



Parks Land Assets and Use



Background

The greenspace portfolio of today is a result of historic developments over the last 150 years and various Local Government political structures up to the formation of the current Authority in 1974. Today, land use allocation is a strategic, spatial Planning function defined by the 'Local Plan'.

This presentation seeks to:

- Explain the context to current land use & management via the Local Plan and the supporting evidence base (particularly the Open Space Sport & Recreation Study)
- Provide examples of how the service has sought to deliver the objectives of the Open Space Sport & Recreation Study within the constraints of significantly reduced resources
- Indicate current approaches and future thinking for sustaining the borough's greenspaces in a period of continuing austerity.



Local Plan

The 'Local Plan' is a collection of documents that describe the spatial strategy for Bolton. These are used to help plan for the long term growth of the borough and as the basis to determine planning applications. These key planning documents are supported by various types of detailed information about the local and sub-regional area, referred to as the evidence base and supplementary planning documents.

The Core Strategy is the key document which sets out the spatial vision and strategy for the district. It was adopted by the council in March 2011.



The Allocations Plan

The Allocations Plan shows how sites could be used in the future (next 15 years) for developments such as new housing, employment and health facilities. It also shows areas of land that should be protected from development, for example because they are in the Green Belt or are used for recreation. It was adopted by the council in December 2014.

A number of smaller, low quality open spaces have been identified on the Allocations Plan as having potential for a change of use in the future.



The Evidence Base

The evidence base provides useful facts and information to help inform the development of planning policy. As a whole, it includes existing strategies and policy documents, consultation responses including the views of local residents and factual information. With regard to the Council's greenspace holdings it included the results of studies regarding:

- Open space
- Landscape character
- Green infrastructure
- Strategic flood risk assessment

Significant amongst these was the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study completed in 2007. The element covering sports facilities (Playing Pitch Strategy) is currently being updated.



Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study

Vision

‘to provide good quality and accessible sport, recreational and open space opportunities in order to support Bolton being a great place to grow up, live, learn, work, do business and visit.’

Key Strategic Aims

1. Provide usable, accessible and sustainable open spaces, sport and recreational facilities within the Borough.
2. Seek to ensure that this provision is of an appropriate distribution, quantity and quality (new facilities will only be provided or supported if they contribute to the appropriate distribution of facilities).
3. Rectify identified inadequacies and meet identified shortfall through improvements to the current stock of provision.



Key Strategic Aims (cont'd)

4. Encourage, support and develop partnerships with all owners and providers of open space, sport and recreational facilities to secure public/community use of provision.
5. Proactive use of planning powers to quantify and secure appropriate developer contributions for new or enhanced facilities.
6. Work in tandem with providers and community groups (e.g., sports clubs, friends of groups) to secure and develop open spaces, sport and recreational facilities.
7. Ensure that existing and future provision complies with DDA legislation and is fully accessible for all residents
8. Provide affordable facilities, which are accessible to all sections of the community.



Open Space Assessment Land typologies

There are a number of typologies within the assessment but today's focus is on those in dark type:

- Parks and gardens
- Semi/natural greenspaces (including woodlands)
- Green corridors
- Amenity greenspace
- Allotments, community gardens and city farms
- Cemeteries, disused churchyards and burial grounds
- Civic spaces
- Outdoor Sports Facilities

The Study considered the quality and quantity of the provision within each typology.



Examples of delivery on the key aims of the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (by typology) in the context of financial constraints

Parks and Gardens

- £4.2M Lottery investment in Queens Park
- Ongoing Capital investment in sustaining the infrastructure of Parks & Open Spaces
- Refresh of the Council's Equipped Play Area Strategy with a new 10 year action plan (2013)
- Supporting Friends & community groups through funding Public Liability Insurance and other support for their activities in parks
- Working with Friends & community groups to bring in external funding to support Parks & Open Spaces (including providing match funding where possible).



Natural & Semi-Natural Landscapes (incl Woodlands)

- Committed resources to maximising external funding to carry out essential maintenance works and access improvements in woodlands (c£422k of grant achieved in last 5 years)
- Increased the area of designated Local Nature Reserves from 52ha in 2008 to 287ha (16 reserves) today
- Successful bids and projects with partners and community groups to bring in funding for Local Nature Reserves
- Sale of significant area of Smithills Estate to the Woodland Trust will reduce long term corporate liabilities whilst protecting the long term future of the woodlands and other sensitive areas of the landscape.
- Limited capacity in the wider voluntary sector to take on land responsibilities and liabilities



Amenity Open Space

- Residents mowing verges and small plots on higher frequency than possible on routine schedules
- Shrub beds removed and replaced with grass to reduce litter traps and maintenance costs
- small, low value amenity areas (grass, shrubs etc) incorporated into garden extensions on request
- infill plots sold for property extensions or new build with s106 or planning conditions to improve the quality of other plots e.g. tree replacement where appropriate
- Not looking to take on new land from larger housing developments through s106



Allotments

- 959 plots on 37 sites boroughwide
- Net cost reduced from £130k pa to c£10k pa since 2010
- Association of Bolton Allotment Societies (ABAS) has been supported through a revitalisation process
- ABAS now represents approx. 70% of Council tenants and is recognised for the purposes of consultation on Allotment matters.
- ABAS now runs the Annual Allotment Competitions
- Since April 2014 9 sites (48% of all plots) have taken Operational Management Agreements (OMA) so manage the site and tenancies on a day to day basis. Council controls waiting lists, rents and tenancy agreements.
- 3 more sites (further 10% of all plots) in discussion regarding OMA and 1 site discussing a potential lease.



Outdoor Sports Facilities

- Playing pitch strategy refresh is involving the relevant clubs, leagues & Governing bodies to achieve a cohesive strategy taking account of the Council's financial situation.
- £2M investment in outdoor sports facilities ongoing (Grass pitches, MUGAs, Tennis Courts & Outdoor Gyms)
- Tennis Coaching sessions now being run in parks (from Arena)
- Reviewing pitch maintenance regimes in response to reduced resources and climate change
- Trial with summer football for u07-u12 to take place May-July.
- Lease of Scholes Bank Horwich to Horwich St Mary's FC completed (over £700k of external funding achieved by the club). Other opportunities being explored.
- Criteria agreed for prioritisation of closure of bowling greens if required (5 closed through lack of demand in last 4 years)



Summary

- Seeking to maintain/improve quality of provision and giving up (where appropriate) quantity within the overall strategic planning framework
- Reviewing and revising as appropriate the use of limited revenue resources
- Supporting community partners (Friends Groups, clubs etc) to be active in carrying out elements of supplementary maintenance
- Strong working partnership with LWT (bids, projects, volunteers)
- Seeking to maximise external funding within the constraints of capacity
- Exploring opportunities for devolved management of facilities



Questions