

Green Spaces Investigative Committee
Scrutiny of Green Spaces in London
November 2001



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**Greater London Authority
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Foreword by the Chair of the Green Spaces Investigative Committee



We should be proud that London is one of the greenest of world cities. Amazingly, two thirds of its surface area is either green space or water, a wonderful amenity for everyone. But our investigations have shown much of it is suffering from neglect.

We asked : How much green space do we have and what condition is it in? What use is it to local communities? Who is looking after it? We were struck by the strength of feeling and interest in these questions. People care deeply about their local green spaces, from parks to sports pitches, from gardens to nature reserves. We heard many individual stories of improvement, but we found the overall picture of green space in London is one of loss, decline, fear of crime, inadequate staffing and lack of funds.

We think the Greater London Authority, under the Mayor, can and should take the lead in reversing decline and achieving a green renaissance in the city. The Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy should help the boroughs to protect and defend our green space. And we don't even know in detail how much green space Londoners have. We were surprised to discover that at the moment there is no up-to-date and comprehensive record of green space in London. There ought to be a thorough study to find out how much we have, how accessible it is, and what shape it's in. Then we will know how much needs to be done and the scarce funding can be spent as effectively as possible. A lot of the Green Belt is in very poor condition – we need positive policies to rediscover its value for Londoners.

One of the key lessons emerging from this Report is that London's green space can't be brought back to life by local authorities working alone. We need Londoners themselves, the users of parks and green space, to get involved. We hope this Report will encourage more people to do so.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Committee, Catherine Bickmore Associates for their technical advice and, most of all, the many people who wrote or came to give us the benefit of their views.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Evans', written in a cursive style.

ROGER EVANS

Chair of the Green Spaces Investigative Committee

The Green Spaces Investigative Committee

The Green Spaces Investigative Committee was established by the London Assembly on 13 September 2000 with the following membership:

Roger Evans (Chair) - Conservative
Trevor Phillips (Deputy Chair) - Labour
Victor Anderson - Green
Louise Bloom - Liberal Democrat
Brian Coleman - Conservative
Samantha Heath - Labour

The terms of reference of the Committee were as follows:

- To examine the threats faced by the green belt and other open spaces in London and how they can be protected
- To examine the opportunities to develop new open spaces and to enhance existing open spaces
- To examine the means of identifying and protecting sites of nature conservation importance.

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Executive Summary

The green spaces of London are one of the city's most important and precious assets. The benefits they provide are many and varied, from sport and recreation through biodiversity and regeneration to tranquillity and health. But we have found that these green spaces are in too many cases threatened with serious deterioration in their condition, crime, vandalism and loss to development. Despite many individual examples of good practice and innovation, we still lack a co-ordinated strategic vision for green space across London. This Report calls for a renewed political commitment to London's green space and a proactive strategy for its renewal.

We regard the restoration of London's green spaces to full health, the protection of the best parks, an end to the neglect of the worst, and high standards of management and maintenance as vital to the capital's economic, social and cultural success. Above all, this Report points to ways in which Londoners can once again enjoy the city's green spaces, just as they have done in the past.

The Report contains many conclusions and recommendations which can be found listed in full at Annex A. Our most important findings are:

- ***Threats to London's Green Space***

The threats to London's green spaces include environmental degradation, dilapidation, vandalism, fly tipping, crime, dog fouling and pressure for development. One thousand hectares of green space in London were lost to development from 1989 to 1999. These threats have been compounded by neglect, a low political priority for green space and decreasing resources.

- ***The Spatial Development Strategy***

The forthcoming Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) should contain a strategic vision for the protection and renewal of London's green space, with detailed guidance for the content of the Borough Unitary Development Plans (UDPs).

- ***A London Parks Forum***

The ownership and management of London's green space are immensely varied. There is currently little effective sharing of vision and best practice. A London Parks Forum should be established, supported by the GLA, which brings together all authorities and organisations involved in the protection and management of London's green space. The Forum would share best practice, gather data on green space, campaign and assist in securing funds.

- ***The Information Deficit***

The care of London's green space and its status in planning decisions are undermined by the lack of comprehensive information on its quantity and condition. This must be immediately addressed through a London Open Space Research Project, directed by the London Parks Forum and supported by interested parties, including the GLA.

- ***Protection from development***

London's green space is under intense pressure from development. There must be a presumption against development on any green space in areas where a green space deficiency has been identified.

- ***Creating new green space***

The SDS should contain guidance on a revised methodology for the assessment of green space deficiency in London. It should also encourage the use of section 106 agreements to ensure the creation of green space in future developments, and require Boroughs to consider the potential for green links and corridors across London.

- ***The Royal Parks Agency***

New legislation is necessary to ensure that the Royal Parks, and the city's other regional parks, take account of the Mayor's strategies, particularly the SDS, in their planning, policies and management.

- ***The Green Belt***

Too much of the Green Belt is underused, neglected and in poor condition. A priority for the SDS must be the revitalising of the Green Belt and a renewed vision of its purpose for London. Current protection for the Green Belt should remain unchanged but there must be added strategies to improve its accessibility, biodiversity and usage.

- ***Playing fields***

Many of London's privately-owned playing fields are suffering from speculative neglect in the hope that their poor condition will allow planning approval for development. This is a scandal which must be urgently addressed. No development should be allowed unless there is evidence of active marketing for alternative sport or recreation use.

- *Funding*

Spending on green spaces has been declining across the United Kingdom, with a decrease of £100 million (16 per cent) from 1990 to 1999. There is a particular problem in ensuring funding for the ongoing maintenance of London's green spaces. The private sector must be more involved in the provision of resources, whilst ensuring that advertising and business promotion do not intrude on the public's enjoyment of green space.

- *Environment and biodiversity*

There is considerable opportunity to increase the environmental value and biodiversity of green space in London. There must be greater effort, with GLA and local authority assistance, to improve the biodiversity of land owned by the GLA family, major utilities and transport bodies, and to ensure environmental value is planned in to all future developments in London. We propose a scheme for the Mayor's forthcoming Tree Strategy for London which will ensure the planting of a new generation of trees in the city and capture the imagination of Londoners.

1. Introduction – a Green Space Strategy?

The need for a strategy

- 1.1 In the last few years policy makers have woken up to two vital facts. On the one hand, the central contribution made by green space to the quality and sustainability of urban life. On the other, the neglect, deterioration and loss of green space in recent decades. It is time for a positive green space strategy for London, a 'green renaissance'. The London Assembly established an investigative committee to consider this issue and identify the essential components of such a strategy. We can no longer rely solely on protective provisions in planning regulations. Whilst important, they have failed to protect London's green space from decline and encroachment.
- 1.2 Why are strategies important? A strategy can focus minds and policies on a particular problem, and we have just pointed out the fact of green space decline. A strategy is also required when we need to map out how a policy can be implemented in the context of other, often competing priorities. The limited funds available to local authorities and the pressure for housing development are facts which will not go away. We need a strategy for green space which is realistic and takes account of other policy imperatives. Finally, a strategy is vital where a matter is not the responsibility of one body or individual but rather involves many and varied organisations and interventions. We need a strategy for green space to bring all Londoners and relevant authorities together with a common purpose and shared understanding of what must be done to reverse decline, and to enhance and maintain green space for the future. Richard Rogers echoed much of our evidence when he said that London was suffering tremendously from the lack of an overall view and a piecemeal approach to development. There was a desperate need for coordination.¹
- 1.3 The interest in our investigation reveals the strength of feeling on green spaces amongst many bodies and individuals in London. With a number of important studies recently published and a considerable amount of public concern in the issue, it is the right moment for London to take stock of the state and future of its green spaces. London needs a strategic approach to green space. We are not, however, calling for another "Strategy" published in a separate document and similar to those on, say, Transport and Waste. There is no statutory requirement for the Mayor to produce one. And too many overlapping strategies would only confuse. Yet London's green spaces do need both protection and vision if they are to be revived for the 21st century. Without a clearly formulated approach, green space will be as vulnerable to piecemeal loss and decline as before.
- 1.4 Where should we expect to find this strategic approach to London's green spaces? Discussion on green space in the Mayoral strategies is found in the Mayor's initial

¹ Minutes of Evidence 23 May 2001 3.22

proposals for the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS), entitled 'Towards the London Plan', and his draft Biodiversity Strategy.

- 1.5 The draft Biodiversity Strategy, 'Connecting with London's nature', has recently been published for public consultation. It contains considerable discussion of green space, and not only on issues directly related to biodiversity. It includes, for example, sections on a "green renaissance" for London, on access to green space, and on links to business and regeneration.² This is useful and welcome. But green space and biodiversity are not synonymous. The proper sense of biodiversity should be protected – "The diversity, or variety, of plants, animals and other living things in a particular area or region". Green space provides, as we shall see, other benefits in addition to biodiversity, and there may well be some green spaces which have little value from a biodiversity point of view but which are nevertheless important for other reasons.
- 1.6 It is the SDS which must contain the essentials of London's green space strategy since it will carry statutory force as the planning framework for London and its boroughs for the next 15 to 20 years. It thus provides an appropriately overarching and robust instrument for the protection and enhancement of green space. The initial proposals for the SDS, in 'Towards the London Plan', are brief and generally phrased, perhaps understandably. The draft Biodiversity Strategy gives further detail of what the SDS may contain. In this Report many recommendations address the content of the SDS. **The SDS must contain a comprehensive and coherent London-wide policy which identifies the benefits of green space, which sets a planning framework to ensure effective protection and enhancement, and which provides the essential content for Borough open space strategies.**

The scrutiny process

- 1.7 The objectives of the scrutiny were to examine:
- The threats faced by the green belt and other open spaces in London, and how they can be protected
 - The opportunities to develop new open spaces and to enhance existing open spaces
 - The means of identifying and protecting sites of nature conservation importance
- 1.8 The Committee held six evidence sessions and received over 70 written submissions to the investigation. We are grateful to all who contributed to this work.
- 1.9 Our report also draws on a considerable recent body of work on green spaces. This includes the three LPAC reports 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' (November 1999); 'Assessing Demand for Open Space in London'

² 'Connecting with London's nature' The Mayor's Draft Biodiversity Strategy eg paras.4.60-66, 83-87, 98-107

(February 2000); and 'Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London' (March 2000). We also cite the 1999 Report of the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, 'Town and Country Parks'; the work of the Urban Task Force, in particular 'Towards an Urban Renaissance'; the recent reports by ILAM and the Urban Parks Forum surveying local authority owned parks of historic interest. We refer the interested reader to these documents for further and more technical information. Our discussion must also be seen in the context of the Urban White Paper, as well as the future work of the newly formed urban green spaces task force set up by the Government. We do not wish simply to repeat the detailed analysis contained in these reports, but rather apply their conclusions and lessons to the strategic planning of London.

- 1.10 There are some matters which we were unable to explore in detail in the confines of this report. For example, **the open space of London's waterways, private gardens, city farms and 'green buildings' are all important to London's design, biodiversity and liveability. They can all have their quality and accessibility enhanced. We welcome work already done on the integration of these issues into London-wide strategies and encourage further consideration of how they can contribute to a sustainable city. The Environment Committee of the London Assembly may well wish to pursue some of these matters in greater detail in the future.** We concentrate in this Report on publicly accessible green space.
- 1.11 The investigation is entitled "Green Spaces" and this emphasises the environmental value of much of London's open space. It also reflects the issues, and the types of open space, on which we concentrate in this Report. Many of the studies and much of the evidence we cite use the term "open space" and in the body of this Report both phrases are used, for all practical purposes interchangeably. We note that "open space" includes the concept of built open space – much can be done to "green" built open space and much of what we say on benefits, management and usage can apply also to such spaces. But green space is our particular focus.
- 1.12 Many of the issues we discuss are related to questions of planning policy. We do not intend this Report to be a technical analysis of current and proposed planning guidelines. The three LPAC reports cited above go into this matter in considerable detail. We do, however, refer to planning matters and possible contents of the SDS where relevant.
- 1.13 We are grateful for the assistance of our technical consultants, Catherine Bickmore and Michael Welman of Catherine Bickmore Associates, in the course of this investigation.
- 1.14 In this Report we consider the following issues –
 - The benefits of green space for London
 - The information deficit which hampers effective protection and enhancement of green space
 - The current threats to green space - including the pressure for development

- The contents of an effective green space strategy for London – including a proposed London Parks Forum, issues of management, usage, funding and environmental protection
- The potential for the creation of new open space in London.

2. The Benefits of Green Space

A brief history

- 2.1 To understand the benefits of green space in London we should begin with its history, and in particular the history of the public park. The Victorian Society, in evidence to the Select Committee inquiry in 1999, summarised the origins of much of the green space we now enjoy, “Public parks did not come into existence by chance, or simply survive as accidentally undeveloped ground. They were deliberately created, often making use of existing open space (such as common land or the parkland of a stately home), mostly in the 19th and early years of the 20th century, in order to provide a public amenity in the rapidly expanding towns and cities. Right from the start, public parks were seen as having social, economic and environmental benefits. They provided much needed green space in the most heavily built-up and deprived areas. They improved public health by providing the opportunities for fresh air and exercise, and they provided both mental and visual stimulus, and education, through the carefully planned planting of trees, shrubs and flowers”.³
- 2.2 It is clear that many of the perceived potential benefits of parks in today’s society are identical to those which led to the foundation of so many parks. It is true that there is both continuity and wide agreement as to the benefits of green spaces in a city. But there have also been major cultural changes since London’s formal parks were laid down. Some of the reasons that many of the capital’s green spaces came into existence no longer exist. For example, in recent times parents have become more reluctant to allow children to play on their own in local parks and woods. The Victorian ‘promenade’ has all but disappeared. And with the growth of other, indoor attractions, parks are not an automatic choice for leisure hours.
- 2.3 But as some of the past benefits of green spaces have become less relevant, new demands have emerged. Increased stress and pollution have made the parks’ role as London’s “green lungs” more important than ever before. In recent years the staging of major events and fairs in parks has been instrumental in building social cohesion amongst the capital’s diverse communities. As the city’s density increases, local green spaces are likely to serve as “neighbourhood gardens”. With new benefits have come new threats – crime, vandalism, anti-social behaviour.
- 2.4 In the following paragraphs we set out the benefits of and then the threats to London’s parks in the 21st century. Only when we understand the modern reality of green space in London can we identify policies and solutions for the future.
- 2.5 We first list below some of the principal benefits cited in evidence and in the relevant literature. The variety of impacts of green space means it is relevant to a

³ Twentieth Report from the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, Session 1998-99, Town and Country Parks, HC 477-II, Memorandum from the Victorian Society, para.3.1

number of Mayoral strategies, not only the Spatial Development and Biodiversity Strategies. We take a note of strategy linkages where they exist.

Economic Development and Regeneration

- 2.6 We would draw particular attention to the contribution green spaces can make to regeneration. The draft Biodiversity Strategy points out that “The variety of attractive parks and open spaces contribute substantially to London’s marketing image and may have an important role in encouraging inward investment”.⁴ This was also evident in written submissions we received. The Lee Valley Regional Park said that “the presence of the Regional Park makes the Lea Valley an increasingly attractive location for industry. The increased investment by the Park Authority and its partners, in enhancing and creating open spaces, not only provides an attractive setting for those businesses adjoining, but also contributes to quality of life and offers opportunities for recreation ... for those who live and work in the Lea Valley”.⁵
- 2.7 If, well maintained, green space is a catalyst to development and regeneration, the converse can also be true. The absence of green space, or green space in a poor and neglected condition, can deter investment and undermine regeneration initiatives. Ken Worpole, speaking on behalf of the Groundwork Trust, said that there was an absolute interdependence between economic and environmental regeneration.⁶ Groundwork Southwark sent a memorandum concentrating on the case of Burgess Park. They argued that “The extent to which the Park’s development has meshed/will mesh with major regeneration initiatives at North Peckham, the Aylesbury estate and the Elephant and Castle is a key issue. Generally, the Park hasn’t been included as an integrated part of these regeneration programmes. This represents a missed opportunity in that the Park needs to be widely recognized as a community resource that can complement much of the regeneration activity that is happening on the neighbouring housing estates. Importantly, the Park hasn’t been able to benefit from significant funding from these regeneration initiatives”.⁷ Groundwork Southwark thought that until recently the contribution that parks can make to regeneration was not greatly understood, though this had changed with the publication of some influential reports and the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Urban Parks Programme.⁸ **Relevant programmes should be including green space as an essential aspect of neighbourhood regeneration. Such space can significantly enhance quality of life, promote community spirit and attract business and residents to an area. To miss green space out, to allow what exists to remain neglected, is quite possibly to undermine the otherwise good work being done in neighbourhood renewal.**

⁴ ‘Connecting with London’s Nature’ The Mayor’s Draft Biodiversity Strategy para.3.21

⁵ Memorandum – The Lee Valley Regional Park

⁶ Minutes of Evidence 14 March 2001 3.23

⁷ Memorandum – Groundwork Southwark

⁸ Memorandum – Groundwork Southwark

- 2.8 During the inquiry we saw many instances of the successful use of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding to create and enhance green space in London. Mile End Park had received £2 million from the SRB as a contribution to capital funding arrangements. Funds would go to such schemes as ranger training, work with drug users in the park and horticultural therapy for those with special needs. In Havering we saw work of the London Development Agency at two sites formerly owned by Ford Motor Company. There was a single planning application for one million square feet of high quality industrial floorspace. The scheme will also have a strong landscape structure with a wetland area on the east of the site being retained and enhanced. **We welcome the work already done in London to link the benefits of economic regeneration and green space provision, particularly through the work of the London Development Agency and the Single Regeneration Budget.**
- 2.9 The Mayor's Economic Development Strategy makes brief reference to the place of green space in regeneration. We would welcome a more extended account from the London Development Agency of how they are addressing this important issue. **We invite the London Development Agency to respond to this Report with an account of how the availability and use of green space are considered in their regeneration planning.**

Aesthetic value

- 2.10 In addition to the benefits cited above we would mention what, for want of a better phrase, we might call the aesthetic value of green space. It would be a mistake to think green space always has aesthetic benefit. Neglect can easily make such spaces eyesores. When well maintained, however, green spaces contribute significantly to Londoners aesthetic appreciation of their environment. This reminds us of the need to have a broad concept of 'use' when discussing green spaces. There may be numbers of people who rarely spend time in a park or smaller green space, for example, but who value it as they pass by or through it.

Community identity

- 2.11 A further benefit of green space is its function in structuring and giving identity to the urban landscape. There are often important historical associations with parks which help identify communities and neighbourhoods. Green spaces break up and provide focus for residential development, and when effectively cared for can contribute to a sense of community ownership, pride and belonging. The mobilisation of communities to care and campaign for local green spaces often provides a more general boost to civic engagement and community spirit.

Sport, Recreation, Culture and Tourism

- 2.12 The recreational value of green space, both for organised sport and also for more informal play, has always been a central benefit of the provision of green space in the city. Tourism to London will also be enhanced by the effective provision and enhancement of green space. This point is acknowledged in the draft Biodiversity Strategy. Green space must be central to the forthcoming Mayoral Culture Strategy not simply for the sporting and recreational benefits made available to Londoners but also as an attraction to visitors and thus an important contribution to London's economy.
- 2.13 Traditionally London's municipal parks had been the sites of a variety of cultural and recreational activities, such as boating, bowls, musical entertainment from bandstands. Many of the relevant facilities have fallen into disrepair or gone altogether. But green space still has tremendous potential to meet the cultural and recreational needs of Londoners. We must recognise that they are not the same needs as those of a century ago. It is necessary to examine how to revitalise London's green spaces for cultural and recreational pursuits. The resulting increase in usage would be the best protection against decline and loss of green space.
- 2.14 London's parks are not only spaces in which culture can take place. They are themselves part of our cultural heritage. Many date back well over a century, contain historic features in both the built and natural environment, and are a testimony to the history and civic engagement of a local community. Any celebration and preservation of London's culture must have London's green spaces as a central component. **We welcome the proposal contained in the Mayor's draft Biodiversity Strategy for the cultural mapping of green spaces.**⁹
- 2.15 **The Assembly still awaits the Mayor's draft Culture Strategy. It should contain a clear programme to make London's green space central to the city's cultural life. This should include proposals:**
- to encourage the sporting and recreational use of green space
 - to recognise and maintain those green spaces which form an important part of London's cultural heritage
 - to revive the use of green space for cultural and educational activities, paying particular regard to the diversity of London's population
 - to promote with the London Tourist Board and other relevant bodies greater knowledge, access to and use of London's green spaces by tourists
 - to recognise that the quiet enjoyment of green space is itself a cultural activity which should be protected and developed.

⁹ 'Connecting with London's Nature' The Mayor's Draft Biodiversity Strategy para.3.27

Health

- 2.16 There is a general conviction in our evidence that green spaces are also good for health. The King's Fund considered community gardens to be a source of both physical and mental health, and young people at a conference organised by the King's Fund certainly argued that public green spaces had a very positive impact of people's health.¹⁰ That this is a generally held view is clear from the Rapid Review of the Health Benefits of Green Spaces, commissioned by the GLA.¹¹ It is a view we share. The promotion of green space is thus an integral part of the GLA's obligation to promote the health of Londoners. As an effective London-wide green space strategy is put in place, it is vital that we move beyond the vague conviction that some health benefits are linked to the use of green space. It appears that there is a need for research in this area. London should take the lead. **We endorse the recommendation of the Rapid Review of the Health Benefits of Green Spaces, that the London Health Commission take forward policy on the health benefits of green space.¹² This should involve both epidemiological research and also practical recommendations as to how the design, facilities and activities available in parks can be made conducive to good health.**
- 2.17 Many issues spring to mind. How, for example, to make parks accessible to both the elderly and the young, to encourage exercise. How to cater for (often noisy) sport and play, whilst also having space for quiet and relaxation, a vital restorative in a stressful world. Whether the use of green space can be more fully integrated into public health policies – a greater interest from health authorities in supporting the provision of allotments and community gardens? How often do London's GPs recommend patients to use the local park as part of their programme of recovery? We are convinced there is room for useful work in this area and we look forward to the contributions of the London Health Commission and other bodies.

Environmental and biodiversity benefits

- 2.18 The Mayor's draft Biodiversity Strategy states, "London's diversity of wildlife depends on the protection and appropriate management of the wide range of habitats occurring in the capital".¹³ In recent years over 1500 species of flowering plant and 300 types of bird have been seen in the city.¹⁴ Wildlife habitats are listed in the Strategy and include woodland, grassland, the Thames and its tributaries, canals, ponds and lakes, heathland, farmland, parks and squares, cemeteries and churchyards, gardens and allotments, community gardens and city farms, railway land, linesides and roadsides, wasteland and the built environment. We must be

¹⁰ Memorandum – The King's Fund

¹¹ 'Connecting with London's nature' The Mayor's Draft Biodiversity Strategy para.3.8, see also de Vries, Verheij and Groenewegen 'Nature and health:the relation between health and green space in people's living environment' Conference Paper 2000

¹² 'Connecting with London's nature' The Mayor's Draft Biodiversity Strategy para.3.8

¹³ 'Connecting with London's nature' The Mayor's Draft Biodiversity Strategy para.4.1

¹⁴ 'Connecting with London's nature' The Mayor's Draft Biodiversity Strategy para.2.1

aware of the possibilities for biodiversity in even the most built up environments. But it is clear that London's biodiversity depends crucially on the preservation of both the quantity and variety of London's green space. We discuss later in this Report how both planning decisions and green space management can take account of environmental and biodiversity issues.

- 2.19 In addition to the SDS and the biodiversity strategies, a further relevant environmental strategy from the Mayor is the forthcoming noise strategy. An important benefit of green space is the rest, peace and tranquillity provided. **We expect the Mayor's Noise Strategy to include an assessment of the impact of noise pollution on London's green space and proposals to reduce noise levels and mitigate impact so that there is sufficient peaceful green space in London.**

Mitigation of water run-off

- 2.20 A specific environmental benefit of green space is now being recognised as a result of the increased risk of flooding in London. Watling Chase Community Forest state, "Recent flooding has highlighted the risks associated with fast run-off from developed sites. The increased awareness of these risks provides the rationale for providing green open space and particularly tree-covered open space within any development. This can have a financial advantage for the developer, since reduction in the speed of water run-off can lead to a reduction in specifications for draining pipes, etc".¹⁵
- 2.21 The variety of benefit relates to the great diversity in the kind of green space in London. Green space varies in ownership (local authorities, the Royal Parks Agency, private individuals and bodies, Trusts and charities), in character (for example, playing fields, manicured Victorian/Edwardian parks, more natural and wild green space) and in usage (sport, relaxation, outdoor events, dog walking, to name a few). Not every green space will deliver every benefit. When we discuss below the assessment of open space provision in London, it will be clear that crude quantitative measures cannot be applied. Boroughs will need to look at the quality of open space available and the benefits provided. They must also look at the potential benefits of open spaces currently neglected. To this end it is important that Boroughs share an agreed list of open space benefits against which they assess current and potential provision, and any deficiencies. As the strategic authority for London we believe that the GLA is the appropriate body to formulate such a list for inclusion in the SDS. **We recommend that the SDS contain as supplementary guidance a list of open space benefits to act as a framework for Borough planning authorities in assessing the adequacy of open space provision.**

¹⁵ Memorandum – Watling Chase Community Forest

3. The Lack of Information

- 3.1 How much open space is there in London? Even to such a fundamental question, answers vary and are only estimates. There are perhaps something over 125,000 hectares of open space in London, 50,000 of them being protected open land. But such bald statistics tell us very little. They tell us nothing of whether such open land is used and enjoyed by Londoners, how accessible it is, how evenly distributed, whether it is well maintained. Evidence agrees above all else on one thing. We do not know enough about green space provision in London. **There is no up-to-date and authoritative record of London's green space. This is a shocking deficiency for a city which aims to be a beacon in urban planning and design.**
- 3.2 Not only must we know what green space is available, we must also know its ownership, quality, the amount being lost to development, and expenditure on parks and green spaces. The consultants SNU point out that "For those concerned with developing a comprehensive strategy for London, there are major gaps in information on green spaces in London: there is no data to show how much green space is being lost in London through residential and business development; there is no information on the management practices and resources allocated by local authorities and others in relation to green spaces in London".¹⁶
- 3.3 Attempts are being made to fill the information gap. Important work, for example, has been done by the Urban Parks Forum on behalf of DTLR, the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency. They have recently published a 'Public Park Assessment, A survey of local authority owned parks focusing on parks of historic interest' (May 2001). Twenty-one councils and the Corporation of London have contributed to that study and the analysis includes information on the number and location of parks, park strategies, the condition of parks and resources available. We welcome this work and congratulate those bodies which have contributed to its completion. It does not, however, aim to be a comprehensive survey of London's green spaces. It is national in scope but only looks at parks, and amongst parks concentrates on those of historic interest. Parks are by no means the only sort of green space in London and we need a more wide-ranging analysis of green space provision. The GLA must develop further the valuable work already done by the Urban Parks Programme.
- 3.4 Between the abolition of the GLC and the establishment of the GLA there was a system of voluntary notification by Boroughs of planning applications above a threshold of 10 residential units or 1,000 square feet of commercial space to the London Research Centre, which maintained the London Development Monitoring System (LDMS). The Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) state that the LDMS is under review. They argue that reporting of certain types of planning application should be obligatory, in particular those involving open space, and that information on such applications should be made available to all parts of the GLA

¹⁶ Memorandum – Steve Osborn, SNU

- and to others interested in London development matters at an affordable cost.¹⁷ Richard Rogers said that maps of green spaces should be in the public domain to assist in the planning and creation of open space. Though this idea had been warmly received, no map was as yet available.¹⁸
- 3.5 Another source for open space information has been the system for the identification and protection of London's biodiversity, in place since the early 1980s. A system of sites of nature conservation importance has been successfully developed through the work of such bodies as the London Ecology Unit (LEU) and the London Wildlife Trust
- 3.6 English Nature state that much of the habitat survey information for London boroughs is becoming out of date. They recommend that mechanisms be established to implement an ongoing programme of habitat survey so that trends in sites can be measured and that the planning process can be based on up-to-date material.¹⁹ Similarly the London Wildlife Trust state that there is a lack of information available on London's open space. They consider it vital that the GLA conduct regular ecological surveys.²⁰ The draft Biodiversity Strategy states that "The Mayor will aim to survey all open spaces and wildlife habitats on a ten year rolling programme, and employ the adopted procedures for evaluating open land to complete the identification of important wildlife sites throughout London and keep this series updated".²¹ The London Wildlife Trust considered the re-survey of London on a rolling ten-year basis to be the minimum needed to maintain the wildlife site system and monitor changes.²²
- 3.7 The rationale for the rolling programme being over ten years is not explained in the draft Biodiversity Strategy. It is unclear whether the period has been chosen as the appropriate time within which to monitor change or as a result of resource constraints. The GLA has revised the LEU survey format to ensure collection of additional data on land use, ownership, access and facilities.²³ We believe the survey should be further developed into an open space research project.
- 3.8 **We doubt whether a ten year rolling programme to survey London's biodiversity is frequent and sensitive enough to monitor change and plan interventions in a timely and effective way. We recommend that the Biodiversity Strategy revise the timescale of the survey.**
- 3.9 **We believe London needs a comprehensive and rolling survey of all aspects of London's open space, and that the Mayor's proposals for a biodiversity survey be integrated into such a wider work.**

¹⁷ Memorandum - CPRE

¹⁸ Minutes of Evidence 23 May 2001 3.16

¹⁹ Memorandum – English Nature

²⁰ Memorandum – London Wildlife Trust

²¹ 'Connecting with London's nature' The Mayor's Draft Biodiversity Strategy proposal 15 p.39

²² Memorandum – London Wildlife Trust

²³ Memorandum - Policy & Partnerships, GLA

- 3.10 We welcome the GLA's work to continue and develop the information gathering of the London Development Monitoring System and the London Ecology Unit. There should be a London Open Space Research Project, supported by the GLA and other stakeholders. The Research Project should:
- Conduct a comprehensive survey of all green space in London, including details of size, ownership, funding, accessibility, condition, biodiversity, functions and relevant open space strategic plans
 - Require notification by the boroughs of all planning applications for development on green space
 - Maintain a database of green space information accessible to interested parties and the general public either free of charge or at affordable cost
- 3.11 As the Strategic Authority for London we can think of no body better placed to gather London-wide information on green space provision, planning applications, condition and expenditure than the GLA. Without such information it will be extremely difficult to plan London so as to use green space effectively, and as difficult to protect green space from unjustifiable development. We are aware of the finite resources available to the GLA and we discuss below the possibility of sharing the cost of this work amongst a number of interested parties
- 3.12 A further issue to be addressed in the gathering of information is consistency of definition. Certain open space is defined as Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land, but, as the CPRE put it, "A variety of designations is applied to the rest of London's open space or none at all. A simple, standardised system of designation is needed for all of London's open space in order to allow thorough monitoring and protection".²⁴ **We recommend the SDS contain guidance to establish consistency of definition of green space across all the London Boroughs.**

²⁴ Memorandum - CPRE

4. Threats to Green Spaces

- 4.1 We must now turn to those threats which hinder or undermine our enjoyment of green space. In this section we list the threats raised in evidence before addressing in the remainder of the Report how best to tackle and solve these problems, with examples of good practice.
- 4.2 Threats to green space in London include not only threats to the quantity of green space, in other words the threat from development, but also the threat to its quality. Moreover, the two threats, to quantity and to quality, are linked. **The loss of green space is frequently preceded by deterioration in its quality.** The 1999 LPAC Report 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' notes that "the formal appearance, high quality and usage of public open space act as deterrents to applications for development".²⁵ It goes on to report that "The Quality and Maintenance of Open Space is an issue that is commonly considered by Inspectors in open space cases ... visual amenity is a valid and strong justification for protection. There were a number of cases where it was apparent that private landowners had deliberately run down land in order to increase 'hope value'".²⁶ We mention in this context the purposeful neglect of playing fields, a subject we return to below. The LPAC report found that "Scruffy sites that appear to be separate from main pieces of open land are vulnerable to both development, and allocation for housing in UDPs".²⁷
- 4.3 **We deplore the purposeful neglect of green space in order to increase the chance of its development. We are also aware that unintentionally local authorities might follow the same route. We believe that the Planning Inspectorate in its consideration of planning applications should identify the intentional neglect of green space and presume against granting development in such circumstances. We recommend the SDS consider this matter.**
- 4.4 Given the link between the poor quality of open space and its loss to development, it is extremely worrying to find clear evidence both nationally and in London of the declining condition of green space. The Public Park Assessment published this year concluded that "urban parks in the United Kingdom, in general, are in serious decline".²⁸ More specifically, they analysed trends in the condition of parks and found "overwhelming evidence that good stocks of parks and open spaces are continuing to improve whilst poor stocks are continuing to decline. Overall the nation's stocks of parks and open spaces are becoming polarised, increasingly they will be assessed as either good or poor; there will be more poor parks than good parks".²⁹

²⁵ 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' p.7

²⁶ 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' p.7

²⁷ 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' p.7

²⁸ 'Public Park Assessment – A survey of local authority owned parks focusing on parks of historic interest'

May 2001 Executive Summary

²⁹ 'Public Park Assessment' May 2001 p.3-13

- 4.5 The evidence thus suggests that poorly maintained green space is particularly vulnerable to development, and that across the country the greater part of green space is deteriorating in quality. The best way to defend green space is to maintain and use it well. But in too many places the argument for green space is undermined by its condition – scruffy, insecure, dilapidated, unimaginative. We also received evidence highlighting deficiencies in the quality of much of London’s green space. Some of it also reveals the tensions between the needs and priorities of different users. This London-based evidence corroborates national surveys such as the Public Park Assessment.

Environmental degradation

- 4.6 Evidence pointed to the poor ecological value of much green space in London, and the adverse effects of pollution. English Nature warned that “Intensively managed ‘green deserts’ attract few species (and often problem ones)”.³⁰ The poor ecological value of much green space was also mentioned by Groundwork Hackney, “Too often the open ‘green’ spaces around housing estates are just scrub grass. They have no ecological value; they have little amenity value”.³¹
- 4.7 Some green spaces are noting a decline in their biodiversity. Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath Conservators pointed to a decline in ground nesting birds, partly a result of a change in climatic conditions but also due to the “relentless pressure” of such activities as “walking, jogging, cycling and dogs”. Cycling was also affecting wildflower sites, badger sets and pond sides.³²
- 4.8 Environmental pollution was cited as a problem by the Corporation of London, and the Lee Valley Regional Park said that “Existing water quality, air/noise and light pollution continue to be areas of concern”.³³

Dilapidation, vandalism, fly tipping

- 4.9 Many memoranda spoke of dilapidation and vandalism of facilities and green space infrastructure as being a serious threat to the usage and future of London’s green space. That this is a widespread problem is demonstrated by the range of witnesses who wrote of it – Caledonian Park Users Group, Bromley, Islington and Lewisham Councils, CPRE, English Heritage, the Urban Parks Forum and London Wildlife, to name a few. This was linked in a number of submissions to a decline or lack of funding. The Urban Parks Forum, for example, wrote of “the substantial cuts in maintenance budgets of London Boroughs over the last two decades – a span of one generation – and the loss of features and character, encouraged by the quest for lower maintenance costs at the expense of upholding economic, social and

³⁰ Memorandum – English Nature

³¹ Memorandum – Groundwork Hackney

³² Memorandum – Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath

³³ Memorandum – Lee Valley Regional Park

environmental value". There was evidence of "Substantial loss of features, facilities and resources".³⁴

- 4.10 Fly tipping is a common problem. Caledonian Park Users Group, the Corporation of London, Bromley Council, Watling Chase Community Forest and London Wildlife all draw attention to it, particularly as it affects Outer London. An important point was made by London Wildlife, "Sites where the problem is not dealt with effectively, rapidly degenerate and problems multiply".³⁵

Crime

- 4.11 Linked to the general decline in the state of parks and their facilities is an increasing threat, and fear, of crime. The Caledonian Park Users Group told us that "The Park is subject to vandalism and crime. It is accessible at night due to the poor state of the railings and a failure to replace damaged or missing portions. Also, there is no official presence to deter potential wrongdoers".³⁶ Watling Chase Community Forest argue that management of green space is often not enough, "some form of policing and wardening may also be required ... This wardening is needed to protect against excessive use of the site, but particularly to protect against abuse, whether this be from fly-tipping as mentioned above or from anti-social behaviour within areas of open space. The latter is not only a problem in its own right, but is likely to lead to a fall in the use of the site by others".³⁷ A ranger service has been introduced in Lewisham precisely because "park users are most concerned about safety and security in parks".³⁸ The NSPCC provided evidence that in a recently national conducted survey "only 35 per cent of respondents felt that the play area in their local park was safe". There were also "general concerns expressed related to anti-social behaviour by teenagers; play areas where supervision was obscured by bushes and trees; and unsupervised and secluded toilets".³⁹

Dog fouling

- 4.12 A significant threat to green space comes from dog fouling, which can effectively remove particularly small green spaces from any use or benefit other than dog walking. **Too many green spaces in London are nothing but dog toilets.**
- 4.13 The Conservators of Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath highlighted dog fouling as one of the problems they faced, "During the day considerable pressure is placed on the Commons lands by pedestrian use. Many pedestrians walk dogs and these animals are ... the greatest threat to the fabric of the Common and its wildlife. Professional dog-walkers although restricted to a maximum of six dogs

³⁴ Memorandum – Urban Parks Forum

³⁵ Memorandum – London Wildlife

³⁶ Memorandum – Caledonian Park Users Group, see also Memorandum - Islington Council

³⁷ Memorandum – Watling Chase

³⁸ Memorandum – Lewisham Council

³⁹ Memorandum - NSPCC

(Commons bye-law) have added greatly to the problem in recent years. There are no bins for the disposal of faeces on the Common".⁴⁰ Watling Chase Community Forest points to "the high use of small public open spaces for dog exercising, resulting in fouling. Without policing, this activity will lead to the site becoming totally unacceptable for play and recreation, particularly for children".⁴¹ Dog control/aggression and dog fouling are two of the threats to London's open space identified by the Corporation of London.⁴²

Development

- 4.14 LPAC published in November 1999 a report entitled "Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London", concluding that "In general there is a commitment to the protection of open space as a valuable asset in the urban environment, yet a large proportion of London's open spaces have been lost since 1991".⁴³ They go on to estimate, "Projecting forward past losses ... that over 1,000 ha of open space will have been lost between 1989 and 1999. London cannot sustain this rate of loss without a significant decline in visual and physical environment".⁴⁴
- 4.15 Evidence provided numerous examples of threats and harm to green space in London. At the heart of the debate must be the pressure on greenfield sites from housing development. The Report of the Mayor's Housing Commission, 'Homes for a World City', estimated that a further 43,000 extra dwellings each year are required in London to meet forecast demand.⁴⁵ The Government has a target of 60 per cent of such housing being built on brownfield sites. That leaves, however, a considerable pressure on greenfield land.
- 4.16 This is not an issue for simple solutions. Hard choices will have to be made. Whilst in this investigation we have been examining London's green spaces and how to protect and enhance them, we cannot ignore the need for housing in the city, and in particular affordable housing. We support the initiative to secure extra dwellings in London. We discuss in greater detail below arguments from some witnesses that the protection of Green Belt land be waived in certain circumstances. It is claimed that a limited amount of housing development will provide revenue to enhance what at the moment is underused green space of poor quality. Similar arguments are used elsewhere in London to justify development on green space. Improvement in the quality of remaining green space cannot, however, disguise the fact that the overall amount of available green space will decrease. Much of this Report stresses the importance of the quality of green space. But quantity is important too, and the quantity is diminishing.

⁴⁰ Memorandum - Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath Conservators

⁴¹ Memorandum - Watling Chase

⁴² Memorandum - Corporation of London

⁴³ 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' LPAC Nov 1999 Executive Summary para.32

⁴⁴ 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' LPAC Nov 1999 Executive Summary para.34

⁴⁵ 'Homes for a World City: The Report of the Mayor's Housing Commission' p.28

4.17 We also heard of other developmental threats, not linked to housing. Judy Hillman spoke of the threats from tube infrastructure, cafes and restaurants, and covered tennis courts.⁴⁶ Similar points were made by others, for example Richmond Council. As we discuss further below, the loss of some green space must be offset against possible increased usage. There is also development linked to economic regeneration. We visited Rainham Marsh in Havering, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Havering Council believes that “developing Rainham Marsh would contribute so greatly to London’s regeneration that it justifies an exception to the normal planning policy of protecting SSSIs”.⁴⁷ The 200 acre site would provide, the Council estimates, 6,000 jobs on site and 3,000 in the surrounding area. The Council claims that it is possible to mitigate some of the environmental impact and that in any event almost all the biodiversity features of the marshes are also present in neighbouring protected land. We make no judgement on this or any other individual case. Our point here is simply that such incursions, for housing, facilities, economic regeneration, however justified, could threaten the overall amount of green space available in London.

⁴⁶ Minutes of Evidence 14 March 2001 3.3-8

⁴⁷ Memorandum – Havering Council

5. Defending and Enhancing London's Green Space

- 5.1 The news is not all gloomy, however, and the situation is certainly not hopeless. We now consider how to respond to the threats to green spaces. We begin with protection from development – a consideration of an appropriate planning framework. Secondly we consider the management and usage of green space and thirdly funding for green space. The fourth section looks at protection of its environmental value and biodiversity. We then discuss separately the protection of two specific kinds of open space – playing fields and the Green Belt.

Protection from development

- 5.2 It is important to understand the current protection regime for green space in London. There are certain categories of designated green space, Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land, where there is a presumption against development. In addition, the boroughs are advised to include two further definitions in their Unitary Development Plans (UDPs), Public Open Space, with established public access, and Urban Green Space, where public access is restricted or not formally established. The 1999 LPAC report 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' analyses all 33 Borough UDPs. It identifies two broad approaches to open space protection. The first is overall protection, where no development on open space is generally allowed. The second is a balancing of open space protection with other priorities, where the loss of some open space is permitted in return for other planning gain. Within those two broad approaches, however, there was wide variation in "the numbers and types of designation used at the local level including use of a single local designation, two designations for public and private open spaces, and multiple and possible overlapping designations. Often different policy approaches (offering varying degrees of protection) are adopted for different designations and types of open space".⁴⁸
- 5.3 The LPAC report states that a Borough's negotiating position is strongest if the policy starting point is a presumption against development. They found that "The majority of losses of locally designated open space have occurred where policies explicitly allow open space protection to be balanced against other priorities".⁴⁹ Some of the Borough officers interviewed thought that partial protection weakened grounds for refusal and invited speculative applications. In some of the case studies in the LPAC report other UDP policies were deemed to outweigh the open space protection. This applied particularly to applications for housing (especially social housing), indoor sports facilities, and development with regeneration benefits".⁵⁰
- 5.4 A separate statutory system of protection is provided for sites of importance for biodiversity. In London there are five sites of European importance and 37 Sites of

⁴⁸ 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' p.6

⁴⁹ 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' p.8

⁵⁰ 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' p.8

Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Below the national level of importance there are Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation recognised by the Boroughs. These are also subdivided into tiers – first, Sites of Metropolitan Importance; secondly, Sites of Borough Importance (Grade I and Grade II); and thirdly, Sites of Local Importance. The Mayor’s draft Biodiversity Strategy states that “The Mayor expects that development that would harm a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, Green Corridor, geological site, Countryside Conservation Area, or other feature found to be of comparable value, should not be permitted. Where, exceptionally, a harmful proposal is permitted, the harm should be minimised and compensatory measures are expected”.⁵¹ **We welcome the Mayor’s commitment to defend Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation from development.**

- 5.5 Should a similarly strong presumption against development be applied to all of London’s green space? The LPAC report ‘Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London’ recommends that “UDP policy wording and supporting text would state unequivocally that there was a presumption against development”.⁵² We firmly support the concern to avoid any further loss of green space in London but are not convinced that such a blanket presumption is the best approach. It would result in too inflexible a framework for a city which must remain dynamic. We consider it more important that the needs of a local community for green space are fully met, and we discuss below how such an assessment might work. We believe that there should be an absolute commitment to maintain the total area of green space in London at its current level and that where change takes place it must increase the size of that total area wherever possible. **We recommend that there be a presumption against development on open space where an open space deficiency has been identified. In cases where development is to be permitted we believe there should be an obligation to maximise open space provision within the development or for there to be compensating and high quality open space creation on a different site.**
- 5.6 The pressure on greenfield land could be eased if ideas were developed and implemented to maximise the release and development of brownfield sites, as recommended, for example, in the report of the Urban Task Force, ‘Towards an Urban Renaissance’.

The Management and Usage of Green Spaces

A London Parks Forum

- 5.7 We begin our consideration of the management and usage of London’s green spaces with a recommendation for a London Parks Forum, and we place it at the head of this section because of its central importance to a strategic approach to green space. As this Report goes to press we are pleased to learn of initial moves to

⁵¹ ‘Connecting with London’s nature’ The Mayor’s Draft Biodiversity Strategy proposal 2 p.33

⁵² ‘Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London’ LPAC November 1999 p.10

set up such a network. As we make clear below, we envisage the Forum developing in a more formalised way and with central GLA involvement.

- 5.8 The ILAM report notes that 32 per cent of the responding authorities had no parks strategy. A parks strategy is an important opportunity to bring green spaces up the political agenda, assessing their positive value for a locality and establishing benchmarks and criteria which can act as an important protection against development. 'Towards the London Plan' includes a commitment that the GLA will "work with boroughs to produce a good practice guide for boroughs on how to prepare open space strategies".⁵³
- 5.9 Borough open space strategies are essential given that, as Groundwork Hackney says, "Even where these open spaces are managed by the same local authority, so many council departments can be involved that there is typically little consistency in maintenance regimes and no over-arching strategy of green space provision".⁵⁴ It is particularly important that there is a shared open space strategy between planning and leisure departments if green space is to be protected and enhanced effectively.
- 5.10 **The SDS should require all London boroughs to have in place an open space strategy. We welcome the proposal to draft a good practice guide to assist boroughs in the formulation of these strategies. We recommend that the proposed London Parks Forum be used for boroughs to compare and share ideas before such strategies are finalised.**
- 5.11 The memorandum from Groundwork highlights, "the plurality of organisations and institutions funding and managing large, sub-regional and regional parks in London".⁵⁵ It is acknowledged that there are strengths to such plurality but Groundwork also lists the problems that have arisen:
- "There may be a considerable unevenness in quality, sometimes but not always linked to levels of funding
 - The public may feel that they have little or no civic ownership or identification with individual parks in such a diverse portfolio of providers
 - Different park authorities will choose to manage parks according to different priorities – tourism potential, open-air recreation, nature conservation, active sports and leisure – which makes strategic open space planning and recreational provision on a London-wide basis more difficult
 - There is little shared learning, cross-referencing or passing on of good practice between the different park providers".⁵⁶
- 5.12 Groundwork conclude that "a greater degree of coordination and sharing of good practice is urgently needed between the current providers, and here the Greater

⁵³ 'Towards the London Plan' p.55

⁵⁴ Memorandum – Groundwork Hackney

⁵⁵ Memorandum - Groundwork

⁵⁶ Memorandum - Groundwork

London Authority may be able to offer strategic help and guidance, possibly by establishing a London Regional Parks Forum".⁵⁷

- 5.13 We consider it to be vital that there be a London-wide forum in which the many issues surrounding green space which are raised in this Report can be rehearsed amongst local authorities and relevant practitioners. Current green space planning is devolved down to Borough level yet Borough UDPs and planning decisions tend to take little if any notice of green space provision in adjoining boroughs or of cross-borough approaches to shared or adjoining land. The LPAC Report 'Assessing Demand for Open Space in London' concludes that "there is a clear requirement for improved London-wide inter Borough cooperation to take account of geographical differences and overlapping catchment areas".⁵⁸ Thus one task for a London Parks Forum would be the development of a pan-London approach to green space planning. It would also be a vital opportunity to share best practice in funding and management of green space. We would expect the London Parks Forum and the London Biodiversity Partnership to work in close cooperation on many issues. It will also be important to liaise with the Urban Parks Forum.
- 5.14 **We recommend that a London Parks Forum be established with the support of the GLA to bring all local authorities, utility companies and other park management bodies together to share best practice in the planning, funding and managing of green space in London. Though we use the phrase 'London Parks Forum' we stress that we envisage all of London's open space falling within its remit.**
- 5.15 **We believe that the proposed Forum should act as a focus for the pooling of GLA and borough resources to fund a London research project for open space. This would ensure that the open space information deficit is addressed, with considerable economies of scale, and consistency of policy and method.**
- 5.16 **The London Parks Forum would:**
- **establish partnerships for green space renewal**
 - **discuss the London-wide and cross-Borough planning of green space provision**
 - **act as a green space 'champion' for London**
 - **encourage research**
 - **broker grants and sponsorship schemes**
 - **campaign on key issues.**
- 5.17 **'A Green Space Conference for London', organised by the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission, is to take place in February 2002.**

⁵⁷ Memorandum - Groundwork

⁵⁸ 'Assessing Demand for Open Space in London' LPAC February 2000 p.8

We consider this conference to be an ideal opportunity to bring all interested parties together, including the GLA, Boroughs, environmental organisations, other owners of open space such as the utility companies and the Royal Parks Agency, user groups and business representatives, to discuss the format and remit of a London Parks Forum.

- 5.18 **Details of its organisation and resourcing would obviously need to be agreed amongst those involved and we envisage some pooling of support and funds. We do, however, recommend that the GLA as London's strategic authority take a lead in the establishment of the London Parks Forum, perhaps supporting a small secretariat for the body.**
- 5.19 We heard evidence from Michael Wale, Honorary Secretary of the Acton Gardening Association, on the threats facing London's allotments. Allotments are a valuable resource providing recreation and exercise, biodiversity, and social activity. It is important that the use of allotments is protected and promoted. Michael Wale proposed a Greater London Allotment Authority.⁵⁹ **We believe the London Parks Forum should include a section dedicated to promoting and sharing information on allotments.**

The Staffing of Parks

- 5.20 An emphasis of recent discussion of green spaces is that in London and other cities it is a mistake simply to consider questions of quantity of green space. What is shocking in recent years has been the decline in the quality of our green space. Evidence received by the Committee stressed the loss of expertise in parks management, the decline in attention to green spaces within local council priorities. The recent ILAM report provided important information in this context. On the basis of the interviews conducted it was concluded that "one of the reasons for the decline in the condition of parks is the lack of systematic rebuilding and refurbishment programmes ... One deteriorating feature has a detrimental effect on the whole park and can encourage vandalism ... Neglect is the parent of vandalism and long-term neglect can lead to persistent vandalism".⁶⁰
- 5.21 The ILAM report also highlighted the impact of cuts in staff, "Anti-social behaviour can usually be associated with reduced levels of staffing".⁶¹ The report blames in part the effect of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), "By separating management from maintenance, the sense of ownership of park-keepers, gardeners and groundsmen was lost. A holistic and responsible attitude to care was not fostered in contractors working to a price. The redeployment of staff led to many trained gardeners undertaking menial tasks, such as cleaning and litter picking. The resultant low staff morale and motivation resulted in experienced and qualified staff

⁵⁹ Minutes of Evidence 21 March 2001 3.9

⁶⁰ Cultural Trends 38, 2000 Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK pp.68-69

⁶¹ Cultural Trends 38, 2000 Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK p.69

- leaving the parks service".⁶² Financial savings were rarely reinvested in the park service.
- 5.22 We stress that the issue is not simply one of providing more staff. There may well, for instance, be economies of scale which can be achieved in the deployment of staff. The important point is high quality staffing and outcomes, not merely numbers. The ILAM report looked forward to the Best Value regime providing "the opportunity to examine aspects of quality as well as cost in an assessment of the success of park provision".⁶³ Best Value inspections by the Audit Commission have begun to look at open spaces. The website contains, for example, a report on Enfield's parks and open spaces which it considers to be good and likely to improve. Staffing is addressed in a number of recommendations, including proposals for a clear training and development plan for staff, and that the role of the park ranger service and its numbers be clearly specified.⁶⁴ **We look forward to the Best Value regime encouraging a more effective use of resources and setting of performance measures in the management and staffing of open spaces. We recommend that the Audit Commission consider conducting a thematic study of open spaces.**
- 5.23 The Corporation of London, "the single largest provider of open spaces to Londoners", is committed to continued professional development for staff and employs resident keepers.⁶⁵ It is clear, however, that the City of London has at its disposal resources unavailable to other London boroughs. Steven Downbiggin from Capel Manor College argued forcefully in written evidence that the lack of a skilled workforce in London "is one of the major things frustrating the effective maintenance, conservation and use of London's green and open spaces at the present time".⁶⁶ Without such skilled staff "any capital investment in them is ultimately likely to prove exceedingly wasteful".⁶⁷ Steven Downbiggin called for a skills strategy for those living and working in London "to promote green London and the landbased and associated industries" and told us that he was discussing these issues with the LDA.⁶⁸
- 5.24 The Mayor's draft Biodiversity Strategy states that "The Mayor will work with the London Development Agency to ensure that the green economy is supported and developed in London and will work to encourage greater representation of minorities in the green sector".⁶⁹ This is welcome but there needs also to be a recognition of the serious shortage in 'green skills' now facing the capital. **The London Development Agency must develop a green skills strategy which addresses urgently the current skills shortage in London.**

⁶² Cultural Trends 38, 2000 Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK p.69

⁶³ Cultural Trends 38, 2000 Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK p.70

⁶⁴ www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk

⁶⁵ Memorandum – Corporation of London

⁶⁶ Letter Steven Downbiggin to Chair of the Committee 15 August 2001

⁶⁷ Letter Steven Downbiggin to scrutiny manager 19 July 2001

⁶⁸ Capel Manor College proposal

⁶⁹ 'Connecting with London's nature' The Mayor's Draft Biodiversity Strategy proposal 62 p.61

Security, Usage and Design

- 5.25 Staffing of parks relates not only to maintenance but also to security. We heard evidence that the decline in the number of park wardens had resulted in greater fear of crime. Pat Tawn of the King's Fund believed park patrols could significantly improve safety.⁷⁰ In addition to park wardens, we believe there are further ideas to improve security which should be developed, ideally within the proposed London Parks Forum. Best practice from such bodies as the Royal Parks Agency should be shared. Ideas on safety information, emergency help points, or the parks equivalent of a 'neighbourhood watch' scheme could all be explored.
- 5.26 Green space should be designed to promote security, though there must be sensitivity to all benefits. The clearing of sight lines, for example, should take account of the biodiversity benefits of hedges and plant growth. **We recommend that the proposed London Parks Forum have as a priority the development of ideas on the security of green spaces, including the use of parks wardens, effective design and involvement of the local community.**
- 5.27 Designing in of safety will improve usage of parks. Increased usage will in turn improve security. But increased park usage will not only make parks more secure. It is a guarantee for their future. The Urban Parks Forum put the point succinctly, "the best protection for parks and green spaces in London is the use and appreciation of the public".⁷¹ Effective management must therefore consider how to maximise the use of green space by all sections of the community, how to assess usage systematically over time, and how to consult with both users and non-users on green space issues.
- 5.28 We need to apply British design skills to our open spaces. This is not to say that all green space should be formal – even for those wilder areas of important environmental value there are key design decisions which can significantly affect their condition and usage. We have already quoted the Wimbledon Common Conservators complaining at the extent of dog fouling on the Common and then adding that there no bins there for the disposal of faeces. Dog fouling was frequently referred to during our investigation as a problem which reduced enjoyment and usage of green space. Bins for dog faeces are one solution. Another is the creation of spaces in parks specially reserved for this purpose. Organisations such as Groundwork Hackney⁷² and the Corporation of London⁷³ are working at innovative solutions to the problem. **Dog fouling is an issue where we need the London-wide sharing of good practice in prevention, not just for our larger municipal parks but also for those small green spaces, often near housing, which so rapidly deteriorate into dog toilets unusable by the rest of the community.**

⁷⁰ Minutes of Evidence 21 March 2001 3.44

⁷¹ Memorandum – Urban Parks Forum

⁷² Memorandum – Groundwork Hackney

⁷³ Minutes of Evidence 17 May 2001 4.22

- 5.29 The design of parks must aim to be sensitive to the functions of green space and the needs of the community, and must also aim to increase usage. Terry Farrell and Drew Bennellick gave examples of the enhancement of green space through carefully designed facilities.⁷⁴ Purism should not become an obstacle to innovation. We know that there are concerns, quoted earlier, about building development, for example of cafes, on green space and we accept that this must be done sensitively, taking account of the character and environmental value of the space. But we believe that the sacrifice of a small amount of green space can be justified if it attracts more people to the park in question.

Accessibility

- 5.30 One contribution to increase the usage of green space by a community is increasing accessibility. Terry Farrell also recommended the connection of all park edges “with level, wide, super-generous crossings (as has begun at Hyde Park Corner)”.⁷⁵ In oral evidence he expanded on his memorandum, suggesting that parks could be used to create “green rivers through London”.⁷⁶ Sustrans argue that “One of the most effective ways of increasing the number of people who will enjoy and benefit from open space is by improving accessibility for ‘through’ journeys, whether they be for leisure or utility purposes”.⁷⁷ Sustrans laid a particular emphasis on provision for cyclists. They made the important point that in considering green space “it is essential also to consider how people travel to these areas. Thought needs to be given to improving sustainable transport routes to/from open spaces ... the links and access points to green spaces are arguable even more important than work inside the parkland. If people cannot get into green space for fear of crossing a road or difficult access arrangements (e.g style of gates, opening hours, infrequent access points), improvements within the park will be underused and undervalued”.⁷⁸
- 5.31 The CPRE also raised the issue of accessibility, in particular to green space in the outer London boroughs, “due to poor transport links and lack of information, many Londoners cannot easily benefit from the city’s countryside and large open spaces. There is a need to improve accessibility by improving transport links and information, rather than by developing built leisure and car dependent facilities on open space. Accessibility of local open space also needs improvement”.⁷⁹
- 5.32 A number of witnesses stressed the value of linkages and connections between green spaces in London. Terry Farrell argued for the creation of “pedestrian/cycle/bridle path connections linking together all the central Royal Parks using the Grand Union canal etc”.⁸⁰ Groundwork argue for effective linkage of green space to “strategic public transport, cycling and pedestrian networks”.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Minutes of Evidence 17 May 2001 4.10, 21 March 2001 3.24

⁷⁵ Memorandum – Terry Farrell

⁷⁶ Minutes of Evidence 17 May 2001 4.5

⁷⁷ Memorandum - Sustrans

⁷⁸ Memorandum - Sustrans

⁷⁹ Memorandum - CPRE

⁸⁰ Memorandum – Terry Farrell

⁸¹ Memorandum - Groundwork

CPRE also raised the importance of open space 'chains' to provide pedestrian and cycle travel links. They believed there was considerable untapped potential for such linkages. They concluded that "All local walking and cycling networks need to be reviewed on a cross-borough basis to ensure:

- A far more comprehensive network
- That links between areas of open space are improved (e.g road crossings)
- That proper signage is provided
- That cross-borough maps and information are readily available".⁸²

5.33 The Mayor's initial proposals for the SDS include a commitment "To support networks of strategic open spaces and walking routes such as 'green chains', and improve access to and connections between elements throughout the network".⁸³ These ideas are also developed in the Transport Strategy. The section on Promoting Walking states that TfL will support and promote six strategic green walking routes: the London Outer Orbital Path, the Capital Ring, the Thames Path National Trail, the Jubilee Walkway, the South-East Green Chain and the Lee Valley Walk.⁸⁴ The section on Promoting Cycling, however, does not link the issue with the provision of green space.

5.34 There are two distinct issues here. One is the accessibility of green space to users, both the immediate accessibility at the borders of the space and the accessibility over longer distances provided by effective transport links. It may well be that some of the proposals outlined in the Mayor's Transport Strategy will address these accessibility issues. That Strategy does not, however, explicitly address the transport accessibility of green space. This is an omission which we believe must be rectified. The Royal Parks Agency specifically requested GLA intervention to improve such public transport links.⁸⁵ **If we have no knowledge of the transport accessibility of green space, nor any specific proposals to address deficiencies, we cannot arrive at any assessment of the adequacy of green space provision in London. We recommend that the proposed GLA audit of green space in London include assessment of transport accessibility. We also recommend that on the basis of that assessment the Mayor amend his Transport Strategy to deliver improved public transport provision and accessibility to green space.**

Green Chains and Corridors

5.35 The second issue is the extension of open space through linkages which provide green transport routes for pedestrians and cyclists. Terry Farrell in his oral evidence stressed the importance of such linkages for the design of central London. Both he

⁸² Memorandum - CPRE

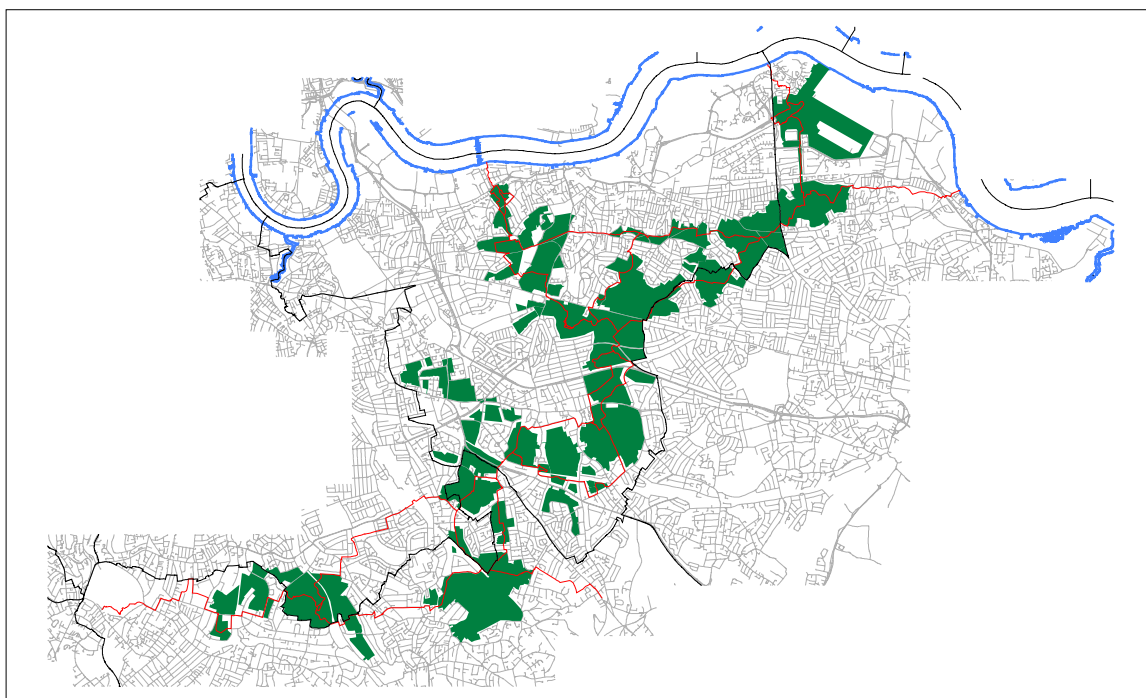
⁸³ 'Towards the London Plan' p.55

⁸⁴ 'The Mayor's Transport Strategy' Proposal 4I.6

⁸⁵ Minutes of Evidence 17 May 2001 4.14

and William Weston, Chief Executive of the Royal Parks Agency, mentioned improvements at Hyde Park Corner as a good example of what can be achieved.⁸⁶ We also received evidence from the South East London Green Chain Working Party which works in partnership with the Boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich and Lewisham to protect and promote a strategic network of open spaces in South East London.⁸⁷ The Green Chain was established in the mid-1970s and describes the interconnecting 300 parks and open spaces between the Thames riverside in the east to Crystal Palace Park in the South. The green spaces are linked by a fully signposted 40 mile footpath network called the Green Chain Walk. The promotion of the continuous string of green spaces, with leaflets, a website, a route guide, site information panels and travelling displays, has resulted in the greater use of these spaces (12 per cent of all visitors on the Green Chain Walk are not residents from the Green Chain Boroughs).

Map of the South East London Green Chain Network



Crown Copyright. Greenwich Council 086731LA. Not to scale.
Green Chain Walk and open spaces, with borough boundaries.

- 5.36 One impact of the Green Chain is enhanced protection from development. All of the Green Chain Boroughs have incorporated specific policies into their UDPs. Green Chain policies confer additional protection since an open space is not considered in isolation but in the context of other related open spaces. The Green Chain Working Party monitors and comments on all planning applications which may have harmful effects on the open spaces. Furthermore, at such planning

⁸⁶ Minutes of Evidence 17 May 2001 4.3-13

⁸⁷ see Memorandum – SE London Green Chain Working Party

- stages the Working Party can suggest planning conditions which will help improve existing sites, in some ways creating new green routes linking open spaces. **We consider green chains to be a vital contribution to the strategic network of open space in London, protecting and enhancing the open space itself and improving accessibility and usage.**
- 5.37 We welcome the fact that the Mayor's strategies address this matter. Support has been declared for existing projects. The Transport Strategy also encourages Boroughs "to identify schemes that would contribute to the overall vision of the development of pan-London pedestrian routes, to the benefit of local people and the wider community".⁸⁸ The encouragement remains rather vague, and as such we suggest it is unlikely to be very effective. **We recommend that the Mayor set out a clear process of consultation, with timescales, to motivate the Boroughs to identify green pedestrian and cycle routes and links.**
- 5.38 **We recommend that the SDS contain both strategic guidance on the creation of green chains and other green transport links for cyclists and pedestrians across London, and an expectation that Boroughs in their UDPs identify the potential for such linkages and develop the concept.**
- 5.39 Other forms of green linkages, in particular green corridors, can also give opportunities for more sustainable journeys and open space enhancement/creation. Gideon Amos from TCPA also referred to wildlife corridors which allow the movement of wildlife and the enhancement of biodiversity across London.⁸⁹ The Environment Agency gave evidence on river corridors which "contain substantial areas of open/green space within a predominantly built environment".⁹⁰ The Environment Agency emphasised the biodiversity benefits of such linkages, which maintain genetic diversity and make populations more robust to environmental change.⁹¹ The Agency points out that "In many cases riverside paths are purely functional, minimising any interaction between the public and the environment ... The network of riverside footpaths forms a substantial open/green space resource. A holistic approach to their design and management will provide ecological and social improvements. The final outcome will provide biodiversity improvements and an improved experience for people using the path".⁹²
- 5.40 Examples of the Environment Agency's work on river corridors include projects on the River Wandle at Wandle Park and on Pickle Ditch, a Wandle tributary, at Priory Park. At Priory Park, improvements to the river corridor included a new footpath and interpretative information, as well as river restoration and landscaping. The work was funded through a section 106 agreement. The work at Wandle Park also used section 106 funds, as well as Landfill Tax credit, sponsorship, the SRB, the European Life Grant and Derelict Grant. Again, the improvement of the river itself was linked to increasing public access and amenity.

⁸⁸ The Mayor's Transport Strategy para.41.9

⁸⁹ Minutes of Evidence 20 June 2001 3.10

⁹⁰ Memorandum – The Environment Agency

⁹¹ Memorandum – The Environment Agency

⁹² Memorandum – The Environment Agency

- 5.41 The Green Corridor Partnership provided oral and written evidence to the Committee and we saw some of their work during a visit to Hounslow. The aim of the Partnership is to improve “the environment of the M4/A4 for those who live, work and travel through one of the UK’s busiest transport corridors”.⁹³ On our visit we saw examples of tree planting, boundary improvements, a new visitor centre, artwork and nature trails. The Partnership has agreed a strategic landscape plan which includes land owned by the Highways Agency, Transport for London and BAA Heathrow and which crosses three borough boundaries. The plan is informally used as supplementary planning guidance by the Boroughs of Hounslow and Hillingdon. The scheme had involved businesses and local schools and had been involved with section 106 planning applications. Initial funding came from the SRB but as the initial five-year period of the scheme came to an end they were going to seek charitable status so they could apply for grants in the future.⁹⁴
- 5.42 **We applaud the work being done by such bodies as South East Green Chain Working Party, the Green Corridor Partnership and the Environment Agency to establish green routes through London. We believe this is vital to increase access to and usage of green space.**

The Parks of London – A Strategic Vision

- 5.43 There are in London some parks which in size, history and significance to the city should be considered as a distinct category. They need to be planned and managed for the sake of London as a whole and integrated into a London-wide vision for green space. We call them here regional parks, though we do not intend this term to be identical in sense to the planning category in LPAC’s Hierarchy of Publicly Accessible Open Space. Our definition of regional parks would include the Royal Parks, and also such spaces as Hampstead Heath and the Lee Valley Regional Park. In this section we call for a strategic vision for the regional parks of London.
- 5.44 Terry Farrell regretted the fact that the Royal Parks and Palaces were not integrated with each other and within a broader vision of urban design. The Royal Parks have “at best, an ambivalent/unresolved relationship with the great palaces ... and at worst the palace/park relationship is hostile and disruptive to the urban planning of London, ignoring key relationships that, in architectural and landscape terms, link them as one design”.⁹⁵ The Royal Parks Agency agreed, “Opportunities exist to create imaginative links with green spaces right across the city, and to create new and enhanced green areas ... Unique vistas and views exist throughout the capital, many from within the Royal Parks looking outward. It is vital that these are protected and enhanced. Opportunities arise from time to time to create new ones, such opportunities should not be lost”.⁹⁶ Both Terry Farrell and the Royal Parks Agency have a particular interest in the design of central London. Terry Farrell

⁹³ Memorandum – Green Corridor Partnership

⁹⁴ Minutes of Evidence 13 June 2001 4.16-22

⁹⁵ Memorandum- Terry Farrell

⁹⁶ Memorandum – Royal Parks Agency

- considers that much more can be done to integrate the buildings and green spaces of the central London royal parks "Take down, and open up palace walls. Replace with railings and gates. Relate gardens with openness to parks and urban areas. Make the palaces increasingly accessible for concerts, galleries, education, museums and conferences".⁹⁷
- 5.45 We agree that there is room to improve the design of central London so as to improve the provision and enjoyment of the considerable green space available. We were pleased to note in both their written and oral evidence the willingness of the Royal Parks Agency to think imaginatively on such issues and cooperate with strategic bodies such as the GLA.
- 5.46 **We recommend that the GLA conduct a review in partnership with the Royal Parks Agency and other interested parties of the current planning, design and use of the Royal Parks and palaces of central London, with the aim of establishing a single and agreed vision for the preservation, enhancement and enjoyment of this world heritage standard stock of green space.**
- 5.47 A wider issue presents itself in this context. The independence of the Royal Parks Agency and certain other regional parks such as the Lee Valley Regional Park from either GLA or local authority control. Terry Farrell did not think change of ownership was necessary, "such questions would lead to much debate and cost whilst obscuring the real issues".⁹⁸ We agree. However, even if ownership is not to change, we believe that there must be a statutory framework which ensures planning consistency across London and some degree of accountability for the regional parks. Involvement in the London Parks Forum will be welcome and important but more is necessary.
- 5.48 Crucial issues for the government of London such as traffic management, urban design, biodiversity and cultural policy are profoundly affected by the actions of regional parks; indeed, a lack of coordination, or cooperation, can make it impossible to implement strategies for the whole city. There must therefore be a framework which ensures a partnership and which allows the democratically expressed will of Londoners to take precedence. **We recommend that the GLA be given a statutory role in the planning and management of London's Royal Parks, Lee Valley Regional Park and other regional parks. We envisage this involving representation on management boards, rights of consultation on matters of significance, and a requirement that such parks be planned consistently with the principles of the Mayor's Strategies, in particular the Spatial Development Strategy.**
- 5.49 The Royal Parks Agency argued in written evidence that "London's open spaces are admired for the illusion that is presented of a sense of countryside in the city. High buildings can, in certain circumstances, intrude on this illusion".⁹⁹ This point is

⁹⁷ Memorandum – Terry Farrell

⁹⁸ Minutes of Evidence 17 May 2001 4.11

⁹⁹ Memorandum – Royal Parks Agency

expanded upon in the submission of the Royal Parks Agency to the Mayor's SDS consultation process. The document produced for that process, 'Sky Space around London's Inner Parks', states, "The Inner London Parks are one of London's glories, extensive open spaces evocative of the natural world, enjoyed by millions. The most popular qualities of the parks are peace, greenery, wide open space and freedom, giving recreation from the surrounding metropolis. Conservation of these values depends upon keeping the open sky around the parks uninterrupted above the tree canopy, beyond significant prospects of famous monuments seen in silhouette and beyond long views along the lakes".¹⁰⁰

- 5.50 Richard Rogers did not consider high-rise buildings to be necessarily detrimental to parks, citing the example of Central Park in New York. He did accept that there is an important tradition in England of having low-rise buildings around parks. We are sensitive to the aesthetic impact of tall buildings near to parks. We understand that the issue is currently being considered by a working group comprising GLA, RIBA and English Heritage representatives. We look forward to the outcome of their discussions and consider this a matter for further debate in the London Parks Forum.

Consultation and community involvement

- 5.51 If parks and green spaces are to be used they must please the users. This obvious point has too often in the past been lost on those responsible for public green spaces and it is only in recent years that local authorities and other bodies have looked at the issues of community involvement in the planning and management of green space. The TCPA argue that green spaces should be seen as "an invaluable resource for communities. By linking meaningful engagement of local communities to this rich network of public spaces local ownership can be built up, leading in time to better managed places naturally policed by their own communities".¹⁰¹ The importance of community involvement was also a central theme of the Report of the Urban Task Force, chaired by Richard Rogers, which argued that particularly in deprived areas there needed to be "different models of neighbourhood management, that give local people a stake in the decision-making process".¹⁰² This is not always easy. We heard from both English Nature and the Countryside Agency that it is difficult to engage and involve local communities.¹⁰³ The sharing of good practice is essential. The ILAM report points out that a requirement of Best Value "is increased public consultation, via user needs assessment surveys, public meetings, focus groups and friends groups".¹⁰⁴ **We believe local participation in the management of green spaces is vital if they are to survive and prosper in the future. This is particularly true for those smaller green spaces so often overlooked.**

¹⁰⁰ 'Sky Space around London's Inner Parks' The Royal Parks p.2

¹⁰¹ Memorandum - TCPA

¹⁰² 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' The Report of the Urban Task Force – 'Managing the Urban Environment'

¹⁰³ Minutes of Evidence 14 March 2001 3.14, 3.19

¹⁰⁴ Cultural Trends 38, 2000 'Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK' p.70

- 5.52 The ILAM report is informative on user statistics, “Local authorities have not traditionally collated or maintained records about park users. Competitive bidding for grants from Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and lottery funding has encouraged the provision of user numbers”.¹⁰⁵ Of the parks assessed in that report only 45 per cent had any visitor numbers available, many of those estimates. With no standard method of calculating usage the accuracy of the resulting statistics was variable. It was likely that awareness of the identity of those using the parks is even lower than knowledge of the numbers of users.
- 5.53 The ILAM report also suggests that few user satisfaction surveys take place. But as important is the opinion of non-users – local authorities need to find out what prevents people from using their green spaces. The report warns that there could well be a tendency for wealthier neighbourhoods to enjoy greater consultation than more deprived areas because the wealthier residents are more adept at exerting pressure on the authority. Of course this militates against one of the important benefits of urban space, its capacity to contribute to local regeneration and its availability to all, irrespective of means or social status.
- 5.54 The GLA is committed to considering issues of equality and diversity in all its policies. This applies to the use of green space as to everything else. It is thus also important to have a sense of how green spaces are used by ethnic minorities, the disabled, the elderly, as well as by the socially marginalised and excluded. Their usage is affected by such issues as facilities, access, welcome, security. **We recommend that user assessment and consultation conducted by local authorities pay particular attention to the views and needs of minority and vulnerable groups and consider how to increase their usage of green space.**
- 5.55 A vital component of genuine accessibility of green space is the local community’s knowledge of the green space available. Groundwork Hackney spoke of the need to “raise awareness of local communities to the existence and extent of [Lee Valley] Park. We have been shocked to discover some teachers and parents from a school a few hundred yards away from the Lea unaware of its existence. The transience of the Hackney population (residential and working) is such that one cannot assume awareness of basic amenities and local features”.¹⁰⁶ **Open space strategies should include measures to raise awareness of local green spaces in the community.**
- 5.56 Groundwork Hackney also raised the question of the place of young people in the use and management of parks. They point out that “Young people are major users of parks and open green spaces. Teenagers especially are often perceived by other users as disruptive – even when just kicking a ball or hanging around. At the same time young people are usually excluded from park user groups and other consultation and participation mechanisms. Redressing this situation would, in our view, be a major step forward to a more sustainable society”.¹⁰⁷ Martin Hyde from Lewisham Council told us that discussions in schools on their local park had

¹⁰⁵ Cultural Trends 2000, 38 ‘Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK’ p.72

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum – Groundwork Hackney

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum – Groundwork Hackney

decreased vandalism. The Council was considering engaging in consultation over weekends in order to reach such groups as children more effectively.¹⁰⁸ **We recommend that children and young people be included in user surveys and represented in park user groups.**

Funding

- 5.57 At the heart of the debate over the maintenance of green spaces in London is the question of money. The Select Committee Report records a near unanimous view in their evidence that local authority expenditure on parks had declined, and quoted a Government figure of £638 million spent in 1990/91 compared to £538 million in 1999.¹⁰⁹ In years when local government expenditure has been under pressure from many quarters it is not surprising to see expenditure decline on green spaces when their maintenance is not a statutory responsibility of local authorities.
- 5.58 In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number and variety of sources of capital funding for green spaces. The ILAM report points to a “significant real growth in the rate of capital investment over the last two decades. In order to fund large projects, it is increasingly necessary to bring together a number of different funding sources, including the private sector which wishes to be associated with private and prestigious projects. However, whilst individual parks have benefited, others have seen no capital expenditure whatsoever during that time”.¹¹⁰
- 5.59 The ILAM report’s main conclusion, as we have mentioned earlier, is “the continuing polarisation of the standard of parks with the good often getting better and the poor often getting worse”.¹¹¹ This is particularly relevant to the question of funding. Whilst some green spaces may become ‘prestige’ projects and attract considerable external funding and local authority attention, others might well experience a ‘shadow effect’ of declining funds and care. Evidence expressed concern at the neglect of green space around housing estates.¹¹² There is a danger of funds flowing to those parks and green spaces championed by well-organised and wealthier neighbourhoods. Funding applications can become ad hoc responses to available pools of money rather than part of a clear funding strategy with defensible priorities. **Local open space strategies should ensure equitable and comprehensive planning and funding for the whole green space stock.** It is already the case that capital funding applications are required to provide evidence of a clear vision for the green space in question, including management, design and revenue funding proposals. In addition, **capital funding applications should be required by funding bodies to demonstrate that the proposal is**

¹⁰⁸ Minutes of Evidence 13 June 2001 4.26

¹⁰⁹ Twentieth Report of the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, Session 1998-99, Town and Country Parks, HC 477, paras. 78-81

¹¹⁰ Cultural Trends 38, 2000 ‘Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK’ p.77

¹¹¹ Cultural Trends 38, 2000 ‘Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK’ p.81

¹¹² Memorandum - Groundwork Hackney

part of a coherent strategy designed over time to meet the resource needs of all the applicant's green space stock.

5.60 There has been an increase in the number of potential sources of capital funding in the last two decades. They include:

- local authority capital receipts
- lottery funds - the Heritage Lottery Fund and the New Opportunities Fund
- Landfill Tax receipts
- the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)
- European and other Challenge funding
- the private sector (including section 106 agreements)

5.61 Often the local authority will be required to provide match funding to that provided from an external source. Thus the skills required from a local authority are ones of identifying possible sources of funding, drafting effective funding proposals, working alongside external funders, rather than just the traditional one of internal budget management. **We recommend the sharing of best practice within London on the securing of external funding for green spaces. Not all authorities are equally skilled in this area and it is a matter to which local authorities should give attention when considering their staffing and expertise.**

5.62 We took evidence from two of the bodies which now offer capital funding for parks and green spaces in the capital –the New Opportunities Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) is a Lottery Distribution Body established in 1998 to allocate Lottery funding to education, environmental and health-related projects, with a particular emphasis on those who are most disadvantaged in society. The NOF has created an environment initiative for green spaces and sustainable communities amounting at present to £125 million for the whole of the UK. Across the UK 75 per cent of the funding is to be spent on green spaces schemes. Priorities for funding are determined by Government policy directions and the NOF's own broad consultation process. In England the key priorities to have emerged are funding for playing fields and children's play.¹¹³

5.63 The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is another Lottery Distribution Body. In London the HLF has awarded £32.9 million for 47 public park projects. These awards cover 28 London boroughs and range from £5,000 for a management plan to £6.9 million for the regeneration of Battersea Park.¹¹⁴ The HLF does not fund the development of new parks or green spaces. It does support projects aimed at protecting, enhancing and improving access to land of importance for its scenery, history, wildlife, cultural and local value. This includes urban green spaces and can include

¹¹³ see Memorandum – New Opportunities Fund

¹¹⁴ Memorandum – Heritage Lottery Fund

historic parks and gardens. In 1996 the HLF launched the Urban Parks Programme, which had been particularly successful, providing grants to refurbish parks of heritage importance, both nationally and locally. To date 100 park projects have been funded by the Programme in London. This figure includes capital projects and also the funding of restoration plans.¹¹⁵ In considering the provision of grants Eilish McGuinness from HLF told us in oral evidence that improved accessibility was a vital component to any bid.¹¹⁶

- 5.64 A number of issues were raised with Eilish McGuinness from HLF and Helen Earner from NOF in oral evidence.¹¹⁷ One was the assistance given to smaller bodies to put in bids. The HLF gave practical assistance to smaller bodies unfamiliar with the application process, advising on criteria a bid must meet, also providing case studies as a guide to applicants and giving feedback on all unsuccessful bids. An open day was being planned specifically for smaller projects. The NOF neither offered direct guidance nor assessed failed bids. **We recommend that the New Opportunities Fund and its Award Partners develop further the assistance and advice offered to smaller bodies interested in bidding for funds, including direct advice on applications and effective feedback on bids.**

Revenue Funding

- 5.65 If capital funding is in short supply, with numerous requests to funding bodies for assistance, the picture is even more grim for revenue funding, identified by many witnesses as vital to the proper maintenance, preservation and usage of green spaces, and thus to their long-term future. The ILAM Report states "There has been no significant change in the sources of revenue funding available to public parks over the last 20 years. They remain overwhelmingly a local authority provision, paid for through Council Tax with some help from revenue raising activities".¹¹⁸ Whilst admitting that financial data were sketchy, ILAM concludes that over the last twenty years "local authorities' expenditure on all parks and open spaces has decreased considerably" with gross expenditure falling by 18 per cent. Reasons given include such local factors as local policy decisions, general economic pressures on local authorities, a mechanistic financial management culture and local government reorganisation.
- 5.66 Eilish McGuinness confirmed that the HLF did not provide revenue funding for parks. Helen Earner said that on a case by case basis the NOF was prepared to provide revenue funding. The emphasis, however, appeared to be on encouraging a greater understanding of how to generate revenues. Local authorities had been provided with assistance in developing sustainable projects
- 5.67 Some of the Boroughs which gave evidence to the Committee confirmed the difficulties local authorities experience in funding parks and green spaces.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum – Heritage Lottery Fund

¹¹⁶ Minutes of Evidence 13 June 2001

¹¹⁷ Minutes of Evidence 13 June 2001

¹¹⁸ Cultural Trends 38, 2000 'Local Authority Historic Parks in the UK' p.75

Richmond Council state, “the extensive areas of open space (compared to other boroughs) and limited resources mean that it is impossible to maintain the basic infrastructure of parks and open spaces (e.g walls) or to undertake improvement programmes” .¹¹⁹ Lewisham Council stress that “The big issue ... for everyone who is committed to making real improvements is how to increase the revenue budget to allow substantial improvements to the management of the parks services ... The dilemma for the Council is how to prioritise budgets across its whole portfolio. Parks are, by their nature, resource hungry and may not be afforded the highest priority for spending when balancing the needs of the local community. The challenge for parks officers is how to make a strong enough case for an increase in the revenue budget” .¹²⁰ The LPAC report ‘Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London’ found that the fear of the burden of the maintenance budget was deterring local authorities from applying for capital funding for green space.¹²¹

- 5.68 We do not consider that the answer is to make the provision and upkeep of green space a statutory obligation for local authorities. We agree with the Select Committee’s conclusion that there is little point adding a further statutory obligation without additional funding also being provided. What is needed is community and political commitment to the importance of green space, a realisation of its centrality to regeneration, business development, sustainability, and the basic liveability of a city. We believe the Mayor’s Sustainable Development Strategy must emphasise the centrality of green space provision to the future planning of London, and thus to Borough UDPs. As a political commitment is established we look forward to seeing an increase in revenue funding for green spaces.
- 5.69 What we need, however, is not simply more money but money better spent. We have already spoken of the need to revive the skilled management of London’s green spaces. False economies in the past, such as the removal of skilled park staff and the loss of park departments in councils, have accelerated decline. An enthusiastic and knowledgeable park staff, supported by their council, can do much to ensure that revenue funding is wisely and sustainably spent. **The London Parks Forum should play an important role in spreading best practice in effective and sustainable green space expenditure.**
- 5.70 More thought and sharing of ideas is necessary on how best to maximise revenue funding. The principle of public accessibility should not be compromised. Nor should advertising and business promotion intrude on the public’s enjoyment of green spaces. However, we have noticed in evidence that there is little discussion of the role the private sector could play in supporting green spaces. As we stated above, there is clear evidence that the private sector benefits from the attractiveness and regenerative effect of neighbouring green space. Something must be put back.

¹¹⁹ Memorandum – Richmond Council

¹²⁰ Memorandum – London Borough of Lewisham

¹²¹ ‘Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London’ LPAC March 2000 p.5

- 5.71 **We believe that there are opportunities for private sector funding for public open space through sponsorship or planning gain which have still to be explored. We do not believe this need compromise the distinctive and non-commercial character of London's green spaces. We recommend that the Mayor organise meetings between London's business community, the boroughs and other interested parties to consider how to involve the private sector in the support and funding of green space in London.**
- 5.72 On our site visits we came across revenue-raising schemes. Greenwich Park has introduced a number of such schemes, including a plant shop, car parking charges, a cafe, sports pitches, tennis courts, boating and special events. Revenue funding arrangements for Mile End Park are to include such facilities as extreme sports, go karts and green bridge shop rents. We welcome such ideas. Of course there are dangers – we must preserve the principle of free public access to green spaces; we must preserve areas of peace and rest; we must avoid unnecessary development on green space. But these revenue-raising schemes not only provide the funding necessary to preserve and maintain green space. They also repeople our parks. They reintroduce London's green space into the public realm of recreation and pleasure. That must be good.
- 5.73 There was discussion of the raising of revenue for parks through the staging of concerts and other events. The advantage of such an approach is both the revenue collected and the opening up of the park to those who otherwise might not know of its existence and facilities. **It is important that revenue raised through the staging of events is put back into the parks service, with particular attention to those green spaces otherwise neglected. It is also important that such events are planned sensitively so as to avoid detrimental effects to any valuable environmental or heritage assets. We believe that increased park usage is more likely to result from events designed for and aimed at the local community.**
- 5.74 A further aspect to the provision of maintenance funds for green space is the use of planning gain. The LPAC report 'Creating and Enhancing Open Space in London' states that "The creation of open space is highly dependent upon s106 agreements for capital funding".¹²² There had been less use of s106 agreements for revenue funding of newly created open space, in part due to a lack of clarity in Government guidance. LPAC make a number of recommendations, including "The potential availability of s106 related funding for maintenance of public open space should be increased. This will require clarification of the regulatory framework ...".¹²³ Both Watling Chase Community Forest and Martin Hyde from Lewisham Council told us of difficulties in using s106 agreements for revenue funding.¹²⁴ **We recommend that the Government provide clear advice on the use of planning gain for the funding of the ongoing costs of green space.**

¹²² 'Creating and Enhancing Open Space in London' March 2000 LPAC p.7

¹²³ 'Creating and Enhancing Open Space in London' March 2000 LPAC p.10

¹²⁴ Memorandum - Watling Chase Community Forest; Minutes of Evidence 13 June 2001 4.33

The Environment and Biodiversity

- 5.75 We have already stated that one of the benefits of green spaces to London is the environmental gain and contribution to the city's biodiversity. The Mayor has published a draft Biodiversity Strategy which identifies the benefits of biodiversity for London and contains many recommendations on the environmental value of green spaces.
- 5.76 It is important that green spaces and their contribution to biodiversity are not considered solely in terms of statutory denomination and protection. All open space, and for that matter built up areas also, are capable of considerable biodiversity.
- 5.77 Witnesses emphasised the fact that brownfield sites could well support considerable biodiversity. As has been stated above, the emphasis in the provision of new housing in London will be on the development of brownfield sites, the Government aiming for 60 per cent of new development to be on brownfield rather than greenfield. This is to be welcomed as a general principle in that it aims to protect existing green space. Crudely pursued, however, there could be unnecessary loss incurred in London's biodiversity as, say, an intensively cultivated field without any significant biodiversity is protected before a brownfield site of considerable ecological interest. English Nature argue for development on brownfield sites to be considered on a case-by-case basis, with particular assessment of and attention to their ecological interest and broader environmental functions.¹²⁵
- 5.78 The Assembly Committee Report on an earlier version of the Mayor's draft Biodiversity Strategy, whilst welcoming its contents, points out that the draft Strategy "does not seek to manage the many likely conflicts that arise between biodiversity preservation and development".¹²⁶ We support the emphasis on the development of brownfield sites. We know that difficult choices must be made and that on occasion the biodiversity of brownfield sites must be sacrificed in order to provide the necessary development for Londoners. We agree with English Nature that **where brownfield sites are to be developed measures must be put in place "to encourage the retention of existing wildlife features in new development and the appropriate mitigation of any loss"**.¹²⁷ **Indeed there should be a policy to increase the environmental value of brownfield sites which are to be developed. We consider the GLA should provide guidance as to how planning gain can be used to this end.**
- 5.79 Dave Perkins, Head of Park Operations, Lee Valley Regional Park, said that there was potential to convert brown space into green space. It was possible in some circumstances to exchange lands as long as there was no deterioration in the overall footprint of the park, and that those exchanged lands were accessible and provided the same quality as the lost land.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Memorandum – English Nature para.5.1

¹²⁶ Assembly Scrutiny of the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy p.3

¹²⁷ Memorandum – English Nature para.5.2

¹²⁸ Minutes of Evidence 17 May 2001 4.27

- 5.80 **We believe that there may be occasions where what is technically a brownfield site may in fact offer a wider range of benefits, including significant biodiversity, to a community than an alternative greenfield site. There should be encouragement in the SDS and local UDPs for the greenfield site to be developed in such cases with the brownfield site henceforth being considered a greenfield site for protection purposes and effectively managed for the local community.**
- 5.81 A particular issue raised was the numbers of trees in London. We should stress that greening London does not necessarily involve considerable amounts of space. Evidence provided by Trees for London stressed the environmental and regenerative benefits of more trees in the city. They pointed to the unequal distribution of trees in London, “the more prosperous the area, the more trees you will see”.¹²⁹ Trees were also under threat. Graham Simmonds, Chief Executive of Trees for London, criticised the utility companies for cutting down trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders, and demanded stiffer penalties in such circumstances.¹³⁰
- 5.82 English Nature warned, however, that “in some places the encroachment of trees through lack of management has led to the damage of important habitats, and removal of trees is a priority. In addition the significant programme of tree-planting over the past 15 years has often been to the detriment of existing wildlife interest, either through planting inappropriate species or in inappropriate habitats or locations. We urge the GLA to encourage new woodland and tree initiatives to accord to an overall strategy that respects existing habitats of importance, and that prioritises natural colonisation and management, before planting”.¹³¹
- 5.83 The draft Biodiversity Strategy promises a London-wide strategy for trees and woods, coordinating the variety of current community initiatives. A strategy is necessary. It is not enough simply to plant more trees – to do so without planning could well be to do harm both to buildings and to natural habitat. **More thought needs to be given on how to integrate tree planting into road, pavement and building design. We welcome the Mayor’s commitment to a tree strategy for London.**
- 5.84 We believe that the GLA can take a lead here in a very specific way. One key benefit of green space is that it can encourage a sense of civic pride and attachment. The cost of tree maintenance and damage to property has in recent years put pressure on both local authorities and householders. But trees can be planted in a way that minimises cost. **We believe that as part of a coordinated strategy the GLA should encourage a tree-planting scheme to capture the imagination for Londoners. We favour the offer of a tree to be planted for every child born in the capital. A minimal charge may help to offset some of the potential costs.** The GLA’s Architecture and Urbanism Unit is developing a

¹²⁹ Memorandum – Trees for London

¹³⁰ Minutes of Evidence 21 March 2001 3.37

¹³¹ Memorandum – English Nature

programme to plant one million more trees in London and we refer this idea to the Unit as a way of engaging Londoners in the scheme.

- 5.85 It is important in these environmental matters that the GLA family leads by example in this area. **We would encourage all land, and in particular open space, owned by either the GLA itself or the functional bodies¹³² to be audited for environmental and ecological quality, and for plans to be put in place to maximise the biodiversity of such land.** One example of good practice was LDA-owned land we visited in Havering which is to be developed as a Centre of Excellence for Manufacturing and Engineering but with green space provision included in the plans.

Playing fields

- 5.86 One of the benefits of greens space which we have quoted above is the provision of areas for play and recreation. Thus **protection of green space is a central part of any strategy which aims to enhance sporting activity. Indoor facilities are also important in London's sporting life but we must stress the continuing benefit of open air facilities for the physical and social well-being of the community.** We must therefore make special mention of the threat to playing fields and recreation space.
- 5.87 There was considerable concern at the loss of playing fields to development. Richmond Council highlighted a number of issues relating to sports facilities. They cite "the underlying pressure for redevelopment of some private sports grounds reflecting declining membership and the profitability for residential development".¹³³ Sport England also cite the declining membership of staff sports clubs and changing ownership of sports grounds through corporate takeovers and mergers. The result has been the desire of many owners to redevelop at least part of their playing fields.
- 5.88 There is a five-year limit on the need for local planning authorities to consult Sport England on development of disused playing fields. Sport England claim that owners have closed and locked grounds, then waiting for disuse and neglect to take their toll and the five-year period to elapse. The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) states that "Sites that are considered to be derelict are those that are incapable of beneficial use without treatment. Land that has been closed off to prevent access and has become overgrown and neglected is not derelict".¹³⁴ Sport England recommend an increase in the five-year period during which Sport England has to be consulted on development and that UDPs contain a requirement of evidence of any disused sports ground having been actively marketed for alternative sports or recreation use before any consideration is given to alternative

¹³² London Development Agency (LDA), London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA), Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), Transport for London (TfL)

¹³³ Memorandum – Richmond upon Thames Council

¹³⁴ Memorandum – National Playing Fields Association

- development proposals.¹³⁵ The developmental pressure on playing fields was shown by the fact that in London there were on average 50 planning applications a year for development on playing fields.¹³⁶
- 5.89 **The speculative neglect of London’s privately-owned playing fields is a scandal which must be urgently addressed. We recommend that UDPs require evidence of the active marketing of playing fields for alternative sport or recreation use before consideration is given to development.**
- 5.90 As with green spaces generally, playing fields have according to witnesses been the victim of cutbacks and neglect. Sport England claim, “This has an inevitable impact on maintenance and usage”.¹³⁷ There was also a continuing pressure for development. The London Playing Fields Society and Sport England both argued that current protection for playing fields as found in PPG17 was inadequate.
- 5.91 As stated earlier, a recurring theme in both oral and written evidence was the lack of information on playing field provision in London. The NPFA said that “A survey of recreation space is needed to identify the adequacy of existing provision”.¹³⁸ **We recommend that the proposed GLA green space database include details of recreation space in London.**
- 5.92 We must note that there can be tensions between recreational and environmental demands in managing recreational space. Both Sport England and the NPFA said that they supported astro-turfing.¹³⁹ NPFA regarding one astro-turf pitch as being the equivalent of two grass pitches in their assessment of recreational space provision. Recreational space need not be green space. We accept that astro-turfing and all-weather surfaces increase the potential usage of open space. We would be concerned, however, at significant replacement of grass by artificial surfaces on London’s playing fields. Apart from possible environmental loss, such changes could be used to justify a decrease in the amount of open space required in a given area and thus permit further development on open space.
- 5.93 All-surface playing areas are not the only threat to the ‘greenness’ of the traditional playing field. Richmond Borough Council also mentions floodlighting as something which can alter “the appearance and character of open space”.¹⁴⁰ Such floodlighting might have an impact on biodiversity, though the ecological effects of artificial lighting are not well understood. In addition to possible direct effects on certain species, there may be secondary impacts. For example, regular human use of an area at night as a result of artificial lighting might increase disturbance to habitats.

¹³⁵ Memorandum – Sport England

¹³⁶ Minutes of Evidence 23 May 2001 3.24

¹³⁷ Memorandum – Sport England

¹³⁸ Memorandum - NPFA

¹³⁹ Minutes of Evidence 23 May 2001 3.28

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum – Richmond upon Thames Council

- 5.94 Similarly, Richmond raised concerns at “the scale and intensity of indoor sports provisions/stadiums, including pressure for ancillary development”.¹⁴¹ The sporting bodies which gave evidence emphasised the importance of proper facilities to widen access and usage. The NPFA said that in general they support “the construction of new pavilions, club houses and changing rooms of an appropriate scale, improvements to school facilities, floodlighting, the provision of all-weather pitches, small car parks for the use of participants, landscaping, unobtrusive fencing and the redevelopment of brownfield land”.¹⁴² They were sensitive to the possible excessive light pollution from floodlighting and the danger of a loss of trees or other environmental features capable of providing a screen or habitat.
- 5.95 It must be accepted that the changing expectations of sporting facilities will mean some development and change to traditional playing fields. If this means increased usage, an end to the cycle of neglect and decline, and the retention of the greater part of the green space available then this should be welcomed. There is, however, also a danger of unnecessary development. There should be special protection for those playing fields which are of particular environmental importance and development should attempt to preserve and enhance green space wherever possible.

The Green Belt

- 5.96 Green Belt land enjoys the strongest protection against development under current planning provisions. We received evidence critical of the quality of the Green Belt and suggestions that such blanket protection should be reconsidered. The TCPA argued that the Green Belt was currently degraded.¹⁴³ Bromley Council mentioned the urban/rural fringe of the Green Belt and its more remote locations as affected by vandalism, unauthorised caravan parking, fly tipping and the dumping and burning of stolen cars. The Council also states that “Inappropriate uses taking place without planning permission even being applied for seems to be an inherent problem in the Green Belt and involves a significant staff input to keep under control”.¹⁴⁴ CPRE comment, “Much of London’s Green Belt countryside is badly degraded. Policies are needed to improve access and amenity and improve its countryside quality in terms of landscape, use, soil, nature conservation value etc. so as to increase the opportunities for enjoyment of this major resource for London”.¹⁴⁵ The National Trust stress that “there is a real need to look at ways in which the Green Belt can be brought back to life. At the moment it provides a passive resource for Londoners, and thought needs to be given to how it can become actively beneficial instead”.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Memorandum – Richmond upon Thames Council

¹⁴² Memorandum - NPFA

¹⁴³ Memorandum - TCPA

¹⁴⁴ Memorandum – Bromley Council

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum - CPRE

¹⁴⁶ Memorandum – National Trust

5.97 This debate over the Green Belt brings us back to the question of the relationship between quantitative and qualitative approaches to green space provision. In terms of the protection of greenfield sites from development the Green Belt has in general terms been an important success. Doug Ogilvie from Bromley Council, for example, told us that Bromley had been effective in its defence of Green Belt land. This remains, however, a negative achievement. The more strategic London-wide approach to green space which we advocate in this report requires positive use and benefits to derive from Green Belt provision. Instead we have a body of evidence pointing, at least in many areas, to neglect and degradation. The TCPA and the CPRE emphasised the importance of enhancing and protecting the Green Belt's biodiversity and environmental provision. Many witnesses mentioned the need for improved access.

Community Forests

5.98 We received evidence of how the Green Belt can be used well. We were particularly struck by evidence from two Community Forests, Thames Chase and Watling Chase. Twelve community forests were established on the borders of major cities in 1990. Thames Chase Community Forest told us that whilst much of the Green Belt offered little public benefit to Londoners, Community Forests breathed new life into the landscape with a forest providing recreational and environmental relief from the city.¹⁴⁷ So far at Thames Chase 234 hectares of new woodland have been created, 272 hectares of woodland have come into management, 341 hectares of land have become accessible, with volunteer days, new hedgerows and paths.¹⁴⁸ The Forest straddles the border of London (Barking, Dagenham and Havering, and outside London, Thurrock and Brentwood). There had previously been much low quality landscape since the area had been used for landfill and gravel extraction.¹⁴⁹

5.99 The Thames Chase memorandum listed some of the benefits to the Green Belt provided by the Community Forest. They emphasised the many benefits from woodland, both environmental and recreational. The introduction, moreover, of management to woodland was immensely important, "The majority of woodland in and around London suffers from little or no management ... Under-managed woodlands are under-used by people as they are afraid of their isolated nature. Re-introducing management gives people the confidence to re-use the woodland, and by the increased use they help to 'self-police' the area".¹⁵⁰ Accessibility to the area was enhanced with clearly signed green routes, "Wooded accessible landscapes at the edge of the city provide town dwellers with a destination on their doorstep ... They will reduce traffic flows out of the city at weekends and holidays. City dwellers, instead of fleeing the city, should be encouraged to travel locally to the wooded urban fringe, preferably by public transport".¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum – Thames Chase Community forest

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum – Thames Chase Community Forest

¹⁴⁹ Minutes of evidence 20 June 2001 3.19

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum – Thames Chase Community Forest

¹⁵¹ Memorandum – Thames Chase Community Forest

- 5.100 Both Thames Chase and Watling Chase Community Forests emphasised the importance of local community involvement in the establishment and running of the Forests.¹⁵² Capital funding had been available from such sources as Landfill Tax, Derelict Land Grant, the Capital Modernisation Fund and from negotiations with developers. The challenge was revenue funding.¹⁵³ Watling Chase Community Forest said that in the past they had been able to secure not only capital funding through planning gain but also endowments for the maintenance of the new open land. Recent planning decisions suggested that it was not reasonable to expect the developer to provide for maintenance costs in perpetuity and this would make securing endowments more difficult. They believed, however, that the economic and environmental benefits of such green space (including mitigation of water run-off) would mean it would still be possible to secure some level of maintenance funding.¹⁵⁴
- 5.101 Another welcome initiative in Green Belt regeneration has been in London Wildlife Trust (LWT) nature reserves. The Heritage Lottery Fund have recently given a large capital grant to the LWT for conservation, restoration and access on 13 of its nature reserves, most of which are within the Green Belt. The aim is to enhance the sites, achieve biodiversity targets and demonstrate best practice. The project also involves the development of a volunteer network and the encouragement of local communities in the management of their green spaces.¹⁵⁵ The LWT is to hold a conference on Green Belt management in 2002 as part of this project.

Development and the Green Belt

- 5.102 Some witnesses went, at least tentatively, further. Andrew Patterson from Watling Chase Community Forest refers to "the barrier that absolute adherence to Green Belt can create". Whilst the Green Belt offers many opportunities for the development of pocket parks to meet local needs, the revenue costs in particular make such provision unlikely. He points out that "For certain of these sites, the development of housing on a small proportion of the site could provide the financial means by which the green space is both implemented and managed. However, to allow this, the housing would have to be allowed within the Green Belt. Without such a process, it is likely that these sites will remain as derelict eyesores in close proximity to settlements. The danger in following this course is that each restoration achieved provides hope to another landowner elsewhere, and speculative purchases will continue".¹⁵⁶ The National Trust also mentions this debate and the proposition that well-landscaped commercial and residential developments can be seen as an improvement on the current situation in the Green Belt of sporadic developments such as quasi-agricultural or recreational structures. They cover, however, any possible dilution of the Green Belt with a multitude of

¹⁵² Memoranda – Thames Chase and Watling Chase Community Forests, Minutes of Evidence 20 June 2001 3.20-21

¹⁵³ Minutes of Evidence 20 June 2001 3.23, 3.27

¹⁵⁴ Memorandum – Watling Chase Community Forest

¹⁵⁵ Memorandum – Heritage Lottery Fund

¹⁵⁶ Memorandum – Watling Chase Community Forest

- caveats. They argue that development on Green Belt should only be considered when all alternative development has been assessed and discounted as more environmentally damaging. They also suggest consideration of extension of the Green Belt to make up for past losses.¹⁵⁷
- 5.103 We discuss later in this report the possible use of planning gain to develop the provision of green space in London. Should such a principle be applied to the Green Belt? Is the absolute protection offered by the Green Belt outmoded? We have no doubt that there needs to be a reinvigoration of the Green Belt. We believe, however, that it is too early to talk of removing the protection which it has enjoyed for so long. We are not convinced that decline can only be reversed through the admission of development. There are other avenues for regeneration of the Green Belt which must first be attempted before we give up a system of protection for green space which, however crudely, has served us well for 40 years.
- 5.104 **We strongly believe that a priority for the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy must be the revitalising of the Green Belt and a renewed vision of its purpose for London.**
- 5.105 **We welcome the forthcoming conference on Green Belt management in 2002 and recommend that it receive full support from the GLA.**
- 5.106 **We believe that the protection currently afforded to the Green Belt should remain unchanged.**
- 5.107 **We recommend that particular attention be given to increasing the accessibility of the Green Belt with effective transport links, signage and facilities.**
- 5.108 **We recommend that the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy contain specific proposals to enhance the biodiversity and ecological value of Green Belt land.**

¹⁵⁷ Memorandum – National Trust.

6. Creating Green Space

- 6.1 There is a danger of being too defensive in formulating a green space strategy for London, talking only of protection and mitigation. We must also envisage the creation of new tracts of green and open space in the city. 'Towards the London Plan' states that the SDS will "require boroughs to target specific areas of deficiency for the creation and enhancement of open space".¹⁵⁸ We have discussed above the ways to attract funding for new open space. Here we concentrate on how to assess the need for new open space and how planning provisions can be used to create open space.

Assessing the need for open space

- 6.2 Planning policy guidance states that local planning authorities should identify areas of public open space deficiency in their UDPs. This is clearly a prerequisite for judging whether and where in a borough more open space should be created. This section of the Report examines evidence received on open space deficiency in London, the standards used in the past to assess such deficiency, and how in the future open space needs should be identified.
- 6.3 Many of those who submitted evidence pointed to the uneven distribution of and unequal access to green space in London. WS Atkins Planning Consultants, the authors of the LPAC report 'Assessing Demand for Open Space in London', told us that "Public green open space for recreational and amenity purposes is unequally distributed within and between London Boroughs for reasons of history and geography".¹⁵⁹ London Wildlife Trust state, "Open space provision in London is not evenly distributed. Outer London is more fortunate than inner boroughs but even here there are significant differences. This inconsistency is often mirrored in other social problems and inequalities. Areas of London where open space is lacking are also likely to suffer from social deprivation, poor air quality and high crime. When these issues are tackled the provision of new, high-quality open space must also be addressed".¹⁶⁰
- 6.4 Other memoranda also emphasised the linkage between social deprivation and absence of green space. Croydon Council, for example, whilst acknowledging that it has considerable amounts of open space, adds that "the north of the borough has many attributes of inner London, including high-density housing and significant areas of Local Park deficiency" – "57 per cent of the population live within a deficiency area".¹⁶¹ Trees for London state that "Trees are like a wealth indicator in London – the more prosperous the area, the more trees you will see".¹⁶² In oral

¹⁵⁸ 'Towards the London Plan' para.2.97

¹⁵⁹ Memorandum – WS Atkins

¹⁶⁰ Memorandum – London Wildlife Trust

¹⁶¹ Memorandum – Croydon Council

¹⁶² Memorandum – Trees for London

evidence Richard Rogers told us that research suggested that houses with trees outside them sold for 17.5 per cent more than those without.¹⁶³ **The creation of new green spaces is a vital part of any attempt to reduce inequality in London and tackle social exclusion.**

- 6.5 There are standards to enable London's planners to identify deficiencies in open space provision and encourage in relevant areas efforts to create more open space. The historic standard has been the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) minimum standard for outdoor playing space of 2.43 hectares per 1,000 population (also known as the 'six acre standard').¹⁶⁴ Many London Boroughs continue to find this standard useful in their day-to-day protection of open space and strategic plans.¹⁶⁵ This quantitative approach is, however, of limited value. The LPAC report cites evidence that the fixed standard is "not responsive to changing demographic and socio-economic structures, changing lifestyles and patterns of mobility and leisure participation".¹⁶⁶ Not only does it fail to take proper account of the realities of current demand, it also lacks any assessment of the quality of the space in question. Furthermore, open space provision cannot be seen solely in terms of the provision of playing areas. As we have seen above, there are many other benefits associated with green space.
- 6.6 In addition to the NPFA standard, the majority of Boroughs have applied a 'Hierarchy of Publicly Accessible Open Space' which incorporates qualitative guidelines as well as quantitative measures. This Hierarchy was originally formulated in the Greater London Development Plan (GLDP) and later revised by LPAC. The Hierarchy divides open space into regional parks and open spaces; metropolitan parks; district parks; local parks; small local parks and open spaces; and linear open spaces. For each category there is a description of defining characteristics and a statement of the approximate size and distance from home.
- 6.7 WS Atkins comment on the Hierarchy that "whilst it more accurately reflects the way people use open space in relation to distance, it does not take into account other factors that will influence demand, notably quality of open space, population structure, the needs of different groups and accessibility factors".¹⁶⁷ In both the LPAC report and their memorandum, WS Atkins conclude "The use of standards to assess demand for open space is of limited relevance in the London context".¹⁶⁸ They added that "There is a need to reflect local characteristics and the differences between Inner and Outer London in terms of the definition of open space, the relevance of standards and the ability to meet them ... The rigid application of standards to determine the level of provision of open space is inappropriate given London's high density of development, the uneven distribution of open space and variations in the characteristics of Boroughs and constraints on the provision of new areas of open space".¹⁶⁹ They recommend "alternative approaches to demand

¹⁶³ Minutes of Evidence 23 May 2001 3.14

¹⁶⁴ 'Assessing Demand for Open Space in London' LPAC February 2000 para.3.5

¹⁶⁵ 'Assessing Demand for Open Space in London' LPAC February 2000 p.9

¹⁶⁶ 'Assessing Demand for Open Space in London' LPAC February 2000 p.8

¹⁶⁷ Memorandum – WS Atkins

¹⁶⁸ Memorandum – WS Atkins

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum – WS Atkins

- assessment” and for greater attention to be paid to issues of quality rather than quantity. Doug Ogilvie from Bromley Council also thought assessment of open space provision should differ between Inner and Outer London.¹⁷⁰ Alan Barker from the Urban Parks Forum said that measuring open space per population did not work; quality and use were far better guides. This included targeting certain population groups.¹⁷¹
- 6.8 What does this mean in practice? WS Atkins state that “User surveys are perhaps the most accurate method by which demand for open space can be determined”.¹⁷² They make the important point that any forecast of demand needs to consider need, changing population and changing aspirations. They state that if standards are to contribute effectively to open space planning “they must form part of a broader policy, implementation and management framework that assesses issues of quality, socio-economic characteristics, accessibility, sustainability, ecology and the changing needs/demands for recreation”.¹⁷³
- 6.9 We have spent time summarising the content of WS Atkins memorandum and LPAC report because the assessment of deficiency or surplus of green space is crucial to both green space creation and protection. We also consider that a crude application of standards does not reflect the peculiarities and constraints of London, nor take account of key issues such as quality, sustainability, diversity and accessibility. **We recommend that the SDS contain clear guidance on a more qualitative and responsive set of criteria for the assessment of green space provision.** At present one can theoretically be provided with an appropriate amount of green space on the basis of the LPAC Hierarchy, when in fact the space might be very difficult to access by public transport, or be without any opportunity for peace and quiet, or be vandalised and unsafe, to give just a few examples. We would thus expect such new criteria to exert pressure on local authorities to improve the quality of existing green space and pursue vigorously opportunities to create new green space.
- 6.10 Open space provision must also be assessed from a London-wide perspective. In another LPAC report, ‘Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London’, we read that “few UDPs seek to address open space deficiencies in a strategic, London-wide context”.¹⁷⁴ There was not “much evidence of cross-Borough co-operation in the creation of new open spaces such as metropolitan parks”.¹⁷⁵
- 6.11 The LPAC report ‘Assessing Demand for Open Space in London’ admits that “the Planning Inspectorate continue to place importance on the justification of policies to protect open space in objective and quantitative terms”.¹⁷⁶ We do not envisage the new criteria for open space assessment doing without standards altogether. Standards can be vital warning lights indicating a level below which there is a

¹⁷⁰ Minutes of Evidence 20 June 2001 3.3-7

¹⁷¹ Minutes of Evidence 13 June 2001 4.37

¹⁷² Memorandum – WS Atkins

¹⁷³ Memorandum – WS Atkins

¹⁷⁴ ‘Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London’ LPAC March 2000 p.3

¹⁷⁵ ‘Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London’ LPAC March 2000 p.6

¹⁷⁶ ‘Assessing Demand for Open Space in London’ LPAC February 2000 p.11

presumption that the varied demands for green space cannot be properly met. **Consideration should be given to inclusion within the SDS of quantitative standards which distinguish between functions of green space, which also attempt to capture its quality/condition, and which are responsive to the realities of inner and outer London and cross-borough-boundary provision.**

- 6.12 In moving to more complex methods for the assessment of open space provision we must consider the resources available for the proposed assessment policies. The LPAC report 'Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London' noted that few Boroughs had yet calculated deficiency areas even on the 1992 revised methodology "probably because of the resources required".¹⁷⁷ We refer to the sections earlier on the information deficit and the proposed London Parks Forum as a body to oversee a comprehensive survey of London's open space. **We recommend that the London research project for open space either undertake or significantly assist in the borough assessments of open space deficiency. This would ensure consistency of policy and approach, and a cross-Borough strategic vision for London's open space provision.**

Creating new green space

- 6.13 We have discussed above the creation of green space through green links and green corridors, which link open space provision to the greening of transport routes and the promotion of sustainable journeys across London. We must also consider what opportunity exists for additional and larger-scale open space creation, particularly given the competing pressure for housing development.
- 6.14 The LPAC report 'Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London' makes clear that for much of London, particularly the inner boroughs, the potential for creating new open space is severely constrained. Case studies revealed that the vast majority of new open space came "from just four sources: private open space; redundant industrial sites; rail or highway lands; and former power or gas works sites".¹⁷⁸ Much of this land, however, would be classified as brownfield site and thus be a priority for housing development. To use it for new open space would probably be to place even more development pressure on green space elsewhere. The decline in manufacturing industry in London from the 1960s has created open space opportunities, albeit a finite resource. **The London Parks Forum should examine what opportunities, if any, still exist for the strategic provision of new open space, particularly in areas of deficiency, from land once used for manufacturing or utilities purposes.**
- 6.15 One of the main sources for the provision of open space in the future will be new developments. We discussed water run-off above and there certainly are environmental and design benefits to the provision of high quality open space within new housing developments. The TCPA felt, however, that "Provision of

¹⁷⁷ 'Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London' LPAC March 2000 p.7

¹⁷⁸ 'Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London' LPAC March 2000 p.4

green spaces will rarely be popular with housing developers (either in the private or charitable sectors) but nonetheless remains vital to the aspirations of Londoners". They concluded that "local plans should require inclusion of pocket parks, squares and other innovative public spaces within new developments".¹⁷⁹ We saw examples of such an approach, linking development and green space provision, at the Edward Woods Estate, and at Imperial Wharf in Hammersmith & Fulham.

- 6.16 The main vehicle to effect such open space provision will probably be the use of section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. Section 106 agreements impose obligations on developers as part of an agreed planning application. In the LPAC report case studies it emerged that "By far the largest source of capital funding for the creation of open space was found to be developer contributions via s106 type agreements (70%)".¹⁸⁰ The concern of many boroughs, as we saw when discussing funding, was a fear that operational costs might become a burden on budgets and the LPAC report considered that some offers of capital funding for new open space have been rejected for this reason.
- 6.17 We have raised earlier the question of whether s106 agreements can also be effectively used for maintenance. **Innovative solutions to maintenance and revenue funding are the key to the confident creation of new open space in the future.** Concerns were also expressed in the report of the Urban Task Force at the bureaucratic delays involved in securing s106 agreements. This must also be addressed. But **we remain convinced that planning gain will be central to green space creation in the capital and consider this to be an important opportunity to develop holistic design for London, integrating residential, economic and green space needs.**
- 6.18 **We reiterate our support of the use of s106 agreements to create new open space and recommend that all Borough UDPs explicitly link s106 agreements to the meeting of open space deficiencies.**
- 6.19 A related issue which has come to the attention of the London Assembly is the lack of burial space in London. This is not the place to consider this matter in detail but it is important to note it as a matter of open space provision, particularly important for people of certain faiths. Discussions have taken place between members of the London Assembly Environment Committee and representatives of London's faith communities to consider how best to address this question.

¹⁷⁹ Memorandum - TCPA

¹⁸⁰ 'Creating & Enhancing Open Space in London' LPAC March 2000 p.5

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 For too long the protection of green space in London has been reactive, with little political commitment to its value and to the enhancement of its condition and use. The threats to London's green space, both its quantity and quality, are serious and real. The formation of a London-wide strategic body, the GLA, is an opportunity to reverse past drift and decline and to effect a 'green renaissance' in the city. We have identified two key vehicles in this process – the Spatial Development Strategy and a London Parks Forum. But the reviving of London's green space cannot be reduced to instrumental or technocratic solutions, however useful. Most importantly, Londoners themselves must get involved. Only when London properly values, supports and uses its green space will it be able to protect it effectively.

Annex A - Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

(square brackets indicate action point and relevant body)

Introduction - a Green Space Strategy?

The need for a strategy

1. The SDS must contain a comprehensive and coherent London-wide policy which identifies the benefits of green space, which sets a planning framework to ensure effective protection and enhancement, and which provides the essential content for Borough open space strategies. (Para 1.6) [Action: Mayor]

The scrutiny process

2. The open space of London's waterways, private gardens, city farms and 'green buildings' are all important to London's design, biodiversity and liveability. They can all have their quality and accessibility enhanced. We welcome work already done on the integration of these issues into London-wide strategies and encourage further consideration of how they can contribute to a sustainable city. The Environment Committee of the London Assembly may well wish to pursue some of these matters in greater detail in the future. (Para 1.10)

The Benefits of Green Space

Economic development and regeneration

3. Relevant programmes should be including green space as an essential aspect of neighbourhood regeneration. Such space can significantly enhance quality of life, promote community spirit and attract business and residents to an area. To miss green space out, to allow what exists to remain neglected, is quite possibly to undermine the otherwise good work being done in neighbourhood renewal. (Para. 2.7)
4. We welcome the work already done in London to link the benefits of economic regeneration and green space provision, particularly through the work of the London Development Agency and the Single Regeneration Budget. (Para. 2.8)
5. We invite the London Development Agency to respond to this Report with an account of how the availability and use of green space are considered in their regeneration planning. (Para. 2.9) [Action: London Development Agency]

Sport, recreation, culture and tourism

6. We welcome the proposal contained in the Mayor's draft Biodiversity Strategy for the cultural mapping of green spaces. (Para. 2.14)
7. The Assembly still awaits the Mayor's draft Culture Strategy. It should contain a clear programme to make London's green space central to the city's cultural life. This should include proposals:

- to encourage the sporting and recreational use of green space
- to recognise and maintain those green spaces which form an important part of London's cultural heritage
- to revive the use of green space for cultural and educational activities, paying particular regard to the diversity of London's population
- to promote with the London Tourist Board and other relevant bodies greater knowledge, access to and use of London's green spaces by tourists
- to recognise that the quiet enjoyment of green space is itself a cultural activity which should be protected and developed. (Para. 2.15) [Action: Mayor]

Health

8. We endorse the recommendation of the Rapid Review of the Health Benefits of Green Spaces, that the London Health Commission take forward policy on the health benefits of green space. This should involve both epidemiological research and also practical recommendations as to how the design, facilities and activities available in parks can be made conducive to good health. (Para. 2.16) [Action: London Health Commission]

Environmental and biodiversity benefits

9. We expect the Mayor's Noise Strategy to include an assessment of the impact of noise pollution on London's green space and proposals to reduce noise levels and mitigate impact so that there is sufficient peaceful green space in London. (Para. 2.19) [Action: Mayor]

Mitigation of water run-off

10. We recommend that the SDS contain as supplementary guidance a list of open space benefits to act as a framework for Borough planning authorities in assessing the adequacy of open space provision. (Para. 2.21) [Action: Mayor]

The Lack of Information

11. There is no up-to-date and authoritative record of London's green space. This is a shocking deficiency for a city which aims to be a beacon in urban planning and design. (Para. 3.1)
12. We doubt whether a ten year rolling programme to survey London's open spaces is frequent and sensitive enough to monitor change and plan interventions in a timely and effective way. We recommend that the Biodiversity Strategy revise the timescale of the survey. (Para. 3.8) [Action: Mayor]
13. We believe London needs a comprehensive and rolling survey of all aspects of London's open space, and that the Mayor's proposals for a biodiversity survey be integrated into such a wider work. (Para. 3.9)

14. We welcome the GLA's work to continue and develop the information gathering of the London Development Monitoring System and the London Ecology Unit. There should be a London Open Space Research Project, supported by the GLA and other stakeholders. The Research Project should:
- Conduct a comprehensive survey of all green space in London, including details of size, ownership, funding, accessibility, condition, biodiversity, functions and relevant open space strategic plans
 - Require notification by the boroughs of all planning applications for development on green space
 - Maintain a database of green space information accessible to interested parties and the general public either free of charge or at affordable cost.
- (Para. 3.10) [Action: Mayor]
15. We recommend the SDS contain guidance to establish consistency of definition of green space across all the London Boroughs. (Para. 3.12) [Action: Mayor]

Threats to Green Space

16. The loss of green space is frequently preceded by deterioration in its quality. (Para. 4.2)
17. We deplore the purposeful neglect of green space in order to increase the chance of its development. We are also aware that unintentionally local authorities might follow the same route. We believe that the Planning Inspectorate in its consideration of planning applications should identify the intentional neglect of green space and presume against granting development in such circumstances. We recommend the SDS consider this matter. (Para. 4.3) [Action: Mayor]

Dog fouling

18. Too many green spaces in London are nothing but dog toilets. (Para. 4.12)

Defending and Enhancing London's Green Space

Protection from development

19. We welcome the Mayor's commitment to defend Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation from development. (Para. 5.4)
20. We recommend that there be a presumption against development on open space where an open space deficiency has been identified. In cases where development is to be permitted we believe there should be an obligation to maximise open space provision within the development or for there to be compensating and high quality open space creation on a different site. (Para. 5.5) [Action: Mayor and Boroughs]

The management and usage of green spaces

21. The SDS should require all London boroughs to have in place an open space strategy. We welcome the proposal to draft a good practice guide to assist boroughs in the formulation of these strategies. We recommend that the proposed London Parks Forum be used for boroughs to compare and share ideas before such strategies are finalised. (Para. 5.10) [Action: Mayor and Boroughs]
22. We recommend that a London Parks Forum be established with the support of the GLA to bring all local authorities and other park management bodies together to share best practice in the planning, funding and managing of green space in London. Though we use the phrase 'London Parks Forum' we stress that we envisage all of London's open space falling within its remit. (Para. 5.14) [Action: GLA and stakeholders]
23. We believe that the proposed Forum should act as a focus for the pooling of GLA and borough resources to fund a London research project for open space. This would ensure that the open space information deficit is addressed, with considerable economies of scale, and consistency of policy and method. (Para. 5.15) [Action: GLA and stakeholders]
24. The London Parks Forum would:
 - establish partnerships for green space renewal
 - discuss the London-wide and cross-Borough planning of green space provision
 - act as a green space 'champion' for London
 - encourage research
 - broker grants and sponsorship schemes
 - campaign on key issues.(Para. 5.16)
25. 'A Green Space Conference for London', organised by the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission, is to take place in February 2002. We consider this conference to be an ideal opportunity to bring all interested parties together, including the GLA, Boroughs, environmental organisations, other owners of open space such as the utility companies and the Royal Parks Agency, user groups and business representatives, to discuss the format and remit of a London Parks Forum. (Para. 5.17)
26. Details of its organisation and resourcing would obviously need to be agreed amongst those involved and we envisage some pooling of support and funds. We do, however, recommend that the GLA as London's strategic authority take a lead in the establishment of the London Parks Forum, perhaps supporting a small secretariat for the body. (Para. 5.18) [Action: GLA]
27. We believe the London Parks Forum should include a section dedicated to promoting and sharing information on allotments. (Para. 5.19)

The staffing of parks

28. We look forward to the Best Value regime encouraging a more effective use of resources and setting of performance measures in the management and staffing of open spaces. We recommend that the Audit Commission consider conducting a thematic study of open spaces. (Para. 5.22) [Action: Audit Commission]
29. The London Development Agency must develop a green skills strategy which addresses urgently the current skills shortage in London. (Para. 5.24) [Action: London Development Agency]

Security, usage and design

30. We recommend that the proposed London Parks Forum have as a priority the development of ideas on the security of green spaces, including the use of parks wardens, effective design and involvement of the local community. (Para. 5.26) [Action: GLA and stakeholders]
31. Dog fouling is an issue where we need the London-wide sharing of good practice in prevention, not just for our larger municipal parks but also for those small green spaces, often near housing, which so rapidly deteriorate into dog toilets unusable by the rest of the community. (Para. 5.28)

Accessibility

32. If we have no knowledge of the transport accessibility of green space, nor any specific proposals to address deficiencies, we cannot arrive at any assessment of the adequacy of green space provision in London. We recommend that the proposed GLA audit of green space in London include assessment of transport accessibility. We also recommend that on the basis of that assessment the Mayor amend his Transport Strategy to deliver improved public transport provision and accessibility to green space. (Para. 5.34) [Action: Mayor]

Green Chains and Corridors

33. We consider green chains to be a vital contribution to the strategic network of open space in London, protecting and enhancing the open space itself and improving accessibility and usage. (Para. 5.36)
34. We recommend that the Mayor set out a clear process of consultation, with timescales, to motivate the Boroughs to identify green pedestrian and cycle routes and links. (Para. 5.37) [Action: Mayor]
35. We recommend that the SDS contain both strategic guidance on the creation of green chains and other green transport links for cyclists and pedestrians across London, and an expectation that Boroughs in their UDPs identify the potential for such linkages and develop the concept. (Para. 5.38) [Action: Mayor]
36. We applaud the work being done by such bodies as South East Green Chain Working Party, the Green Corridor Partnership and the Environment Agency to

establish green routes through London. We believe this is vital to increase access to and usage of green space. (Para. 5.42)

The Parks of London - a strategic vision

37. We recommend that the GLA conduct a review in partnership with the Royal Parks Agency and other interested parties of the current planning, design and use of the Royal Parks and palaces of central London, with the aim of establishing a single and agreed vision for the preservation, enhancement and enjoyment of this world heritage standard stock of green space. (Para. 5.46) [Action: GLA and Royal Parks Agency]
38. We recommend that the GLA be given a statutory role in the planning and management of London's Royal Parks, Lee Valley Regional Park and other regional parks. We envisage this involving representation on management boards, rights of consultation on matters of significance, and a requirement that such parks be planned consistently with the principles of the Mayor's Strategies, in particular the Spatial Development Strategy. (Para. 5.48) [Action: Government]

Consultation and community involvement

39. We believe local participation in the management of green spaces is vital if they are to survive and prosper in the future. This is particularly true for those smaller green spaces so often overlooked. (Para. 5.51)
40. We recommend that user assessment and consultation conducted by local authorities pay particular attention to the views and needs of minority and vulnerable groups and consider how to increase their usage of green space. (Para. 5.54) [Action: Boroughs]
41. Open space strategies should include measures to raise awareness of local green spaces in the community. (Para. 5.55)
42. We recommend that children and young people be included in user surveys and represented in park user groups. (Para. 5.56) [Action: Boroughs]

Funding

43. Local open space strategies should ensure equitable and comprehensive planning and funding for the whole green space stock. (Para. 5.59) [Action: Boroughs]
44. Capital funding applications should be required by funding bodies to demonstrate that the proposal is part of a coherent strategy designed over time to meet the resource needs of all the applicant's green space stock. (Para. 5.59) [Action: Funding bodies]
45. We recommend the sharing of best practice within London on the securing of external funding for green spaces. Not all authorities are equally skilled in this area and it is a matter to which local authorities should give attention when considering their staffing and expertise. (Para. 5.61) [Action: Boroughs]

46. We recommend that the New Opportunities Fund and its Award Partners develop further the assistance and advice offered to smaller bodies interested in bidding for funds, including direct advice on applications and effective feedback on bids. (Para. 5.64) [Action: New Opportunities Fund]

Revenue funding

47. The London Parks Forum should play an important role in spreading best practice in effective and sustainable green space expenditure. (Para. 5.69) [Action: GLA and stakeholders]
48. We believe that there are opportunities for private sector funding for public open space through sponsorship or planning gain which have still to be explored. We do not believe this need compromise the distinctive and non-commercial character of London's green spaces. We recommend that the Mayor organise meetings between London's business community, the boroughs and other interested parties to consider how to involve the private sector in the support and funding of green space in London. (Para. 5.71) [Action: Mayor and stakeholders]
49. It is important that revenue raised through the staging of events is put back into the parks service, with particular attention to those green spaces otherwise neglected. It is also important that such events are planned sensitively so as to avoid detrimental effects to any valuable environmental or heritage assets. We believe that increased park usage is more likely to result from events designed for and aimed at the local community. (Para. 5.73)
50. We recommend that the Government provide clear advice on the use of planning gain for the funding of the ongoing costs of green space. (Para. 5.74) [Action: Government]

The Environment and Biodiversity

51. Where brownfield sites are to be developed measures must be put in place "to encourage the retention of existing wildlife features in new development and the appropriate mitigation of any loss". Indeed there should be a policy to increase the environmental value of brownfield sites which are to be developed. We consider the GLA should provide guidance as to how planning gain can be used to this end. (Para. 5.78) [Action: GLA and Boroughs]
52. We believe that there may be occasions where what is technically a brownfield site may in fact offer a wider range of benefits, including significant biodiversity, to a community than an alternative greenfield site. There should be encouragement in the SDS and local UDPs for the greenfield site to be developed in such cases with the brownfield site henceforth being considered a greenfield site for protection purposes and effectively managed for the local community. (Para. 5.80) [Action: Mayor and Boroughs]

53. More thought needs to be given on how to integrate tree planting into road, pavement and building design. We welcome the Mayor's commitment to a tree strategy for London. (Para. 5.83)
54. We believe that as part of a coordinated strategy the GLA should encourage a tree-planting scheme to capture the imagination for Londoners. We favour the offer of a tree to be planted for every child born in the capital. A minimal charge may help to offset some of the potential costs. (Para. 5.84) [Action: GLA]
55. We would encourage all land, and in particular open space, owned by either the GLA itself or the functional bodies to be audited for environmental and ecological quality, and for plans to be put in place to maximise the biodiversity of such land. (Para. 5.85) [Action: GLA and Functional Bodies]

Playing fields

56. Protection of green space is a central part of any strategy which aims to enhance sporting activity. Indoor facilities are also important in London's sporting life but we must stress the continuing benefit of open air facilities for the physical and social well-being of the community. (Para. 5.86)
57. The speculative neglect of London's privately-owned playing fields is a scandal which must be urgently addressed. We recommend that UDPs require evidence of the active marketing of playing fields for alternative sport or recreation use before consideration is given to development. (Para. 5.89) [Action: Boroughs]
58. We recommend that the proposed GLA green space database include details of recreation space in London. (Para. 5.91) [Action: GLA]

The Green Belt

59. We strongly believe that a priority for the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy must be the revitalising of the Green Belt and a renewed vision of its purpose for London. (Para. 5.104) [Action: Mayor]
60. We welcome the forthcoming conference on Green Belt management in 2002 and recommend that it receive full support from the GLA. (Para. 5.105)
61. We believe that the protection currently afforded to the Green Belt should remain unchanged. (Para. 5.106)
62. We recommend that particular attention be given to increasing the accessibility of the Green Belt with effective transport links, signage and facilities. (Para. 5.107) [Action: Stakeholders]
63. We recommend that the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy contain specific proposals to enhance the biodiversity and ecological value of Green Belt land. (Para. 5.108) [Action: Mayor]

Creating Green Space

Assessing the need for open space

64. The creation of new green spaces is a vital part of any attempt to reduce inequality in London and tackle social exclusion. (Para. 6.4)
65. We recommend that the SDS contain clear guidance on a more qualitative and responsive set of criteria for the assessment of green space provision. (Para. 6.9) [Action: Mayor]
66. Consideration should be given to inclusion within the SDS of quantitative standards which distinguish between functions of green space, which also attempt to capture its quality/condition, and which are responsive to the realities of inner and outer London and cross-borough-boundary provision. (Para. 6.11) [Action: Mayor]
67. We recommend that the London research project for open space either undertake or significantly assist in the borough assessments of open space deficiency. This would ensure consistency of policy and approach, and a cross-Borough strategic vision for London's open space provision. (Para. 6.12) [Action: GLA]

Creating new green space

68. The London Parks Forum should examine what opportunities, if any, still exist for the strategic provision of new open space, particularly in areas of deficiency, from land once used for manufacturing or utilities purposes. (Para. 6.14) [Action: GLA and stakeholders]
69. Innovative solutions to maintenance and revenue funding are the key to the confident creation of new open space in the future. (Para. 6.17)
70. We remain convinced that planning gain will be central to green space creation in the capital and consider this to be an important opportunity to develop holistic design for London, integrating residential, economic and green space needs. (Para. 6.17)
71. We reiterate our support of the use of s106 agreements to create new open space and recommend that all Borough UDPs explicitly link s106 agreements to the meeting of open space deficiencies. (Para. 6.18) [Action: Boroughs]

Annex B - Evidentiary Hearings, site visits and written evidence

1. Evidentiary Hearings

Evidentiary Hearing 1, 14 March 2001

Witnesses:

Clive Fox - Director, Groundwork Regional Office for London and SE England

Ken Worpole - Consultant

Judy Hillman - Consultant

Mathew Frith - Urban Adviser, English Nature

Valerie Woodfield - Countryside Officer, Countryside Agency

Evidentiary Hearing 2, 21 March 2001

Witnesses:

Ralph Gaines - Director, London Wildlife Trust

Pat Tawn - Public Health Programme, King's Fund

Drew Bennellick - Regional Landscape Architect, English Heritage

Alan Byrne - Regional planner, English Heritage

Michael Wale - Honorary Secretary, Acton Gardening Association

Graham Simmonds - Chief Executive, Trees for London

Evidentiary Hearing 3, 17 May 2001

Witnesses:

William Weston - Chief Executive, Royal Parks Agency

Mike Fitt - Director of Parks, Royal Parks Agency

Terry Farrell - Architect, Terry Farrell & Partners

Jennifer Adams - Director of Open Spaces, Corporation of London

Dave Perkins - Head of Parks, Lee Valley Regional Park

Evidentiary Hearing 4, 23 May 2001

Witnesses:

Martin Simmons - Head of Development & Planning, Greater London Authority

Peter Durrans - Development Manager, Sport England

Richard Rogers - Richard Rogers Partnership

Evidentiary Hearing 5, 13 June 2001

Witnesses:

Alan Barber - Director, Urban Parks Forum

Fiona Sim - Green Corridor Programme Manager, London Borough of Hounslow

Martin Hyde - Parks Regeneration Manager, London Borough of Lewisham

Helen Earner - Policy Adviser, New Opportunities Fund

Eilish McGuinness - Senior Grants Officer, Heritage Lottery Fund

Evidentiary Hearing 6, 20 June 2001

Witnesses:

Doug Ogilvie - Planning Officer, London Borough of Bromley
John Meehan - Director, Thames Chase Community Forest
Gideon Amos - Director, Town & Country Planning Association
Richard Bourn - Director, Council for the Protection of Rural England London Office

2. Site Visits

Site Visit 1, 14 May 2001

Islington:

Caledonian Park

Judith Humphries and members of the Caledonian Park Users Group
Andrew Bedford - London Borough of Islington

Hackney:

Daubney Green, Wick Village Community Garden, St John's Churchyard and Wick Wood

Danielle Byrne and officers from Groundwork Hackney
John Zerasci - London Borough of Hackney

Tower Hamlets:

Mile End Park and Victoria Park

Lorraine Hart - Envirotrust
Ron Kane - Park Manager, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Site Visit 2, 2 July 2001

Havering:

Rainham Marshes and Development of Ford Dagenham Estate

Roger McFarland and Mike Robinson - Directors, London Borough of Havering
Chris Corrigan and Mark Underhill - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Dennis Jacobs - Manager, Ford Motor Company
David Makepeace - Chief Executive, Heart of Thames Gateway
Andy Butler - Heart of Thames Gateway

Greenwich:

Greenwich Park, Woolwich Common and Oxleas Wood

Derrick Spurr - Park Manager, London Borough of Greenwich
Aidan Cunningham - Green Chain Project Officer, London Borough of Greenwich

Site Visit 3, 16 July 2001

Merton:

Raynes Park

Gary Hunt and members of the Raynes Park and West Barnes Residents Association
O Duyile - London Borough of Merton

Hounslow:

Heathrow M4 Spur Road, Holloway Lane, Sam Philips Recreation Ground, Cranford Park, Heston Farm Estate, Osterley Fields, Gillette Corner Park and Chiswick Roundabout

Fiona Sim - Green Corridor Programme Manager, London Borough of Hounslow

Hammersmith & Fulham:

Norland North Park/Edward Woods Estate and Imperial Wharf Development

Chris Hannington - Housing Services, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
Michael Page - Countryside in Partnership
John Herron - St George plc

3. Written Evidence

Written evidence was received from the following organisations:

Acton Gardening Association
WS Atkins
Bromley Council
Caledonian Park Users Group
Camberwell Society
Capel Manor College
Council for the Protection of Rural England (London)
Corporation of London
Countryside Agency
Croydon Council
English Heritage
English Nature
English Partnerships
Environment Agency
Terry Farrell (architect)
Ford Motor Company
Friends of Richmond Park
Friends of the Royal Parks Forum
Garden History Society
Greater London Authority (Policy & Partnerships Directorate)

Green Chain Working Party (South East London)
Groundwork Hackney
Groundwork Regional Office for London and SE England
Groundwork Southwark
Mrs L Hales (member of the public)
Harrow Council
Havering Council
Heritage Lottery Fund
Judy Hillman (Urban Affairs Consultant)
Hounslow Council (Green Corridor Partnership)
Islington Council
Pat Keith (member of the public)
King's Fund
Landscape Design Associates
Liverpool City Council
Michael Wiseman (member of the public)
National House Builders Council
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
New Opportunities Fund
Nicole Bechirian (member of the public)
Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
Lewisham Council
Local Government Association
London Cycling Campaign
London Playing Fields Society
London Wildlife Trust
J Mayfield (member of the public)
Metropolitan Public Gardens Association
Vic Morgan (member of the public)
National Playing Fields Association
National Trust
Open Spaces Society
Ramblers Association
Raynes Park & West Barnes Residents Association
Regents Park Conservation Area Advisory Committee
Richmond Council
Richard Rogers (Richard Rogers Partnership)
Royal Parks Agency
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
St George plc
Austin Smith (member of the public)
Sport England
Sustrans
Thames Chase Community Forest
Town & Country Planning Association
Trees for London
Urban Parks Forum
Watling Chase Community Forest

Wimbledon Common & Putney Heath Conservators
Womens Environment Network

Copies of the written evidence that we have gathered during the course of this investigation can be inspected by the public during normal office hours at the GLA Offices, Romney House, Marsham Street, London SW1P 3PY. Contact: Richard Davies, Assistant Scrutiny Manager, on 0207 983 4199.

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ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਜਾਂ ਕੋਈ ਤੁਹਾਡਾ ਜਾਣ-ਪਛਾਣ ਵਾਲਾ ਇਸ ਰਿਪੋਰਟ ਦਾ ਅਗਜੈਕਟਿਵ ਖੁਲਾਸਾ ਅਤੇ ਸੁਝਾਵਾਂ ਦੀ ਨਕਲ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਵਿਚ, ਬ੍ਰੇਅਲ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਮੁਫਤ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿ੍ਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ 020 7983 4100 ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ assembly.translations@london.gov.uk ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਈ-ਮੇਲ ਕਰੋ।

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Assembly Scrutiny: the Principles

The powers of the London Assembly include power to investigate and report on decisions and actions of the Mayor, or on matters relating to the principal purposes of the Greater London Authority, and on any other matters which the Assembly considers to be of importance to Londoners. In the conduct of scrutiny and investigation the Assembly abides by a number of principles –

- scrutinies aim to recommend action to achieve improvements;
- scrutinies are conducted with objectivity and independence;
- scrutinies examine all aspects of the Mayor's strategies;
- scrutinies consult widely, having regard to issues of timeliness and cost;
- scrutinies are conducted in a constructive and positive manner;
- scrutinies are conducted with an awareness of the need to spend taxpayers money wisely and well.

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