receive a presentation about the Estates Plus Strategy. Whilst this strategy is primarily focused on the provision of new homes on existing housing estates through the use of redundant land, it also considers how best to improve existing green spaces in these developments or to create new provision.

The presentation received mentioned three planning policies that relate to the use of green space for housing. These were:

“New building projects should ensure the highest possible space standards for users, in both public and private spaces inside and outside the building, creating spacious and usable private as well as public spaces.” (London Plan, Policy 4B.2 Promoting world-class architecture and design)

“Landscape design should be an integral part of the development creating robust, positive spaces rather than left over space. It should demonstrate a contribution to promoting biodiversity. A landscape plan, describing layout and structure should be submitted with the planning application” (UDP Policy EQ7 External Works and Landscape)

“In light of these policies, the Council will seek to protect any open space, particularly those in areas of deficiency, of above average quality and value or which provide facilities for recreation reflecting the varied needs of that particular area. Therefore, before the Council will consider the redevelopment of open space it will be necessary to establish whether it:

- has any amenity value in being used as a playing field, recreation grounds or children playing areas;
- is located in an area of deficiency;

- is of above average quality and value as defined in the Open Space Assessment (June 2005)”

6.9.7 The Commission learned that there was no formal definition of what made land redundant, though it can often be seen as space which is ‘no longer fit for their primary objective’, such as areas where garages had been destroyed with only the concrete floors remaining- this is defined as ‘open space’. With no productive use for this land, it has been identified as valuable for housing stock. Decisions about the provision of new homes were based on an assessment of location and housing density, together with the use and purpose of existing open space.

An example of where the planning guidance cited above had led to a suggested site for new homes being rejected was the Frampton Park estate, where the assessment found it to be densely populated with large green spaces. These spaces were felt to be too important, and instead of being used for new homes would be improved following development of other parts of the estate. In total 9 sites were rejected.

The Commission recognised that there was some localised opposition to the Estates Plus Strategy, with concerns including the use of neighbourhood offices for new housing. However the Commission were confident that the strategy was being compiled with the Borough’s interests at its core, and that green space would not be adversely impacted where possible.

6.9.8 Recommendation 8

(i) **The Commission recommends** that consideration is given to the adoption of an holistic approach across all housing spaces to the improvement of green space, through the application of common standards. The focus of these standards should be on development principles rather than actual designs, as each green space should respond to its locality.

(ii) It is also felt that an officer from Hackney Homes and a nomination to represent Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) should be included in the new Green Spaces Forum. Dependant on capacity and maintaining a manageable membership size, this forum could also be extended to the Private Landlords Forum.

We recommend that a report should be produced by the Community Services directorate outlining how the Green Spaces Forum will operate by no later than July 2009. This should incorporate how the forum plans to engage the Neighbourhoods & Regeneration directorate, and potential benefits from linking with the Better Homes Partnership.

6.10 Planning

6.10.1 The Unitary Development Plan is the current statement of planning policy. It strongly resists the loss of space classified as Metropolitan Open Land, and seeks to protect all other open space. However, it can in practice be difficult to argue against a developer who can demonstrate that a particular green space is not needed because of low use and poor maintenance (reinforcing a need for solid performance

management systems). The shortage of land in the Borough means there is always a threat of housing development on open land.

Emerging planning policy will seek to strengthen the position, and will be set out in a Core Strategy supported by Area Action Plans and master plans. It will encourage the provision of more and better quality open space, and propose links to join up green areas. Section 106 agreements can also be used to secure resources to improve the quality and quantity of open space. However other priorities, such as provision of more affordable housing, usually account for the bulk of such funding. The shortage of suitable land for development means that it is extremely important to find innovative ways to incorporate open space into new developments.

6.10.2 The Council has put a new process in place to ensure that S106 funding is utilised for projects which will be scoped in advance to provide a 'project bank' in readiness for the release of any relevant S106 funding. This will include Parks projects.

6.10.3 The impact of climate change on planning policy is now a very important issue; adapting to change in the climate through the design of space and buildings being the main challenge. Permeable soft and hard surfaces allow for excessive rain water to run off, and reduce the 'heat island' effect which will come with hotter summers.

6.10.4 At the Commission meeting in January 2008 the Head of Planning Policy responded to a specific question about Area Action Plans, noting that any development of areas has to conform to the London Plan. The Dalston Area Action Plan did set out plans for more green space, however when consulted, residents indicated they felt parks provision locally was sufficient. Nevertheless, a new public open space in the centre of Dalston has been negotiated as part of development plans.

The Atkins report notes that "Planning decisions should have regard to the analysis undertaken on current levels of provision, the identified deficiencies and the quality and value of the open spaces within or surrounding a development site"³⁵. Recommendations to this effect are included in the study, and outlined in 6.2.4 of this report.

6.11 Arboriculture

6.11.1 Hackney has a rich tree stock in parks, housing estates and on streets, with a recent estimate valuing them at £200 million. Many are protected by Tree Preservation Orders due to their position in a preservation area or relative worth. In particular, street tree provision is another area where the Mayor's priorities have started to produce benefits. There is a Council commitment to plant 1,000 new street trees by 2010, with 300 planted in the first phase. Mayor Pipe noted at the time that "the London Assembly praised us last year as being one of the few boroughs to be planting new trees and increasing their number".

6.11.2 The Commission held a special meeting in July to bring together the various services that provide maintenance and development to the Borough's tree stock.

³⁵ 'Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1' (Atkins) June 2004 p.xiii

Presentations were received from the Community Services and Neighbourhoods & Regeneration departments, Hackney Homes and the Tree Musketeers- a local community group of arboriculture experts. Members appreciated the opportunity to discuss issues with all relevant local service providers.

Whilst part of this fell outside the remit of the Green Spaces review (notably for street trees), it was considered sensible to discuss the Borough's tree stock holistically, as many of the issues relating to tree preservation are the same regardless of environment. It was explained that Transport for London also managed a significant number of trees within the Borough, and evidence was sought following the meeting.

6.11.3 Estimates of the Borough's tree stock were supplied, including:

- *The Parks Service* have responsibility for managing and maintaining all parks trees (over 60 sites), of which there are approximately 60,000. They also carry out additional work on highways sites (8,000 trees), in schools, around Council buildings and for some larger private concerns such as Housing Associations.
- *Hackney Homes* is responsible for approximately 23,000 trees of varying species, size and condition (Exact tree numbers present within the estates are still being clarified through on-going tree condition surveys). To date, approximately 8,000 trees have been surveyed and assessed.
- *The Highways service* manage around 7,500 street trees, across 58 slip and verge sites.
- *Transport for London* maintain 317 trees along the 'red routes' which they manage.

6.11.4 Each service was asked what issues they faced in maintaining the Borough's tree stock to the highest level. A selection of their responses are outlined below:

The Parks Service

There was a need to raise the profile of trees and tree work so that people understand more about it, and to deal with irresponsible dog owners. There was a desire to move the service from a small under-resourced unit (providing a largely reactive programme of works), to one that is properly resourced and supported to carry out a proactive and inclusive programme of works.

Hackney Homes

The cost of tree maintenance- It is envisaged that approximately 18,000 trees will require maintenance of some sort to return the tree stock to a safe and healthy condition. Depending on how this work is completed it could cost up to £2 million.

The Highways service

100–130 trees are lost per annum. This is mostly due to age, disease and danger associated with the tree.

Transport for London

- Constant excavation of services disturbing the roots
- High levels of pollution/particulates
- Mechanical damage

- Vandalism
- Tree roots damaging footways and the real/perceived risk of subsidence to property
- Establishment of transplanted trees
- Road salt damage
- Demands of pruning for CCTV, street furniture, street lighting, property and highways clearance

A Highways representative noted that their recent work has included drafting a tree policy and strategy (which is due to be completed by the end of the financial year), boroughwide tree protocol, setting up a tree carers network, creating a tree resource management project, design guide and mapping the Borough's stock. It was unclear whether the Tree Strategy would form part of the Open Spaces Strategy, though the Commission would support such an approach.

- 6.11.5 As previously mentioned the Commission also invited a representative for the Tree Musketeers, a local voluntary group with expertise relating to arboriculture. He noted that the Council did achieve some notable successes, in particular the planting of street trees had been exemplary. However there was concern raised that (among other issues) Hackney does not have a dedicated tree officer in their planning department, that over zealous tree management on housing estates had diminished an excellent tree stock, and that many of the most prominent trees in Hackney parks are suffering from untreatable diseases and a significant number will be lost in the next 5-10 years.
- 6.11.6 The Parks Strategy notes that "The development of the strategy has identified the need to produce proactive management plans and a database for the Borough's tree stock to enable trees to be protected and maintained for years to come. The database will maintain a record of the tree stock and ensure that accurate records of inspection, maintenance and replacement are kept". The Commission strongly supports this approach, but is aware that there are several stakeholders involved in the maintenance of the Borough's tree stock- such as Hackney Homes, social services, schools, Transport for London and RSLs. It would be valuable for all of these groups to be approached and for their data to be included in the database.
- 6.11.7 Following feedback from the Tree Musketeers relating to four specific incidents, a Councillor on the Commission raised a Members Enquiry with the planning division. The Member also asked about whether the Council would consider employing an arboriculturalist to oversee planning applications that threatened the Borough's tree stock. The Assistant Director (Regeneration & Planning) responded by noting that "In our current restructuring the addition of an arboriculturalist has been identified and will add to our capacity as well as diversifying our skills. We anticipate that the post will be filled in the next few months".
- 6.11.8 The representative of the Tree Musketeers noted that, unlike most Council responsibilities, the management of trees cuts across many departments and directorates. Trees exist in many environments (on streets, in parks, on estates and on development sites) and each have specific issues. However sound arboriculture and the management of individual amenity trees should be applied to all trees wherever they may be. At the Commission meeting in July 2008 it was noted that

the Council's approach to having two arboriculture teams (in two directorates) was not an approach shared in many authorities. The Commission are keen for the Council to consider proposals to combine these services in a single team, to ensure best practice is shared and efficiencies are maximised.

6.11.9 Recommendation 9

(i) **The Commission recommends** that the Council consider how best to maintain and develop the Borough's tree stock. With arboricultural management spread across two teams in different Directorates and a separate team in Hackney Homes it is felt that expertise and funding opportunities may not be maximised, and that feasibility of bringing responsibilities for arboriculture into a single team should be explored (though not at the cost of existing budgets). This would then unite management of all trees into one team, with the exception of those maintained by Transport for London (TfL) on the Borough's 'red routes'.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report detailing the feasibility of operating a single Arboriculture team by no later than July 2009.

(ii) The Commission also recommends that the Council should publicise the importance of its tree stock (both to the public and to local decision makers), review the capacity of relevant teams to protect the long-term health of trees and develop approaches to harnessing local expertise and enthusiasm to ensure they are maximised.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report considering publicity of the value of trees, addressing local capacity and recognising local volunteering by no later than July 2009.

6.12 **Travel, Leisure and Green Spaces**

The issue of utilising green space to improve travel through the city was recognised in the Safer Routes initiative, as outlined in the Department for Transport's 'Tomorrow's Roads: Safer for Everyone' report³⁶. This explained that there was a lack of east-to-west travel routes in London, which is now being addressed as part of the initiative.

Cycling

6.12.1 The Commission received a presentation from the London Cycling Campaign in Hackney, outlining the Borough's cycling profile, specific issues about cycling in green spaces, and an overview of local provision. This included:

- Hackney was awarded the Best Cycling Borough award in 2006 and the London Cycling Campaign's 'best facility' award 2007, and has the biggest training programme in London (delivered by STA Bikes, a voluntary sector initiative);
- Concerns remain that large sections of the population are still physically inactive, and that worsening health outcomes are predicted;

³⁶ 'Tomorrow's Roads: Safer for Everyone' Department of Transport, March 2000

- Cycling in green spaces was described as the best place for those new to cycling to find their feet, as there is a perception of safety (away from motors); and
- Cycling is now allowed in approximately 70 open spaces in London.

WS Atkins Consultants Ltd completed a report on the 'trial cycle route in Kensington Gardens' in November 2002, following a scheme that explored sharing paths in green spaces between pedestrians and cyclists. The following figures were presented to the Scrutiny Commission:

	before signage	After signage
Objections / reports of near misses	22%	2%
Perception by pedestrians that cyclists behave well:	40%	80%
(Installation of shared use signs was the only physical change to infrastructure)		

6.12.2 The London Cycling Campaign felt that a positive approach is the only practical choice, and that blanket bans on cycling in parks and enforcement are ineffective and cause resentment among the considerate majority. In response to a question about how to deal with unruly cyclists, it was felt that increasingly there was a spirit of self-regulation in a growing culture of urban cycling. It was agreed that if you allow individuals to set a good example then others will likely follow.

Aims of a positive approach should be to improve safety for all users, facilitate access for all, enable comfortable shared use, retain green/wildlife corridors and increase park usage significantly.

The London Cycling Campaign outlined the following recommendations:

- Permit cycling except at particularly difficult points, and that a blanket approach is taken to byelaws (as in LB Ealing)
- 'Shared use' signs at park entrances
- Widen paths to 3 metres if possible – increasing comfort for all
- Focus enforcement on anti-social cycling, not considerate cycling
- Provide cycle parking where needed, eg Clissold Park café
- Continue to promote cycling events in green spaces (including cycle training, promotion through groups like 'Dr Bikes', bike security marking, cyclists' breakfasts)

A recent 'Cyclists Breakfast' event was jointly run by the London Cycling Campaign and the Streetscene division. The Head of Streetscene endorsed all the above comments.

Walking

6.12.3 Though not explicitly discussed at a Commission meeting, Members raised interests in how best to promote walking as both a sustainable way to travel and an enjoyable pastime.

Members noted that routes such as the Capital Ring offer great walking opportunities for residents. The Capital Ring, one of the Mayor of London's key routes, is a green route that encircles London within a 10 mile radius of Charing Cross. Hackney features in 3 of the 15 sections of the walk, with detailed notes about the walks available on Transport for London's website³⁷. Other walks through the Borough include Lee Valley walk, which links Hackney with five other boroughs.

The Council also coordinates walking projects, such as the 'Walking Together' programme. The walks take between 30 and 60 minutes, and are led by a qualified Health Walks leader & First Aider. The Walking Together programme offers a range of walks which take place in parks within Hackney, and contribute to the Council's health-focused social activities.

Bowling

- 6.12.4 The Commission recognised that parks and green spaces are regularly used as the primary location for sports and recreation in a local area, and this is particularly true in Hackney. Though sports were not explicitly considered by our review, the issue of bowling provision was considered followed some comments made during the site visits to both parks in Hackney and Tower Hamlets. During the visit to Clissold Park it was explained that bowls greens in the borough are now derelict, as it was becoming far too expensive to maintain them (around £50-55,000 a year) for the 3 boroughwide greens. However the Parks and Open Spaces Development Manager from LB Tower Hamlets noted that council subsidies to bowls greens were a fantastic way to help older people in the borough live more independent lives, describing it as "almost a social service".

The Commission support this argument, and are encouraged to learn that the Council are currently considered options to return the bowls green to public use. It is understood that this may be in conjunction with an Environmental Services private firm with a history of supporting such initiatives. The Commission would warmly appreciate being kept informed of developments.

6.13 Biodiversity

- 6.13. The Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs produces much of Central Government's information relating to this topic, and describes biodiversity as:

"The whole variety of life on Earth. It includes all species of plants and animals, but also their genetic variation, and the complex ecosystems of which they are part. It is not restricted to rare or threatened species but includes the whole of the natural world from the commonplace to the critically endangered.

The world is losing biodiversity at an ever-increasing rate as a result of human activity. In the UK we have lost over 100 species during the last

³⁷ Transport for London website- <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/gettingaround/walking/localroutes/1160.aspx> . The Walk London is also a useful source of information, with a Hackney-specific page at <http://www.walklondon.org.uk/borough.asp?B=11&submit.x=9&submit.y=8>

century, with many more species and habitats in danger of disappearing, especially at the local level. On a world scale the rate of loss is now recognised to be a cause for serious concern, requiring concerted international action to prevent continued loss of biodiversity”³⁸.

6.13.2 Park services are uniquely well-placed at the local level to maximise the Borough’s contribution to protecting biodiversity and providing natural environments that can support fragile ecosystems. CABE Space note that “aside from the intrinsic value of having nature in our cities, urban wildlife habitats also provide a focus for local communities, who often become very attached to them... Even the simple knowledge that a natural area exists is, for many, a source of satisfaction”³⁹.

6.13.3 In 1994, the UK became the first country to produce a national biodiversity action plan, following the Convention on Biological Diversity signed in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. From 1 October 2006, Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act states that all local authorities and other public authorities in England and Wales have a duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions. The duty aims to raise the profile and visibility of biodiversity, to clarify existing commitments with regard to biodiversity, and to make it a natural and integral part of policy and decision making.

In London, the Mayor’s Biodiversity Strategy outlines the capital’s approach to maximising local nature. It states that “the Mayor will encourage and support all London borough councils in the establishment of local biodiversity partnerships and the production, implementation and monitoring of borough Biodiversity Action Plans as an integrated element of the delivery and implementation of Community Strategies”⁴⁰. By September 2008 29 of London’s 33 boroughs had produced a boroughwide Biodiversity Action Plan, but Hackney had not.

6.13.4 During the Commission’s site visit to Mile End Park, it was explained that the park management incorporate varied grass lengths to promote biodiversity of species. As an example, 10% of the park’s meadow space is protected, to be used as refuges for invertebrae. This often causes confusion with local residents however, who think this has been overlooked in grass maintenance. However the park has exceptional biodiversity, rivalling much larger spaces like Hampstead Heath. When visiting Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park they learned that a change in management had led to a more varied scenery (and an increase in the tree stock), together with a decrease in the overall canopy- this led to the park feeling less intimidating. The Friends group felt that the only local biodiversity expertise in Tower Hamlets lay in the voluntary sector. As noted through the Commission meetings, Hackney also has a significant wealth of biodiversity expertise in the voluntary sector.

6.13.5 There are positive contributions to biodiversity being made in specific sites across the Borough, which are recognised by those sites which have been awarded Green

³⁸ The Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs- <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/index.htm>

³⁹ ‘The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value’ CABE Space, March 2004 (p.17)

⁴⁰ ‘Connecting with London’s nature: The Mayor’s Biodiversity Strategy’ Great London Authority, July 2002 Proposal 52 (p.111)

Flag status. However it is not clear how these initiatives are being shared across Hackney.

At the Commission meeting in July 2008 it was noted that the Council does not have either an ecologist or biodiversity officer. A representative from the Tree Musketeers felt that the combination of huge private development, both large and small, meant trees and habitats were being removed at an alarming rate.

- 6.13.6 As mentioned in the section relating to events in parks (6.6.11), it is crucial that the Parks Service agree how best to find balance between parks as social spaces, and parks with diverse habitats. The Interim Head of Parks and Leisure explained at the Commission meeting in June 2008 that biodiversity was linked to each park's management plans, to ensure appropriate action. Despite the Council having three biodiversity strategies that focus on specific habitat types, at present there was no overarching policy. He accepted that it was hard to maintain a balance.
- 6.13.7 Following the Commission meeting that considered the Parks Strategy indicative action plan, it was agreed that Key Aim 3 ('To Ensure that Parks & Green Spaces make a positive contribution to Conservation & Biodiversity') would be amended to include the action to "Develop, implement and maintain under review a boroughwide Diversity Action Plan", due to be drafted and agreed over the next 5 years.
- 6.13.8 Finally, the Commission considered the use of green roofs. These are vegetated spaces on the roofs of private or public buildings, which can offer a variety of benefits in urban areas such as Hackney. From a biodiversity perspective Green roofs can mitigate the impacts of new developments on brownfield land. Research by the London Biodiversity Partnership since 2002 has shown that some green roofs in London are providing refuge for a number of nationally rare and scarce species. Plants reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and produce oxygen, and plant roofs remove heavy metals, airborne particles and volatile organic compounds. Being absorbed into the green roof system these polluting particles do not enter the water system through surface run off, leading to improvement in water quality.
- 6.13.9 Green roofs can also provide maintenance benefits- A green roof system protects the waterproofing of buildings from climatic extremes, UV light & mechanical damage and in so doing almost doubles its life expectancy. It can also reduce the number of drainage outlets required and have a positive effect in terms of thermal insulation through their ability to cool buildings and insulate them during the winter.
- 6.13.10 In 2004 the Mayor of London recognised the importance of green roofs, and the associated achievements towards the city's biodiversity targets they could support. A briefing paper was produced, that noted green roofs "can deliver benefits throughout the city for individuals and for society as a whole, by creating new outdoor spaces, enhancing biodiversity, reducing flood risk (by absorbing heavy rainfall), providing insulation and improving the appearance of our cityscape"⁴¹. The

⁴¹ 'Living Roofs: Promoting green roofs, roof terraces and roof gardens across London', Mayor of London, 2004 (p.1). For more information see <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/auu/livingroofs.jsp> or <http://www.livingroofs.org/>

Council already provide green roofs, on civic building such as 2 Hillman Street, and the Commission feels that benefit could be found from extending this approach.

6.13.11 Recommendation 10

(i) **The Commission recommends** that the Parks Service continue its work to produce a Biodiversity Strategy, in partnership with local organisations and experts, as a priority for the new Parks Development team. The Commission considers the best approach to maximising local biodiversity would be to include the final strategy as a chapter of the Open Spaces Strategy.

(ii) The Commission recognises that funding may not currently be available for the recruitment of a dedicated Biodiversity officer, but remains firmly of the view that recruitment to such a post would represent the best approach to delivering a Biodiversity strategy and action plan. At a minimum, the Commission recommends that officers complete a benchmarking exercise with the other London local authorities who have produced a Biodiversity action plan, so that they may understand how this was produced and maintained with a view to developing a local approach toward implementation

6.14 Play

The importance of children being given an opportunity to play independently of adults is often underestimated, and with the exception of schools there are few local areas better positioned to provide this than green spaces.

The issue of play provision has received significant consideration from Central Government recently, and will feature heavily in the new Children's Plan. In August 2006 the Department for Culture, Media & Sport published 'Time for Play: Encouraging greater play opportunities for children and young people', which recognises that "play is of fundamental importance for children and young people's health, well-being and learning"⁴². CABE Space also noted that "for younger children in particular, non-structured outdoor breaks are effective in helping cognitive development"⁴³. This highlights work of several other departments, and the joined approach being taken to improve play provision and facilities across the country.

During a recent review of Youth Crime the Council's Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission received a presentation from Ben Bowling, a Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at King's College. He noted that "due to our growing awareness of the new risks surrounding adolescence, society was becoming overly safety-conscious and protective, leaving no opportunities for young people to take the relatively low-level risks usually involved in asserting independence and self-discovery"⁴⁴. It is therefore vital to offer age-appropriate risks

⁴² 'Time for Play: Encouraging greater play opportunities for children and young people' Department for Culture, Media & Sport August 2006 (p.7)

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/DCMSPlayReport.pdf>

⁴³ 'The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value' CABE Space, March 2004 (p.9)

⁴⁴ 'Youth and Crime in Hackney: Prevention and Early Intervention', Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission, 7 April 2008, section 6.2.3 (p.34)

to young people, as prevention of this could lead some young people to assert their independence and test themselves in ways that were extremely dangerous and highly unacceptable, including criminal behaviour.

Hackney Play Strategy

6.14.1 In July 2007 Hackney Council and The Learning Trust published the Hackney Play Strategy 2007-2012. This set out the benefits of independent play, national research and local assessments, links to other relevant local strategies and an action plan of initiatives needed to improve play provision in the Borough. The objectives of the strategy were:

- To improve the ability of local provision to include/reach all children and young people
- To improve the quality and accessibility of new and existing play environments
- To raise the awareness of the importance of play
- To support new and existing play provision

The strategy recognises independent play as a vital aspect of children's development, and that it is "different from organised sports, groups, clubs and classes, which have external rules and definitions, and are usually controlled by adults"⁴⁵.

There is a wealth of research into the importance of play, much of which is outlined in the strategy. Most notably "Play leads to the development of social and physical skills that enhance a child's self-esteem, and encourages them to discover and explore their world, including their culture and social roles"⁴⁶.

6.14.2 Locally, there is significant variance in the usage of play spaces in Hackney, both in parks and housing estates. An audit of unsupervised play facilities carried out during the drafting of the Play Strategy found that:

- Very few areas are accessible for children with mobility problems
- At least 8 play areas were locked
- Some play areas were in a state of disrepair
- Sites lack imagination and very few natural features in play areas
- There is little consultation done with children when new play areas are designed

Some views of children were also highlighted, with a significant proportion citing fear and crime as the main reasons they don't use existing play facilities. 79% of children survey explained that they felt safe when they could play in a place where there were adults supervising.

6.14.3 The Play Strategy argues that everyone has a responsibility to ensure that children are able to play every day and have quality play environments in which to play. This includes parents and carers, communities, schools (particularly extended schools), central government, and local statutory departments- particularly Children's

⁴⁵ 'Hackney Play Strategy 2007-2012: Delivering quality play opportunities for all children and young people in the borough' London Borough of Hackney and the Learning Trust, July 2007 (p.9)

⁴⁶ 'Hackney Play Strategy 2007-2012' (p.9)

Services, Hackney Homes, Hackney Planning Department, Hackney Parks Service, Streetscene, Leisure Services and Social Services.

6.14.4 The strategy also recognises the importance of risk in play, as an important aspect of children's personal development. In 2002 the Play Safety Forum agreed that "all children need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences"⁴⁷. This position is supported by the Health & Safety Executive, and nationwide there is a move away from the existing risk-averse provision of play facilities, which had originally been led through concerns about compensation claims. Use of natural resources is one way this is being enacted (the European Standards for Playground Equipment (EN1176 2008) recognises that risk taking is an essential feature of play provision), and the Commission supports such a move to allow children to take measured risks and learn from their own experiences.

Play Partnership

6.14.5 The Commission appreciated the invite to attend a Play Partnership meeting in February 2008, with two Members available to attend. These Members learned that:

- Changes to the 'current climate' (i.e increased concerns about allowing children to play independently) do not change children's desire for play;
- When creating places for children to play, importance rests of the need for children to be able to interact with their surroundings. This is rarely possible in existing play provision, which can be sterile and static;
- It was felt that general health & safety 'myths' needed to be tackled, to allow children to play safely but in a way that encourages development. A growing culture of compensation claims could be avoided if Councils pursued the claims through the courts;
- In relation to the Children's Plan (which focuses on 8-13 year olds and will include a National Play Strategy), the aim is to redress the balance in the "Every Child Matters" scheme between 'achieving' and 'enjoying', and first introduced the concept of Play Pathfinders (of which Hackney has successfully applied to become one); and
- In relation to Section 106 funding, it was explained that GLA Planning Documents now suggest that any new site likely to house more than 10 children should provide some form of play space. Advice was provided in how best to ensure this development funding was directed towards play provision and, as noted above in the Planning section (section 6.10), that the relevant team were eager to build up a 'Project Bank', including accurate plans for a variety of projects across the Borough⁴⁸.

Some local examples of good practice were recognised, with Clissold Park allowing children to play on felled trees and Allen's Gardens allowing excellent opportunities for imaginative unsupervised play.

⁴⁷ 'Managing Risk in Play Provision: A Mission Statement' Play Safety Forum, Reprinted June 2008 (p.2) <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-play-safety-forum.pdf>

⁴⁸ The Parks service also referred to the project bank in their responses to Commission questions relating to Parks strategy action plan. Members were encouraged by this proactive approach

6.14.6 The Commission felt that the creation of a Play Partnership was a positive step which brought together stakeholders from a wide variety of council services, partners and the local community who are involved in providing play space. It was also felt that nominating two Councillors as 'Play Champions' provided the necessary political leadership to this important activity. One of these champions kindly attended a Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission in March 2008 together with the Strategic Development Manager for Childcare & Play to answer Members' questions. Among other topics, it was explained that one of the aims in the Play Strategy's action plan is to produce a play map- this will be distributed as widely as possible, in places such as local children's centres.

Developments

6.14.7 In April 2008 Central Government announced that 20 local authorities would be allocated resources to develop adventure playgrounds or play parks aimed at 8-13 year olds in disadvantaged areas. Hackney was one of these boroughs. The Ministers introducing this promised to "investigate whether local authorities were being over cautious with play equipment and to support parents in balancing risk against opportunity"⁴⁹.

The Fair Play Pathfinder Capital and Revenue Grant offered is £2.21m capital and £510,000 revenue. The proposed plans aim to identify and develop 26–28 public play spaces and to either update an existing or build a new adventure playground in the borough, as required by the grant.

The development of public play spaces will contribute to the objectives of The Children Act 2004, in contributing to delivering the key outcomes of Every Child Matters (being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving and making a positive contribution). The funding and thus facilities provided will also complement development of multi-agency working that underpins the Children's Services Agenda.

6.14.8 The status of being a Pathfinder means that Hackney has been chosen as a top tier authority with a good record on play. In addition this status means Hackney will be an authority to lead the way with innovation in design and delivery which can be used as an example of good practice for other authorities.

Play Pathfinders are required to work with children, young people and their communities to develop innovative play sites with challenging equipment and natural landscapes which will give all children opportunities to play actively outside.

A requirement of a Play Pathfinder is to raise awareness of play amongst a range of professionals who work at a strategic level in relevant borough divisions (Planning, Housing, Regeneration, Traffic, Children & Young People Services, Health) and with front line workers who work in areas of play (park wardens, estate workers, youth workers, PCSOs). The Council will work with third sector organisations and community organisations, which will be crucial to ensure the sustainability of improved play areas as it will improve the good governance of play areas, parks and estates.

⁴⁹ 'Fair Play' Joint DCMS/DCSF Press Release, 3rd April 2008
http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/5064.aspx

6.14.9 The grant expects that designs should be innovative and sustainable, following considered community and young people consultation, and offer free and safe access to facilities. Design guidelines have been published by the DCSF, and were a result of extended national consultation on the National Play Strategy (Fair Play). These have been published as “Design for Play – a guide to creating successful play spaces”. There will also be guidance on Managing Risk, which will detail the risk-benefit analysis which forms a model of a new approach to risk with regards to play areas.

Among other things this has led to the creation of a Pathfinder Steering Group which, for the time being, has replaced the Play Partnership. It is understood that the Parks Service have been well engaged in this group. Its objectives are to ensure the play pathfinder project is on track and to deliver the project, to work across agencies to maximise project outcomes, to maximise use of additional funding and to raise the profile of the importance of play through both the Pathfinder & the Play Strategy.

6.14.10 For the first time there is also now a National Indicator that assesses children and young people’s satisfaction with parks and play areas. ‘NI 199’ is one of the National Indicators which will replace Best Value Performance Indicators, and is aimed to “ensure that local authorities invest in safe and stimulating play facilities, leading to an increase in satisfaction (and take-up amongst children) in local authorities”⁵⁰. The indicator already exists, as it is one of the questions asked in OFSTED’s TellUs survey. This survey is completed by a sample of children in years 6, 8 and 10, and it provides robust data at local authority level. The Commission hopes that this information is used constructively to guide decision-making in relation to play provision.

6.14.11 Recommendation 11

The Commission recommends that the Parks Service actively encourage more informal play provision within areas of their remit, and that all relevant stakeholders improve consultation with one another when considering play facilities throughout the Borough. This is particularly important following the award of Play Pathfinder funding. The Commission also recommends that the Play Strategy 2007-2012 be included as a chapter in the Open Spaces Strategy.

We recommend relevant officers should provide the Commission with a report outlining a formalised approach to engagement with play stakeholders by no later than July 2009.

6.15 Site Visits

6.15.1 As part of the evidence gathering for this review, Members completed two site visits- the first to varied green spaces in Hackney, and the second to green spaces in

⁵⁰ ‘National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions’ Annex 2: Children and Young People, 1 April 2008 (p.155)
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/735125.pdf>

Tower Hamlets, which includes some parks recognised nationally as models of good practice.

Information gained from both of these visits has influenced the findings and recommendations outlined above.

London Borough of Hackney

6.15.2 In April 2008 representatives from the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission completed site visits to four spaces in Hackney, selected for their varied composition and approach. These were:

- **Clissold Park**- Large popular park with Green Flag accreditation
- **Springfield Park**- Large popular park with Green Flag accreditation
- **Allens Gardens**- Small informal space with good play provision
- **Primrose Square**- Housing green space with excellent community involvement

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

6.15.3 In July 2008 Members visited two green spaces in Tower Hamlets, which also offered varied approaches to those visited in Hackney. These were:

- **Mile End Park** - Millennium-funded park nationally recognised for good practice in management and community involvement
- **Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park**- Tower Hamlets' first Local Nature Reserve, managed by the Friends of THCP

6.15.4 Details of these visits are outlined in Appendix 5.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The importance of green spaces has been proven through considerable research from national organisations, and their value are felt no more keenly than in urban areas.

7.2 The Commission supported the aims and aspirations of the Parks Service restructure, and were particularly supportive of the creation of the Parks Development Manager post, which would provide capacity for projects in areas that until now have been difficult to resource. The Commission noted that there would be considerable demand on this capacity however (especially in the first few years), and hoped that resources would be appropriately apportioned to ensure their early success.

7.3 The Commission feel that the new management structure may allow greater opportunities to engage with internal partners as well as external stakeholders. To this end, the Parks Service should identify the various existing partnership groups relevant to their service, and use them to consult on future strategies and champion Parks Services.

7.4 The Commission feels that the Council might like to consider producing an ideal design guide for local green spaces during the production of its own Open Spaces

Strategy. The Commission feels that the Council might like to consider the considerable research produced on the best approach to drafting Open Spaces Strategy, particularly from organisations such as CABI Space.

- 7.5 Promoting local green space is crucial to ensuring that parks and green spaces are as widely used as they deserve to be. The Council has many varied ways of publicising services and engaging with residents, and the Commission would like to see these avenues maximised. The Commission consider that an easy way to promote local green spaces was to allocate ward councillors to their area's parks, and keep them regularly updated on developments. The Commission are also keen to see the Council and Hackney Homes agree how best to publicise who is responsible for the various works that are required to maintain high levels of quality on shared spaces, and that this is fed back to relevant local groups such as Tenant Management Organisations and volunteer groups.
- 7.6 The Commission feels that the Council's Parks Service should consider implementing some form of continuous improvement performance management system (such as the TAES self-assessment framework) to ensure the benefits from additional funding are maximised.
- 7.7 It was also felt that the Parks division might like to consider introducing a system of corporate volunteering, to help with the maintenance of green spaces and to promote wider volunteering. For this, large local companies fulfil their corporate social responsibility through providing employees as volunteers.
- 7.8 The Commission support the potential return of bowls clubs to parks in Hackney, and are encouraged to learn that the Council are currently considering options to return the bowls greens to public use, recognising the social benefits of promoting independence for older people.
- 7.9 It was unclear whether the Tree Strategy would form part of the Open Spaces Strategy, though the Commission would support such an approach. The Commission are keen for the Council to consider proposals to combine the existing multiple arboricultural services into a single team, to ensure best practice is shared and efficiencies are maximised.

Councillor Harvey Odze
Chair of the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Scrutiny Officer: Matt Clack, Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

Financial considerations: Deirdre Worrell, Assistant Director of Finance
(Community Services)

Monitoring officer comments: Angelie Walker, Solicitor

8. CONTRIBUTORS

The following people attended the Scrutiny Commission's meetings and gave evidence or spoke with Members of the Commission in ways that helped shape the review. The Scrutiny Commission owes a great deal to them not only for what they contributed to the investigation but also for the enthusiasm and commitment they brought to the task.

- Fiona Fletcher-Smith- Corporate Director Neighbourhoods & Regeneration
- Dennis Holmes- Interim Head of Parks & Leisure
- Mark White- Parks Operations Manager
- Sharon Standell- Director London & South East, Sanctuary Housing
- Tom Hunt- Head of Estate Environment (Hackney Homes)
- Ben Zimmerman- Arboriculture Officer (Hackney Homes)
- Trevor Parsons- London Cycling Campaign in Hackney
- Oliver Shick- London Cycling Campaign in Hackney
- Jamie Eagles- Shoreditch Trust
- Joost Bergers- Shoreditch Trust
- Jeremy Taylor- Groundwork East London
- Jackie Hopfinger- Strategic Development Manager Early Years & Play (The Learning Trust)
- Cllr Patrick Vernon- Play Champion
- Gill Jackson- Hackney Parks Forum
- Louise Hart- Hackney Downs User Group
- Annie Chipchase- Hackney Marshes User Group
- Mike Treire- Stoke Newington Common User Group
- James Pearce-Barker- Hackney Downs User Group
- Doreen Bullock- Haggerston Park User Group
- Kay Stone- Haggerston Park User Group
- Liz Moxon- Shoreditch Park User Group
- Maggie Chattaway- Butterfield Green User Group
- Janet Harding- Springfield Park User Group
- Russell Miller- Tree Musketeers
- Claire Kelly- Millfields Park User Group
- Mike Martin- London Fields User Group
- Amy Erickson- Stoke Newington Common Users' Group
- Brian Weller- Millfields Park User Group
- Tim Evans- Millfields Park User Group
- Alice Burke- Nightingale TRA
- Shuruj Miah- Trelawney TRA
- Michael Calderbank- Rhodes Estate TRA
- Cllr Ian Rathbone- Millfields and Clapton Pond User Group
- Cllr Barry Buitekant- Springfield Park User Group
- Charlie Grimble- Housing Adviser
- Nicola Baker- Assistant Director of Culture
- Trevor Rawson- Head of Highway Engineering
- Robin Thurairajasingham- Team Leader, Highway Maintenance
- Rupert Bentley Walls- Tree Officer, Highways

- Ian Graham- Arboricultural Manager, Parks & Leisure
- Michael Dixon- Parks Service
- John Zeraschi- Parks Service
- Meghan Zinkewich-Peotti- Sanctuary Housing Association
- Adamma Oti- Sanctuary Housing Association
- Sonia Lambert- Chair of the St John of Jerusalem Church of England Primary School Parent-Teacher Association
- Rosalind Brewer- Parks and Open Spaces Development Manager (LB Tower Hamlets)
- Michael Rowan- Director of Mile End Park
- Kenneth Greenway- Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park
- Terry Lyle- Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

9. MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Cllr Eric Ollerenshaw (replaced by **Cllr Harvey Odze** in Dec 2007) - Chairman

Cllr Clayeon McKenzie - Vice Chair

Cllr Chris McShane (replaced by **Cllr Mischa Borris** in May 2008)

Cllr Philip Glanville

Cllr Gulay Icoz

Cllr Dan Kemp

Cllr Darren Parker

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report or were presented to the Scrutiny Commission as part of the investigation:

- 'Social Spaces: A Parks Strategy for Hackney', London Borough of Hackney, March 2008 (and Indicative Action Plan 2008/2009 to 2012/2013)
- 'Hackney Open Space and Sports Assessment: Volume 1' (Atkins) June 2004
- Planning Policy Guidance 17, 2002
- 'Cultural Services Inspection Report'- Audit Commission, Dec 2007
- 'Hackney Play Strategy 2007-2012: Delivering quality play opportunities for all children and young people in the borough' London Borough of Hackney and the Learning Trust, July 2007
- 'The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value' CABE Space, March 2004
- Hackney Today- Issue 188 (21 July 2008)
- 'It's our space: A guide for community groups working to improve public space' by CABE Space, Feb 2007
- 'Our Towns and Cities: The Future - Delivering an Urban Renaissance' Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Nov 2000(which led to the 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan)
- 'The value of good design: How buildings and spaces create economic and social value' CABE, Nov 2002
- 'Decent parks? Decent behaviour? The link between the quality of parks and user behaviour' CABE Space, May 2005

- 'The Bristol Green Space Design Guide' Bristol City Council, July 2007
- 'Green space strategies: a good practice guide' Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2006
- IDeA Beacon Scheme- Improving Urban Green Spaces (2002-03)
- 'Urban parks: Do you know what you're getting for your money?' CABE, 2006
- 'Parks and open spaces: Towards An Excellent Service', IDeA, CABE and ISPAL, August 2007
- 'Volunteering in the natural outdoors in the UK and Ireland: a literature review' Nick Ockenden, Institute for Volunteering Research, June 2007
- 'Tomorrow's Roads: Safer for Everyone' Department of Transport, March 2000
- 'Connecting with London's nature: The Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy' Great London Authority, July 2002
- 'Living Roofs: Promoting green roofs, roof terraces and roof gardens across London', Mayor of London, 2004
- 'Time for Play: Encouraging greater play opportunities for children and young people' Department for Culture, Media & Sport August 2006
- 'Managing Risk in Play Provision: A Mission Statement' Play Safety Forum, Reprinted June 2008
- 'Fair Play' Joint DCMS/DCSF Press Release, 3rd April 2008
- 'National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions' Annex 2: Children and Young People, 1 April 2008

GLOSSARY

CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
CSV	Community Service Volunteers
CPTED	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
GLA	Greater London Authority
GWEL	Groundwork East London
HPF	Hackney Parks Forum
IDeA	Improvement and Development Agency
ISPAL	Institute for Sport, Parks and Leisure
LEAP	Local Equipped Area for Play
MUGA	Multi Use Games Area
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
OSB	Overview & Scrutiny Board
PCSO	Police Community Support Officer
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
REAP	Recreation and Environment Action Programme
ROP	Resourcing Our Priorities
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
TAES	Towards an Excellent Service
TfL	Transport for London
TMOs	Tenant Management Organisations
TRAs	Tenant & Resident Associations
VFM	Value for Money

Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission Review Proposal**1. Proposed review**

Green Spaces in Hackney

2. Origin of proposal

The proposal to review Green Spaces was put forward by the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission. It was welcomed as an opportunity to maximise the benefit from and support the implementation of the Council's Green Spaces Strategy, anticipated in spring 2008, and the future development of an Open Spaces Strategy into which the former will be incorporated.

3. Scope and terms of reference

- To enable Members to gain an understanding of issues related to provision and management of green spaces in the borough of Hackney, including the specific issue of arboricultural management;
- To consider the extent to which the full range of green spaces in the borough meets the needs of residents and the wider community;
- To contribute to the implementation of an open spaces strategy for the borough by proposing effective ways of involving Hackney's communities in the use and management of all green spaces;
- To consider specifically how community involvement in and effective use of green spaces managed by bodies external to the Council can be achieved;
- To contribute to the process of defining appropriate local performance indicators for the management of Hackney's green spaces.

4. Timescales and methods (including details of formal meetings, public engagement, site visits and other sources of evidence)

The full terms of reference will be agreed by the end of January 2008, and a completed report by the end of July 2008. The Commission will conduct its review by means of formal evidence-gathering at public meetings, likely site visits within the borough and to view examples of good practice elsewhere, and engagement with interested community groups. Desk-based research and ad hoc meetings with Officers will also inform the Commission's discussions.

3rd December – LBH Green Spaces management and strategy

- Presentations on key themes/challenges for LBH Green Spaces and proposed future structures for community involvement
- Presentation on the Green Flag Award Scheme

For Members to gain an understanding of Hackney's current provision and performance, future priorities, and the quantity and quality of green spaces in the borough.

8th January – Housing green space

- LBH perspective on green space managed by housing associations and the Hackney Standard
- Hackney Homes
- Representatives of the Better Homes Partnership.

For Members to hear about how amenity green spaces in and around housing estates in the borough are managed, and explore what barriers if any exist to promoting high-quality and well-used spaces in these contexts.

11th February – Housing green space continued, other users of green space

- Representatives of the Better Homes Partnership
- Hackney's Play Strategy
- Cyclists as users of green space

For Members to hear about issues relating to specific uses of green space.

11th March – good practice in community involvement and diverse uses of green space

- Representatives of voluntary / community sector organisations

For Members to hear about different models of community involvement (including volunteering programmes), ways of encouraging different uses of green space, and case studies of green spaces being successfully integrated with regeneration / social inclusion initiatives.

1st April – parks user groups and residents' involvement forums

- Parks user groups from Hackney
- Estate resident representatives
- Youth representatives

For Members to gain an understanding of the current structure of user involvement in Hackney, to hear community representatives' views about the future of both green spaces and the nature of community involvement in them.

Visits (to be scheduled)

1. Opportunity for Members to visit green spaces in Hackney and see examples of innovative work within the borough (particular emphasis on volunteering, health and education).
2. Opportunity for Members to visit green spaces in other London boroughs where community involvement has had a particular impact, been innovative, or been sustained over a long time.

5. Objectives and likely outcomes

By making recommendations in the areas set out above, the review will aim to support the Council's implementation of its Green Spaces Strategy and the further development of an Open Spaces Strategy. This will make a contribution to enhancing the quality of life of Hackney's residents, and support the Safer and Stronger Communities Block of the Local Area Agreement (specifically the outcome 'Cleaner, Greener and Safer Public Spaces'). It will also support the Mayor's priority of involving the whole community in the Council's work.

6. Lead Member

The Chair / Vice Chair of the Living in Hackney Commission, supported by all the Commission's other Members.

7. Details of how the review and its outcomes will be publicised

The final report will be presented to Cabinet and Council. It will be available on the Hackney Council website and if appropriate through Council and local press. The review's conclusions will also be made available to organisations which the Commission considers would be interested in its findings, including those who have contributed to the evidence-gathering process.

8. Key contributors to the review

Contributor	How have they been consulted on proposal
Council Lead Officer	Kim Wright, Corporate Director, Community Services <i>Has commented on the proposal.</i>
Council Officers	Nicola Baker, Assistant Director Culture, Community Services Dennis Holmes, Intermin Head of Parks Service. <i>The proposal has been circulated for comment.</i>
Executive Member(s)	Cllr Nargis Khan <i>Has reviewed the proposal.</i>
Team Hackney Partnership	Safer Cleaner Partnership, Better Homes Partnership <i>The proposal will be circulated following approval by the Commission.</i>
Partner Organisations	Members of the Hackney Parks Forum and estate management organisations <i>The proposal will be circulated following approval by the Commission.</i>
Voluntary Sector	Parks User Groups <i>The proposal will be circulated following approval by the Commission.</i>
Live/Pending Consultations	

To be considered during the course of the review:

9. Scale of recommendations and parties requested to implement

Service/organisation	Timescales and method for response

10. Details of how outcomes will be monitored

The final report will detail how recommendations will be monitored. This may include scheduled update reports back to the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission from the parties asked to implement any recommendations.

Table 9.1 – Summary of Local Open Space Standards (to meet needs up to 2016)

Open Space Type	Quantity Standard	Area required to meet needs up to 2016	Accessibility Standard	Quality Standard
Public Parks	1.36ha per 1,000 population	The total area of public parks should be increased from 274.46 ha to 287.96 ha. (13.5 ha of additional provision to be directed to existing deficiency areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All residents within the Borough should have access to a Regional Park within 3.2km from home; All residents within the Borough should have access to a District Park within 1.2km from home; All residents within the Borough should have access to a Local Park or Small Local Park within 400m from home; All residents within the Borough should have access to an area of public park within 400m from home. The definition of a public park as identified within the parks hierarchy defined within Chapter 4. 	Public parks within the Borough should meet the Green Flag 'good' quality standard. Open spaces identified within Chapter 10 for improvement should be prioritised.
Children's Play			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All children within the Borough should have access to areas of formal and informal play provision for children and teenagers within 400m from home. 	Children's play provision within the Borough should be of adequate quality and provide the range of facilities associated with the size of the facility. The guidelines set out within the NPFA 6 acre Standard (2001) should be used to assess levels of adequacy in terms of the range and quality of provision.

Table 9.2 – Summary of Local Open Space Standards (to meet needs up to 2016)

Open Space Type	Quantity Standard	Area required to meet needs up to 2016	Accessibility Standard	Quality Standard
Playing pitches	0.65ha of pitch space per 1,000 population	In order to meet the need of teams who play within the Borough, a total pitch area of 150.36 ha in secure community use is required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All residents should have access to playing pitches within secure community use within 1.2km of home. 	Outdoor pitch sports facilities within the Borough should be of adequate quality and provide the range of facilities required to meet the needs of sports clubs. Those playing fields in secure community use identified within Volume 2, which either under perform in terms of the range of provision provided or the quality of existing provision, should be improved consistent with the guidelines identified.
Natural Greenspace	1.0ha of natural greenspace per 1,000 population	The Borough as a whole will meet this target in 2016, with 1.27ha per 1,000 population. However, the 11 wards identified in chapter 7 which fall short of this target should have provision increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All residents within the Borough should have access to a natural or semi-natural greenspace of at least 2ha in size within 300m of home; All residents within the Borough should have access to a natural or semi-natural greenspace of at least 20ha in size within 2km of home. 	Areas of natural and semi-natural greenspace should be of adequate quality and support local biodiversity. Areas of natural and semi-natural greenspace which either under perform in terms of their value to the local community and local biodiversity should be enhanced consistent with the guidelines identified in Chapter 10. Those spaces identified within Chapter 10 should be prioritised for improvement.
Allotments	0.015ha of allotment land per 1,000 population	An additional 2.62ha of allotment land is needed to meet projected demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All residents within the Borough should have access to an allotment garden within 800m of home. 	Allotment sites should be of adequate quality and support the needs of the local community. Allotment sites which under perform in terms of their value to the local community consistent with the criteria relating to the role of sites identified in Chapter 8 should be improved. Those sites identified within Chapter 10 should be prioritised for improvement.

Parks and Leisure Services Restructuring

1. Background and reasons for change

Parks and Leisure Services, together with Libraries, Archives & Information Services and Museum & Cultural Services constitute the Culture Division of the Community Services Directorate. It provides high profile services, the key activities being:

- Sport & Physical Activity Development, including shared oversight of the Active Communities Team (jointly with Tower Hamlets) and two Sports Officers (jointly with the London 2012 Unit);
- Leisure Partnership Management; relative to the operation of the Council's Sports/Leisure Centres by the Council's Leisure Management Partner - currently Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL);
- Leisure Projects; working on the forward Leisure Investment & Development Strategy and the re-tendering of the Leisure Management Partnership.
- Management of Parks & Open Spaces, including grounds maintenance, parks ranger service, arboriculture and parks development;
- Co-ordination of Outdoor Events;
- Back Office Services; to support the Parks & Open Spaces Team.

The Parks and Leisure service area has been successful in many areas, evidenced by the gaining of Green Flag and Quest accreditations for parks and leisure centres respectively together with the opening of the London Fields Lido and the development of new artificial turf pitches. The re-opening of the Clissold Leisure Centre is a further significant indication of progress made.

However, there remain a number of building and infrastructure related issues to be faced in both the short term - the development & implementation of renovation proposals for Clissold Park & Mansion and the Stables, Glasshouses & White Lodge in Springfield Park are examples – and the longer term – the strategic consideration of leisure facilities in Borough are examples.

As well as responding to these facilities related challenges, the service area now needs to develop a strategic/policy position and capability so as to ensure that higher level objectives flowing from the Community Strategy and national and regional initiatives are pursued and achieved. Examples here are the need to develop and implement a strategy for Hackney's Parks within a wider Open Spaces strategy framework and the development and strengthening of the Physical Activity Development Strategy in consultation and co-operation with key partners such as Team Hackney, the Primary Care Trust and the Community Sport and Physical Activity Network (C-SPAN).

The significant progress made by Hackney was clearly recognised in the report of the CPA Culture Block inspection undertaken in late 2007. However, the CPA report did make reference to the need to strengthen the policy position of the service and to more closely align service delivery to strategic needs and outcomes.

Taking these factors into account, the Parks and Leisure Service needs to continue to deliver positive results on the facility improvement agenda and also develop the strategic capability required to ensure that facilities operate within a policy and developmental framework which actively contributes to the delivery of key strategic outcomes.

In order to achieve these service and policy objectives there are a number of specifics which require consideration. These include:-

- A single Head of Service dealing with two operational areas; an arrangement which is at variance to the majority of London Boroughs and which leads to significant capacity issues for the holder of that post; particularly with regard to Sport & Physical Activity Development in the run-up to London 2012. This has been addressed in phase 1 of this restructuring.
- A backlog of individual projects which require re-energising. Examples are the possible development of sports facilities at Springhill and the development, with the Trust, of a bid for Heritage Lottery Funding for Abney Park Cemetery;
- The need to support current major projects such as the restoration of Clissold Park & Mansion;
- The long term vacancy of the Principal Leisure Officer post leading to lack of strategic consideration and day to day leadership of the Sports & Physical Activity Development Team, with consequential damage to the reputation and credibility of the team;
- The need to ensure the Sports & Physical Activity Development, Leisure Projects & Leisure Management Partnership Teams work closely together – especially in the context of re-specifying the service for the re-tendering of the Leisure Management Partnership;
- The need to identify the future role of Sports and Physical Activity Development.
- A need to better integrate the activities of the two Sports Officer posts which are shared with the London 2012 Unit with the activities of the Sport & Physical Activity Development team and the delivery of the wider Physical Activity Strategy;
- A need to provide Back Office Support for the Sports & Physical Activity Development Team;
- A need to create a Parks Development capability which will obviate the need for operational managers to undertake parks development activities which divert them from their core activities and are outside their natural competences
- The parks operational team is divided into 4 areas of differing complexity and size. The service could be delivered through two areas, configured on the basis of their major characteristics;
- The parks operational service currently recruits additional labour each summer. This is a time consuming and wasteful process and does not recognise a pattern of work in which as much work is done in winter, in preparation for summer, as in the summer itself;
- The need for a revised approach by the Council to the staging of outdoor events so as ensure that its Duty of Care and Health & Safety positions are not compromised;
- Lack of clarity with regard to responsibility for the Ranger Team who are involved in day to day cleaning and similar basic activities as they report to the Ranger Manager as opposed to the Area Parks Managers. This is particularly an issue in the Hackney Marsh area and, to a lesser extent the Haggerston area, as a result of the hire of pitches and Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) in these areas;

- A requirement to update the pitch booking service so as to improve customer service and benefit from web based systems;
- A public demand for more interpretive/educational activities in parks & open spaces;
- The need to develop community engagement with the development of parks & open spaces;

2. Proposals for change

The key points of the proposed new structure are:

Back Office Team

- To convert the current Senior Administrative and Management Support Officer posts within the Parks & Open Spaces Team to a Back Office Support Team to provide services potentially to all of the Culture Division, although this arrangement will not cover the Library, Archive and Information Service at present;
- To convert the current Sports & Events Booking Officer post to an additional Back Office Support post to be located within the new Back Office Team;
- Similar posts in other parts of the wider Cultural Division should be considered for transfer to the new Back Office Group in the future; this is not feasible at present due to the constraint on office accommodation.

Leisure & Physical Activity Team

- To change the current vacant Principal Leisure Officer post to Sport & Physical Activity Development Manager, reporting to the Head of Sports & Physical Activity. To give this post explicit responsibility for the Council's Sports and Physical Activity Development Team; including ensuring that the activities of the two London 2012 Unit Sports Officers are fully integrated into the Physical Activity Development framework and strategy; also the Active Communities Team for the period it continues to exist. This post should carry first accountability for the Sport & Physical Activity Development Strategy and development of the Community Sport & Physical Activity Network;
- To create a new post of Leisure Partnerships & Investment Manager, reporting to the Head of Sports & Physical Activity, to lead on the management of the relationship with GLL as the Council's current Leisure Management Partner, currently undertaken by the Leisure Partnerships Manager, and the negotiation of current and future Leisure/Sports Partnership Projects with local sports clubs, the voluntary sector and the private sector. The primary work in preparing for the re-tendering of the leisure management contract will remain outside the scope of this post, although significant input from the post holder will be expected.
- To change the title of the current Sports Officer post to Leisure Partnership Co-ordinator, with that post reporting to the Leisure Partnerships & Investment Manager and taking responsibility for the majority of the day to day liaison with and monitoring of the Leisure Management Partner.
- To create, on a temporary basis for an initial period of twelve months, a new post of Sport and Physical Activity Development Officer – Football, to lead initially on the

development of the Football Foundation bid for Hackney Marshes and the future development of football following the successful Football Foundation bid;

Parks and Green Spaces Team

- The Parks Operations Manager post to be changed to a Grounds Maintenance Manager and to report to the Head of Parks and Green Spaces;
- The service to reorganise on the basis of two areas – North Hackney and South Hackney. In this model the North Hackney area, which will include Clissold and Springfield Parks, is heritage biased; with the South Hackney area, which will include Hackney Marsh, London Fields and Haggerston, is sports biased. This will allow the development of appropriate expertise in each area;
- Each Area Manager to be responsible for two depots and to be based at the principal depot in each area and with an Assistant Area Manager based at the subsidiary depot;
- Each area structure to include, with regard to grounds maintenance, an Operations Supervisor and Scale 3, 4 & 5 Gardeners and Drivers as is the case at present and, with regard to ranger activity, a Ranger Supervisor, a Senior Ranger and Rangers employed at Scale 4.
- Currently Gardeners work the traditional Monday to Friday pattern. Additional seasonal staff are hired in for 32 weeks each year to cover the summer period. This is a resource intensive process which does not recognise changes to working patterns arising from climate change and the need to prepare for summer work during the winter months. It is proposed that the 10 Seasonal Gardener posts currently included within the structure are deleted and replaced by 8 full time posts. It is further proposed that, so as to better align working hours with the use of parks, staff in the Grounds Maintenance Team will work annualised hours to permit longer working days in summer and shorter working days in winter;
- Currently full time Rangers work the traditional Monday to Friday pattern. Part time Rangers are employed solely to cover weekends. Seasonal Rangers are employed in the summer months to provide evening cover during prolonged hours of daylight. The difference in activities undertaken by the current Senior Rangers and Rangers is minimal. It is therefore proposed to place all Rangers, with the exception of the proposed Ranger Supervisors and Senior Rangers on the same grade. So as to align the deployment of staff resources to levels of park use, it is proposed, as with the gardener team above, Rangers are also moved to an annualised hours contract;
- As regards the delivery of pitches for the playing of sports, responsibility to pass to the appropriate Area Manager to ensure accountability and improve customer service;
- To create a new post of Parks Development Manager, reporting to the Head of Parks and Green Spaces and responsible for Biodiversity, Parks Development, liaison with and support for User Groups, overseeing (capital) development projects in parks and the Interpretive, Educational and Environmental activities undertaken by Rangers;
- To create two posts of Parks Development Officer, organised on the North Area & South Area principle detailed above and also Project Specific Development Officers as required, reporting to the Parks Development Manager;

- Given that the majority of Events Activity takes place in Parks & Open Spaces it is proposed that the current Sports & Events Officer post is reviewed so that its sole focus is on events and reports to the Head of Parks and Green Spaces;
- The Arboriculture Team be reconfigured so that it, too, operates on the basis of a Manager, an Assistant Manager/Surveyor, an Operational Supervisor and 2 x Arborist/Drivers;
- The following additional posts, recognised as necessary in the funding allocation for 2006/2007 be created:-
 - FIDO Driver
 - Weekend Litter Bin Run Driver;
- The creation of a new Warden post, to be 50% Heritage Lottery Funded to maintain the St Johns Churchyard site;

In summary the proposals will result in an establishment of 126 posts, in comparison to the current 125 (this includes the additional Head of Service post.)

3. Current Position

The Corporate Director for Community Services has exercised Delegated Powers to address the Head of Service issue. The Head of Parks and Leisure Services post has been deleted from the structure and two new Head of Service posts - Head of Green Spaces and Head of Leisure & Physical Activity – have been created.

These posts have been successfully recruited to by open advertisement. Both posts have been offered to candidates and accepted subject to the usual formalities. Subject to the completion of these formalities, is anticipated that the new postholders will commence their duties with Hackney in early September

As regards the remainder of the restructuring exercise, formal consultation with staff and the trade unions is nearing completion; following which the new structure will be confirmed and recruited to in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures. The target date for the new arrangements to go live is 1 September.

LIVING IN HACKNEY SCRUTINY COMMISSION: PARKS SITE VISIT- 1st April 2008

As part of the Scrutiny Commission's Green Spaces review, it was agreed that site visits would take place (both in Hackney and externally) to gather evidence about best practice. The Commission would like to thank Mark White, Michael Dixon and John Zeraschi (Parks Service), Meghan Zinkewich-Peotti and Adamma Oti (Sanctuary Housing Association), and Sonia Lambert (Chair of the St John of Jerusalem Church of England Primary School Parent-Teacher Association), for meeting with Commission Councillors and explaining their roles.

The Scrutiny Commission visited four varied sites on the afternoon of the 1st April, from formal parks space (Clissold Park and Springfield Park) and less formal green space (Allens Gardens) to a community project on a housing estate (Primrose Square). The following is an account of the Commission's findings:

Clissold Park

Mark White (Operations Manager, Parks & Open Spaces) explained that Clissold Park is the busiest in Hackney, and possibly North London- though London Fields is quickly catching up. Mr White did not feel that the opening of Clissold Leisure Centre had had a great impact on visitor numbers. The last user figures assessed that over 1 million people visited per year. Accurate visitor figures are not recorded on a regular basis, though it is anticipated that this will improve following the receipt of Heritage Funding.

The park is also on the Olympic Cycle Route, part of the regional Greenways for the Olympics and London (GOAL) network, which was negotiated with the London Development Agency and the Capital Ring, an initiative of the London Walking Forum.

Runsmere and Becksmeare Ponds- a popular feature of the park, Mr White explained that they both needed dredging but that this was a very expensive procedure (that once again could be helped through Heritage Funding). 6 water quality readings have been taken a few years ago, which suggest acceptable chemical levels- this is evidenced by the abundance of carp and other wildlife.

Park Lodges- these buildings are under a boroughwide review, to decide how to develop these council owned properties. One suggestion had been to house Safer Neighbourhood teams in them, but nothing has been agreed.

One O'clock Club- this is a social club for under 5's and their parents/carers, run by The Learning Trust. It was felt that the building design has not helped in the development and success of the service, and so is underutilised. A sign on the gate warned of "ongoing heating and water problems".

Tennis Courts- these were upgraded four years ago, paid for by the Lawn Tennis Association. These are maintained by the Parks Service, and is an effective income generator. Whilst clearly being weather dependent, annual income is approximately between £15-20,000. Maintenance costs for cleaning are contained within the division's

recourses at present, replacement of nets when required cost approximately £200pa, and power washing £3,000pa. The Parks division are looking at re-marking the courts, at a cost of £18,000.

Playground- the Operations Manager explained that this was extensively used, and this was clearly the case on the day of the site visit.

Upkeep- the Operations Manager highlighted that the Green Flags awards prevents the use of pesticides, and as such a composting service (based in the middle of the park and at Springfield Park) provided compost for all parks in the north area, and residents on demand.

New River- the path of the river is still visible in Clissold Park, though it was covered following renovation works some years ago. The Operations Manager explained that Heritage Lottery Fund was keen to restore Part of this with the Heritage Funding, but that there had been opposition to reinstate it completely due to the need to replace some trees and cutting the park in two.

Paddling Pool- this is exceptionally popular, and (contrary to many local authorities) there are no plans to close it, as detailed research has found no health & safety reasons to do so. Whilst it does not need to be staffed during open hours, there are innovative arrangements that allow the park's café owner to operate an ice cream van near the pool- offering a responsible individual to be nearby at all times. The pool is formally checked on an hourly basis by Park staff.

Aviary- the Operations Manager explained that it was now necessary to install barbed wire around the roof, as there had been some instances a few years ago of people breaking in to release the birds inside. In fact, the birds are expertly looked after and when the last attack occurred all but 3 birds actually returned to the aviary.

Growing Communities space- seemed very popular, and an asset to local residents.

Butterfly Tunnel- this opens for two days a week, and is a very popular attraction. Once set up each year it was described as nearly self-sufficient, meaning staffing is the only serious financial implication. The Operations Manager explained that the cost at present is contained within the area budget but does impact on other works- staff time costs approximately £7,000pa, to open 5 days per week would cost approx £22,000 plus ongoing costs. Repairs and planting come to approximately £1,000 per annum. The peak for the tunnel is between July and September, though it was felt that the facility could be better publicised to park users.

Bowling Green- this space is now derelict, as it was becoming far too expensive to maintain (around £50-55,000 a year) for the 3 borough wide greens.

Tree Preservation- there is a team of 5 staff looking after the borough's trees in parks, many of which are now suffering with disease.

The Operations Manager explained that research to consider Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) was completed by the group Tree Musketeers and was based on a TPO which

assesses a value of £20,000 against all trees. The final costing of £50 million for the borough was an estimated cost based on the number of trees within Hackney's Parks.

Allens Gardens

This is a secluded and relatively unknown park behind residential buildings. Having originally been an overgrown stretch of unused land, it was renovated 20 years ago by the Rathbone Society for rehabilitation training schemes. The existing layout is similar to that applied by the Society.

The Council joined in partnership with Sure Start, for a project that started in 2003/04 to revamp the park with new planting, furniture and play equipment. The cost for the project was approximately £100,000 to achieve this, and the Parks Division worked together with Stamford Hill Single Regeneration Budget and Sure Start who help with funding. The Operations Manager highlighted use of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to purchase a machine to remove graffiti, which has been successful in protecting the upkeep of the park.

A social enterprise called Growing Communities operate from Allens Gardens (and two other Hackney parks), which includes a classroom for school visits. The Operations Manager was very positive about the arrangement, describing them as "eyes in the parks", as they are able to offer informal staffing of green spaces.

Allens Gardens includes two different play spaces- one formal (with metal play equipment) and one less formal (making use of wood and bark).

Springfield Park

Like Clissold Park this is a more formal park space, including a Grade 2 listed house and conservatory. There are plans in place to upgrade the house and to operate the conservatory as a cold site, having been closed in 2002. The Operations Manager explained that Parks staff were currently able to enforce bylaws and regulations, instead relying on educating Enforcement Team staff.

The park includes a formal cricket pitch, which is used by a local cricket league. Income from this almost covers maintenance costs. The park also includes tennis courts, though the Operations Manager felt these were not as popular as the courts in Clissold Park. When the Commission visited there was no signage for the Hackney City Tennis Club's contact details.

Spring Hill sports ground is across the road from Springfield Park, and is owned by the The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority but leased and maintained by the Council. The lease is due to be re-negotiated in the near future.

The park also includes a bandstand which was restored following the space being condemned. It has not been formally used since the park's centenary two years ago.

There is a good example of local involvement in a community apple orchard, which is jointly run with the Tree Musketeers. These have been a popular initiative, and can be found in other local parks including Butterfield Green, Hackney Downs, Spring Hill and Hackney Downs.

As with Clissold Park, the bowling green stopped being used last year, in part because local clubs refused any increase in charges to cover the significant maintenance costs. Members suggested that the space could be used as a playground space (as there had been some local opposition to existing proposals), and officers agreed to look into this.

Primrose Square

Members met with the Chair of the St John of Jerusalem Church of England Primary School Parent-Teacher Association and staff from the Sanctuary Housing Association, who began by explaining the history of the space. When the New Kingshold estate and community centre were redeveloped the space in Primrose Square was also improved, though no one took responsibility for its upkeep. The Chair of the Parent-Teacher Association felt that Hackney Homes were unhelpful, and as such approached Sanctuary Housing.

Hackney Homes have now agreed to clear rubbish and empty bins, though they are still not officially responsible. The Chair of the Parent-Teacher Association raised concerns about communication, and explained that it could be hard to find out which organisations is responsible for different works.

The space is situated in the middle of high-density housing (with few gardens) and incorporates the main entrance to the primary school, meaning it is not always clear who the space is for.

In October 2007 around 230 pupils from St John of Jerusalem Church of England Primary School in Hackney joined Sanctuary Housing for some bulb planting. The event was the first planting at the Primrose Square Community Garden, a flagship project for Sanctuary's Heart of Hackney scheme to help establish community initiatives through partnership working with local organisations. Sanctuary Housing spent about £5,000 on the community development project, and worked with the local gardening club to make improvements. As this support occurs on a voluntary basis it is not a sustainable approach to maximising upkeep. Sanctuary Housing are currently working with an organisation called ecoACTIVE to raise awareness of sustainability and environmental issues in local schools.

A particular concern for those involved in the development of Primrose Square was dog fouling. A lack of signage was a specific concern, as residents were unaware of the enforcement policies that can be used against those responsible. It was also felt that the Council and Hackney Homes could do more to recognise and publicise the importance of local volunteers.

LIVING IN HACKNEY SCRUTINY COMMISSION: PARKS SITE VISIT TO TOWER HAMLETS- 9th JULY 2008

Following the site visit completed to parks and green spaces in Hackney, Members of the Commission visited spaces in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to gain a better understanding of different management techniques, community involvement and promoting biodiversity. Due to unfavourable weather conditions it was only possible to visit two spaces, but Members gained a new perspective of green space development and support. The Commission would like to thank Rosalind Brewer (Parks and Open

Spaces Development Manager- LB Tower Hamlets) for helping to organise the visit and for accompanying the Commission on the day, and to Michael Rowan (Director of Mile End Park) and Kenneth Greenway & Terry Lyle (Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park) for welcoming the Commission to their parks.

Mile End Park

CABE Space (the national organisation that promotes best design and management of public spaces in towns and cities) note that “Mile End Park has recently been transformed into an exciting, sustainable and popular park for the 21st century, offering facilities for diverse sections of the community and a wide range of ages and interests”.

Ninety acres of linear open space link two parts of the park and form a green length of open space through London's East End, running north-south along a mile of the Grand Union Canal.

CABE Space's case study provides some background:

“In April 1995, Tower Hamlets Council, the East London Partnership and the Environment Trust formed the Mile End Park Partnership (MEPP), the starting point for a grand vision which was submitted to the Millennium Commission for funding.

At its heart was a commitment to engage the whole community throughout the design, implementation and use of the park, and a year long programme was drawn up to create a detailed design to which everyone could feel they had contributed.

Close public involvement started with a Community Planning event held in the park in 1995, which aimed to raise awareness of the proposals and invited feedback based on clear and accessible information about the scheme. An information and publicity campaign with leaflets delivered to every home in Tower Hamlets ran alongside.

This process led to a master plan, strongly supported by local people, which linked disparate and fragmented parcels of land, in both design and practice, by a mile long path vaulting the Mile End Road and for the first time uniting the spaces in one continuous whole, to create a vibrant and active park of regional significance.

Extensive consultation, and views expressed during the participation events, led to an amended final design, and this coupled with delays in funding meant a phased construction programme not originally envisaged, but which successfully dovetailed with the construction of the twelve complex linked elements of the park, (each a significant project in its own right). The consultation continued after completion until September 2002, to reinforce the sense of ownership by local people.”⁵¹

Park design- The master plan referred to was extensive, and little has changed in the past five years. Much of this has been possible only because of extensive community involvement. The Director felt that the long, thin design of the park allows a better focus for families and older people, but does not allow much scope for large-scale events. That said, the park has built a relationship with the local community through smaller events, such as

⁵¹ CABE Space case study: Mile End Park (Tower Hamlets)-
<http://www.cabe.org.uk/default.aspx?contentitemid=201&aspectid=23>

the long-standing 'Park After Dark' event, that takes place on Halloween and last year attracted 300 people. The Director was also particularly keen on dog shows, which he felt generated considerable interest in the park and had cross-community appeal.

The park is separated into recognisable sections, which include (among others) the play area, ecology park, arts park and the terraced garden. Each have their own environment and aims, though do not exclude groups for whom the space is not designed for. The arts park includes two sculptures that can be used as seats, and have cost just £60 to maintain in two years. A 'land draw' event also attracted over 190 feedback comments. The youth park is en route to 3 local schools which improves usage, and includes play equipment and two teen shelters. These face each other, to avoid difficulties and promote self-regulation. There is also an 'urban treehouse' which offers teenagers a level of privacy they may not enjoy elsewhere.

The park's design is also focused on sustainability, with all lighting being powered by wind and solar generators. The park also includes 10 artificial grass surfaces (similar to astroturf) made from old tyres. These have a ten year lifespan and are very popular with those who use the pitches.

Dog fouling bins were strategically positioned following consultation with the borough's animal wardens.

The Director also made reference to the importance of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), and made reference to research that showed demographic attendance in spaces is linked to concepts of safety- you could only expect young mothers to frequent an area that felt truly safe.

Revenue- Mile End Park receives an annual £250,000 grant, which covers about a third of its costs. Local shops on park land provide an income, and the park is run as a business (the Director made reference to charging for any filming exercises). The Park does not attract much sponsorship, mostly due to the ties expected from endorsement.

Staffing- Mile End Park employs full-time rangers

Corporate Volunteers- large local companies fulfil their corporate social responsibility through providing employees as volunteers. Firms are charged at least £10 per head, and is part coordinated by CSV (**community service volunteers**). They have received very positive feedback on this, though the Director noted that it can be resource intensive for staff.

In a similar vein, Mile End Park has an agreement with the local probation service to use offenders completing community service. There are usually 1-2 young people in attendance every day, supervised by probation staff to pick litter and remove graffiti. The probation service is not charged for this.

Biodiversity- the park management incorporate varied grass lengths to promote biodiversity of species. As an example, 10% of the park's meadow space is protected, to be used as refuges for invertebrae. This often causes confusion with local residents however, who think this has been overlooked in grass maintenance. However the park has exceptional biodiversity, rivalling much larger spaces like Hampstead Heath.

Play- the Director explained that the management were planning to remove the existing play facilities (which he felt were formal, boring and underused), and to introduce a youth play zone. They are also introducing 'liminal play spaces' which are small nature trails through existing parts of the park. The Director plans to keep these spaces under review to consider expanding them in future.

Successes- other than those listed above, Mile End Park has achieved notable successes. The large-scale regeneration on the other side of the canal (which follows the eastern boundary of the park) has been successful in part due to the park's development, with photos of it featuring in estate agents paperwork and the local university's prospectus.

Partnerships- The Director was eager for the park to house local services that would be beneficial to the development of the green space. To this end Connexions have an office in the teen park, which offers advice and computer access. There is also an adventure base located there, which is run by the Youth Service for projects across the borough. Both of these pay rent to the park. There are also offices for a Bangladeshi community group, a music studios and a go-karting track.

Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

The space was opened as a cemetery in 1841, but became increasingly overcrowded and neglected. In 1966 Greater London Council bought the Cemetery, closed for burials and aggressively redeveloped. It was not until 1986 that ownership of the Cemetery was given to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, and four years later the Friends group was founded. This group largely run the park, through attracting volunteers and organising events. They also employ a Cemetery Park Liaison Officer, who manages the day-to-day maintenance and education activities.

The park remains open 24 hours a day, and offers easy access to cyclists.

In March 2001 THCP became the Tower Hamlets' first Local Nature Reserve. As the borough's only woodland (and home to the borough's oldest trees) it is extremely valuable to the Parks division and the wider community.

The Chair of the THCP Friends group felt that the relationship with the Council was very positive, and the Council's development manager was certainly appreciative of their contributions. The Friends group are now in their fourth year of a Service Level Agreement with the Council, which originally just covered maintenance of the park but has been expanded. The agreement includes agreed quarterly operations, which are regularly exceeded due to the input provided by volunteers. The one staff member and volunteers complete most of the park's upkeep, with only major tree surgery and grass cutting being contracted. Outside the Service Level Agreement the Council do not provide any direct support, other than locking a gate at night.

Corporate Volunteers- the Friends group work with the **East London** Business Alliance and other relevant organisations to attract interest. They attract around 1,700 volunteers per year, and in 2006 corporate volunteers brought £30,000 into the park. Prices charged range from £10-£100 per person. An issue they face is that some groups feel uneasy

visiting cemetery space. THCP used to engage the local Probation team's community services, but found the return was not worth the staff member's effort.

Biodiversity- a change in management has led to a more varied scenery (and an increase in the tree stock) and a decrease in the overall canopy- this has led to the park feeling less intimidating. This is supported by a London Woodlands grant that the park receives. The Friends group felt that the only local biodiversity expertise lay in the voluntary sector.

Recent changes to the park have not been widely consulted on, and tend to focus on individuals who use the parks regularly. The Friends group felt that they could benefit from stronger links to local councillors. This is particularly true of a space such as THCP, which is based in a popular part of the borough (making it "vulnerable" to developers). There is also considerable demand for more burial space in London. Another recent change was to link the 'scrapyard meadows' (a part of the park which until recently felt disconnected) to the rest of the park- this has received very positive feedback.

The Friends group have hired a consultant to assist in the maintenance of the park's tombstones and monuments- at present they lack these expertise. This was partly necessary for local history protection, and partly for health and safety.

Community Involvement- THCP attracts over 7,000 pupils a year, many through the Setpoint charity which aims to interest young people in science and technology (<http://www.setpointle.org/>). Setpoint is based in the Soanes Centre in THCP, and regularly uses the space as an outdoor classroom. The park also run weekly classes for a special needs charity, and have worked recently with Crisis. They tend to respond to requests for help, rather than reaching out to such organisations.

General Boroughwide Parks Management

Community Involvement- LBTH have 10-12 Friends of Parks groups, and over 120 green spaces. These Friends Groups are not felt to be representative of the wider community, but involves those individuals with the time and ability to volunteer for their local park. The Development Manager felt that an umbrella organisation similar to the Hackney Parks Forum would be greatly beneficial. The Director of Mile End Park described his park's Friends Group as "invaluable". Although he recognised they were not widely representative, he explained that the parks management targeted BME groups with specific interests in issues or events.

Arboriculture- Mile End Park is a relatively new park, and as such does not have any mature trees. They complete an annual check of their trees' health, but do not suffer significantly from disease or other issues. LBTH has one tree officer who is responsible for planning actions and Tree Preservation Orders, surveys, and responses to resident enquiries. The officer is responsible for street and park trees, but not Transport for London's 'red routes'.