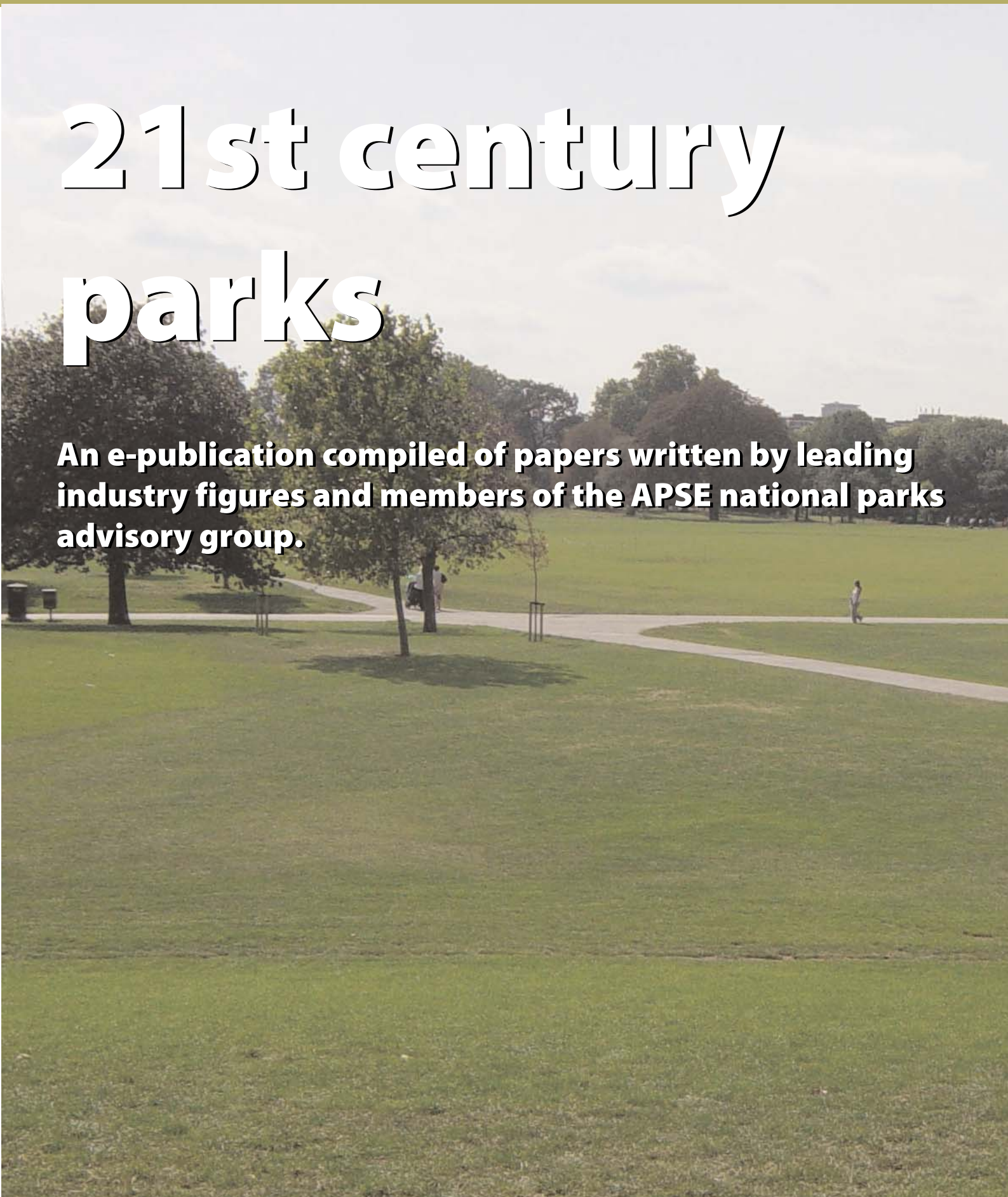
apse membership resources

21st century parks



An e-publication compiled of papers written by leading industry figures and members of the APSE national parks advisory group.

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Introduction

It is estimated that funding for parks and urban green spaces reduced between 1979 and 2000 by £1.3 billion. This was partly due to the effects of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) and also because parks is a non-statutory service but whatever the reason it ultimately led to the wasting away of the skills base and a perception that the work was low-skilled, mundane, physical, menial and boring. This trend has now been halted but the trend of climate change is also beginning to impact on parks services and it is likely that this will increase in the coming years.

Against this background there has more recently been a focus on enhancing parks and green spaces through initiatives such as the Green flag scheme. In particular, many bodies are demonstrating how parks link into providing leisure opportunities, as well as environmental and social objectives such as regeneration, neighbourhoods and social inclusion. Through bodies such as the national lottery significant capital investment has been delivered to many Parks but despite this many local authorities are still struggling to find continued funding to improve parks and maintain them to a good standard in the longer term. However, the greater public priority for investment has enabled local authorities to bring about refurbishment and the renewal of green spaces. The challenge for green space managers in future is to think more imaginatively about both service delivery and sources of funding as was highlighted in the CABE Space publication "Paying for Parks".

The National Audit Office (NAO) report published in March 2006 on 'enhancing urban green space' highlighted the importance of urban green space in the eyes of the public with 91% believe it is worthwhile spending money in this area. The report also gives an indication in terms of budgets and is a useful tool in outlining the essential nature of performance management especially when it is considered that despite spending almost £700 million on Parks this is only a small fraction of the total £36 billion budget spent by local authorities. As a result it also recommended that more needs to be done to identify the most efficient and effective ways of sustaining green space and that "local authorities should use the reliable data on costs to embed efficiency measures such as APSE Performance Networks in their management of green space".

This publication outlines through case studies the major issues concerning parks, grounds maintenance and horticultural services in the next 2 to 5 years. The papers are from leading figures in the industry and the APSE Parks and Grounds Maintenance Advisory Group Network. The accompanying papers give views which may not necessarily be the view of APSE but will hopefully stimulate further debate.

APSE would like to thank those who have contributed to this publication.

Cllr Brian O'Hare,
Knowsley MBC and Chair, APSE parks and grounds maintenance advisory group network

Climate change, horticulture and parks

Author: Guy Barters, Head of Horticultural Advisory Services at the Royal Horticultural Society outlines the impact climate change is having and may have on parks and horticulture.

Use of plants in public open space will be affected by the general warming expected under climate change, which will mean hotter summers, warmer winters and longer growing seasons. Changes in rainfall distribution, with wetter winters and more frequent summer droughts, will also affect plant use. The intensity of change will be highest, and first felt, in the south-east, but will affect other southern and eastern districts. Northern and western regions will be less severely affected, but they too will become drier and warmer.

The trend of climate change means that although it is difficult to ascribe any single weather episode to climate change, there is expected to be a trend of increasingly frequent droughts, floods, heat waves and severe weather events.

In the short term plant growth may very well increase in response to warmer weather. The range and quality of plantings will probably be enhanced, for a while. In the longer term, 50 years and more, the climate in the south will change to regular and severe hot, dry summer conditions when only drought tolerant plants, such as pines, will thrive in many sites.

Tree plantings are at particular risk because trees are expected to last for over 50 years and are impossible to quickly replace. Mature trees are often central to the attractiveness of many parks, and their shade will be invaluable in heat waves. Trees are also highly effective in promoting biodiversity.

Beech for example, is intolerant of drought, but is a mainstay of specimen trees in the south and east. Under hotter drier conditions its future is uncertain, and planned replacement should be undertaken as soon as possible in case it succumbs and clearly, further planting of beech would be unwise, especially where the soil is shallow, dry and sandy and of south-facing aspect.

Winter cold is an important mediator of flowering. Warmer winters mean less chilling and therefore possibly some effect on the flowering or ornamental trees and shrubs. Unfortunately there is not yet sufficient information for practical guidance.

The roots of trees and other permanent plants can withstand some winter water-logging when soil temperatures are low. But water-logging when soil temperatures are warm and roots active is very damaging. These conditions will be more likely in future.

Shrubs in parks are generally robust species that withstand the rigours of urban life and a low level of labour and cultivation inputs. These shrubs, potentilla and berberis for example, will probably cope well with climate change. The lower levels of severe freezes and the enhanced ripening of wood in hot summers should mean that drought tolerant shrubs, cistus and lavender for example, from Mediterranean- type climates are increasingly reliable and effective. The opportunity exists here to use these more to make attractive, low-cost plantings that are recognisably, including to non-gardeners, high quality horticulture. However, wetter winters are expected to stress drought -tolerant plants that are often intolerant of prolonged wetness in at their root zone. This suggests that more attention to drainage will be needed.

Moisture loving plantings that are the jewel in many park's' crown, rhododendrons (including azaleas) and hydrangeas for example, will be increasingly difficult to sustain without heavy irrigation.

Herbaceous plants, especially ones that flower from mid-summer, frequently depend on ample late summer rainfall. Where irrigation cannot be provided and where soils do not retain plenty of moisture it will be difficult to grow these plants. Here colourful plantings that will meet users' expectations can be made, based on grasses and robust shrubs and sub-shrubs, with spring and autumn flowering bulbs.

Bulbs are adapted to sitting out the dryness of summer and, as long as winter water-logging is not severe, they can be expected to continue to play a vital role in beautifying public spaces.

Choosing more robust herbaceous plants that can form self-sustaining, very low input flowering borders is a commonly promoted solution that should be sustainable under climate change. The public might not immediately appreciate the aesthetic qualities of this way of providing an attractive landscape. However to others, its informality and relaxed charm is very desirable.

Turf, especially fine turf, will be hard to grow in the hotter summers of the future and will be less able to resist wear when the increasingly frequent flooding events occur in winter. Considerable capital input will be needed to store water for summer use and to remove excess winter water to ensure that fine turf, including sports turf, will be available.

Replacing turf with more resilient vegetation such as wild flower meadows or self-sustaining communities of drought-resistant herbaceous plants, including grasses, runs the risk of being perceived by users as poor- quality landscaping. However, parks could be said to have a role in helping people become accustomed to the realities of using plants as the climate become drier and more extreme. Once the purpose of these plantings is understood, there will be greater acceptance of the less formal nature of these plantings.

Parks could help local people understand the horticultural responses to climate change that are applicable in their own gardens. The importance of shade and water features in hot summers, the use of raised beds and water-logging tolerant plants, permeable hard surfaces to reduce flooding, rainwater storage and green roofs are all ways in which parks can provide relevant local models for horticultural practices.

Current staff expertise and knowledge may need to be modified and extended to cope with the challenging environment that will be faced by those in charge of public spaces. This may be one of the more challenging aspects of dealing with climate change, given the reported current skills shortages in the parks sector. Other bodies affected by climate change in aspects such as biodiversity, water conservation, flood alleviation and energy conservation may be interested in helping parks demonstrate sustainable horticultural practices. Parks will render other services to the public in mitigation of climate change including areas where surplus run-off during extreme rain events can be temporarily accommodated and the provision of vegetation to cool urban areas by the cooling evaporative effect of vegetation.

How can we respond to climate change?

Author: CABE Commissioner, Alan Barber argues for the importance of parks in helping towns and cities adapt to changes in climate

Managers of parks and green spaces are well aware of climate change. Over the last thirty years they have seen the tree planting season contract with later leaf fall and earlier springs. If they were around in the 1976 drought, they will also have a good idea of what it is like to cope with an extreme weather event. It is the greater frequency of such events which is the most certain consequence of global warming.

Hotter, dryer summers and wetter winters are the consequence of a steady rise in average temperature. This rise will happen regardless of how hard we slam the brakes on carbon emissions. Only around 2050 will we see the first fruits of our efforts and, even then, it will only be to slow down the rate of increase to the end of a century which is likely to be the most critical in human existence.

No wonder so much effort is directed towards mitigating climate change by reducing carbon emissions. This is essential to curb the steady rise in carbon gasses in the upper atmosphere which cause global warming. But if temperatures are set to rise regardless, giving us the kind of summer heat and dryness by mid-century that Marseilles experiences today, just what consequences will this have for our parks and green spaces?

Unfortunately, the only question experts are currently attempting to answer is how do we prepare public parks and gardens to cope with hotter, dryer summers? Their answers amount to a recipe for disaster. The right question is 'how can parks and green spaces help towns and cities to adapt to climate change?' Whatever else we do, we must not kid ourselves that changing to drought-resistant plant species is any kind of answer. Allowing parks to dry out in hotter summers not only diminishes their value, it threatens the value of the cities they serve and the lives of those who live in them. The rest of this article explains why and what we need to do.

The Adaptation Strategies for Climate Change in Urban Environments Project (ASCCUE)1, led by the Centre for Urban and Regional Ecology (CURE) at Manchester University, suggests four key roles for green spaces:

- Allowing natural drainage (infiltration capacity)
- Detaining flood water
- Providing shade under a tree canopy
- Cooling through lower surface temperatures (evaporative cooling)

The impervious nature of cities, not least because of our obsession with paving front gardens and using tarmac almost everywhere, suggests that the predicted higher rainfall events will cause more flooding. Parks are porous but extreme rainfall events will not be confined to winter; after a baking summer, the ground loses its porosity, shedding water rather than absorbing it.

Detaining flood water could involve the creation of more park lakes. The most prized landscape in my own town is a lake created by the water authority twenty years ago merely for storm detention. Nature conservation and recreation have thrived there ever since.

Extending the tree canopy in urban areas means more than planting them in parks and green spaces. Street trees, known across North America as 'Shade Trees' will need to be planted throughout, whilst standards of tree care must rise. Café tables we now place in the sunniest positions will soon be seeking shade to attract customers.

However, it is the urban cooling effect of parks and green spaces which is potentially of greatest benefit. The ASCCUE research shows that grass surface temperatures are, typically, around 120C lower than their hard counterparts, with another 60C reduction where shaded by trees. At night, they lose their heat quicker than hard surfaces. It is the latter which causes the 'Heat Island Effect' in urban centres. At the height of the hot summer of 2003, nightime temperatures in central London were 90C higher than the surrounding countryside. Some 600 extra deaths were recorded as being attributable to the heat island[2].

However, the 'evapo-transporation' of living green surfaces goes into reverse when the ground dries out. Parks and green spaces then cease to be part of the solution and become part of the problem. This is why talk of adapting our parks to dryer conditions by the planting drought-resistant species is so misguided. The essential is that they be irrigated.

If we face the prospect of more extreme rainfall events in winter but longer dry periods in summer, the water that falls in winter should be collected and stored to irrigate parks and green spaces. Annual rainfall across the UK is ample and not predicted to change. There is, however, a long-standing lack of investment in the collection, storage and distribution of water. The UK has built no new reservoirs for two generations. The water supply for the drought-stricken South East can be met from reservoirs better located further north. Relying on natural aquifers to meet the needs of a growing population in a warmer climate is to misunderstand the way our islands are built.

The immediate need is for a new approach to urban freshwater engineering. Instead of building the recently-announced £2billion sewer for London[3] - a pipe which will carry 99% rainwater - this water should be detained closer to parks, in lakes and underground reservoirs, ready for the irrigation of parks when soil moisture drops.

Future generations will need green oases in their cities even more than we do. Their desertification by the one generation who, in their own time, could and should take action to protect this heritage from the effects of a changing climate looks more like betrayal than sustainability.

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1. Gill, S et al. (2004) 'Literature Review: Impacts of Climate Change on Urban Environments' University of Manchester
2. Mayor of London (2006) London's Urban Heat Island, Greater London Authority
3. BBC News (2007) New tunnel for Thames pollution News item 22 March 2007

A Strategic approach to delivering parks services

Author: Shaun Faulkner, Head of parks service, outlines Brent Council parks service's strategic approach to delivering an award winning service.

Setting the scene with the four strands

There are four particular aspects of my experience that I want to highlight:

- The crucial role of consultation and, beyond consultation, community involvement in setting the direction for the services, in developing the vision for each open space, and in helping implement change.
- The effective use of partnerships with the community, the voluntary sector and the private sector to provide new, high quality facilities, access complementary funding, and to support the management of open space.
- The role of management systems and performance management systems in ensuring continuous improvement.
- The value to be gained from an explicit commitment to improving environmental performance and to more environmentally sustainable practice, and the central role of ISO14001 as a tool to achieve this.

1. Crucial role of consultation

Consultation is an area of strength for us. We have, for many years, put much time and effort into our relationships with the community and the users of our parks and open spaces. Wherever possible we have encouraged the creation of "Friends of …" groups to move beyond consultation and engage the community in the management of their open space.

Beyond these relatively traditional but intensively used forms of consultation, we have a comprehensive performance management system that enables us to consult cost-effectively with both users and non-users on an annual basis. The satisfaction ratings from this consultation then form local performance indicators and our means of assessing continuous improvement.

The system assesses the quality of provision, the value of the open space to the Community, resource allocation and customer satisfaction.

The factors that are assessed are those that are important to the Community. We now have six years worth of data and are therefore able to show trends and improvements in line with the requirements of our Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). We are able to share like with like information - not only internally, but also with others who have used/are using the system.

In conclusion, the extensive consultation provided a clear picture of user perceptions and several key issues emerged:

- Security and safety in parks
- A need to improve the provision of children's play areas
- A perceived problem with dog control
- Facilities in parks e.g. toilets, changing rooms and sports pitches
- Infrastructure repair - including paths, toilets and pavilions
- Greater variety for youths especially for youths
- Improvements to the Allotment Service

The Council now has a consistent and effective set of strategies which guide our approach and leadership in relation to urban green space and ones which have been developed by Brent residents.

2. Partnerships

Our partnerships benefit our parks and open spaces in a variety of ways. Examples of the kinds of partnerships and the benefits we obtain from them are set out below.

- **Staff**: in the volatile London labour market ensuring the availability of skilled staff is crucial to our parks' future. We have introduced a successful Apprenticeship Scheme training young recruits to NVQ Level 2 in Amenity Horticulture
- **Professional Partnerships**: Partnership with KMC consultants, led to the development of the performance management system discussed earlier. Our commitment to reducing pesticide use and membership of the Pesticide Action Network has led to develop and to share best practice.
- **Business sector**: Scarce revenue and scarcer capital have meant that we have had to develop innovative partnerships with businesses to improve facilities. Examples are: the development of a five-a-side football facility which enabled new play equipment, improvements to other facilities and community use; a new golf course on a difficult site; and two successful cafés in our two district parks all at no cost to the Council.
- **Contractor:** a long term leasing arrangement has allowed the improvement of our 42 Children's Play Areas in the Borough.
- **Volunteers**: a wide range of volunteers help us manage, develop and improve our parks and open spaces. They undertake practical and administrative work, have a role in security, monitor conditions, represent Brent, innovate and fundraise. Their help has been crucial in securing substantial lottery and other grant funding for our parks.
- **Other Local Authorities**: Membership of a London Wide Benchmarking Group has been important in developing proposals for improvement to our parks and open spaces.
- **Clubs/groups**: Community groups and sports clubs have played an important part in developing or managing facilities that would otherwise fall out of use.
- **Media**: Strong relationships with local media help promote parks and events in them.
- **Education sector**: opportunities for improvement in this area are being implemented as part of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

Investing the time and energy in establishing and sustaining these partnerships is not a trivial matter. But the pay off is considerable. These partnerships are one of the engines that have driven the improvement of our urban green space.

Our investment strategy recognises that finance is more and more likely to come from outside the organisation. We therefore concentrate on creating worthwhile partnerships as already mentioned. With 'home grown' finance we focus on the areas that have been identified by residents as most in need of improvement. We do not have the resources to make everything perfect, which is why it is essential that we have mechanisms and procedures which allow us to prioritise and identify the things that need to be done the most. We have an excellent record in obtaining external funding.

3. Role of management and performance management systems

Brent Parks Service also had to challenge the mythology regarding Brent Council's misconceived and poor national reputation. We started this by seeking externally verified and independently accredited schemes for excellence which gave management and staff both focus and self confidence.

To help us manage as well as possible we have invested time and effort in gaining awards that force us into challenging the way that we work. For example:

- ISO 14001
- ISO 9000:2000
- Beacon Status 'Improving Urban Green Spaces'
- Green Flag Awards

- London and Britain in Bloom Awards
- Horticultural Week - Horticultural Excellence and Best Parks Team 2006
- Investors in People
- Charter Mark - Customer Service Excellence
- Soil Association Organic Status - Fryent Country Park

The value of these systematic tools in ensuring consistent quality and continuous improvement is considerable. The discipline of working within these frameworks has made the introduction of the performance management system easier, since it fitted our organisational culture. We believe that these management tools would help many other organisations.

4. Importance of Environmental Management

The environmental improvement programme driven by ISO14001 has led us to innovative approaches in many areas. For example:

- Fryent Country Park is maintained as an organic park and there are very few, if any, other certified organic local authority projects in London
- 95% of all green waste is composted
- Our programme of pesticide minimisation has been extremely successful
- Water conservation projects

In conclusion, much of what I have presented above deals with incremental improvements to green spaces achieved through consistent and long term strategic management practice. This approach to continuous improvement is essential to the creation and maintenance of good quality, well designed, welcoming green spaces.

Developing a horticultural apprenticeship programme

Author: Toni Magean, Open Spaces Manager at Copeland Borough Council discusses the importance of developing apprenticeship programmes

Many will agree or disagree with the merits of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) when it was introduced as a means of delivering cost effective horticultural services. As with many local authorities Copeland Borough Council established a Client function and an "In-House" function, both with its own specific management team and facilities.

With regards to who delivers horticultural apprenticeships? Client teams felt this was a clear function of the contractor for the development of their service delivery. Contracting teams felt this was a clear function of the Client and to provide a provision within a contract. A resulting barrier in which neither party recognised the importance of investing in training the future of the industry. The effect upon Copeland Council and repeated across many other authorities was the decline and ultimately the disappearance of the industry horticultural apprenticeships. It was also clear that this position was going to be the case for a number of years while the client and contractor ideologists played its part.

However, those who have worked in local government for a number of years will know that politics, policy and legislation will always ensure that the environment is dynamic and nothing ever remains static. Most will agree that CCT has ran its course, though many local authorities today still seem to operate within its culture and operate a Client/Contractor split. However, many local authorities looked to embrace and implement a Best Value approach to service delivery.

For Copeland Borough Council horticultural services, Best Value was a positive approach which provided the mechanism to address both the internal and external critical audit findings of 2001. One critical area identified was the widening skill gap and aging workforce. This was a result of Copeland's in-house contracting team being successful in retaining the services, though no investment had been made for succession planning, as the workforce aged or retired so the skill gap widened.

Embracing Best Value the Council undertook a service function review and through stakeholder and member consultation agreed to amalgamate both the Client and Contracting teams into a single service unit in 2001. Cost savings were identified through this approach in which the council agreed to invest into a horticultural training programme to address the horticultural skills gap, the funding made available supported three trainee positions, it was the aim of the new horticultural management team to introduce and develop a high quality and career advancement horticultural training programme built on a firm academic underpinning, along with learning opportunities and providing further wide ranging horticultural experience through working in the external environment such as the National Trust.

During early 2002 a review of available horticultural training providers and courses was undertaken, this proved to be very challenging as many training providers were addressing industry demands based on the NVQ system. The management team felt that this was not a satisfactory level to provide a firm academic foundation, it was only through a discussion meeting with the principle horticultural lecturer of the University of Central Lancaster UCLAN Newton Rig Campus that a satisfactory academic course was put in place to support the trainees over the next 4 years.

Copeland Borough Councils Horticultural Apprentices are expected

to complete and achieve the National Certificate in Horticulture in their first two years, followed by a further two years to achieve the National Diploma in Horticulture. The academic qualification is made up of 18 modules ranging from Principles of Plant and soil science to Business management. The apprentices attend the university on day release.

Copeland Horticultural department provides a wide range of environmental services and still operates its own nursery; the apprentices are involved in many environmental aspects from ecology and conservation through to arboriculture and landscape construction. However, this experience is within a single service culture of the department itself, this can be limiting and restrictive to development of the apprentices. Therefore to aid the apprentices development and for them to gain experience in other organisational environment and to learn how others deliver horticulture, Copeland Borough Council arranges with other organisations to allow the apprentices to spend up to 6 weeks on their land, the council covers full costs and accommodations. For example the apprentices have gained experience of other organisations and delivered horticultural services at the following:

- Rydal Hall
- Liverpool Botanic Gardens
- Brockhole Gardens
- Cheltenham Borough Council Parks Department
- Lakeland Horticultural Society

The horticultural apprenticeship scheme has been successfully operation from 2002 and the three apprentices have successfully completed their apprenticeship, two have been employed within the department, the other one is working in New Zealand as a gardener.

The apprentice scheme is a rolling programme and three new young apprentices are now in place. Copeland's horticultural apprenticeship scheme has been used as a benchmark for other authorities to learn from and was highlighted at the Green space Northwest Horticultural Apprentices Seminar. The scheme was also recognised externally when one of our young apprentices won the APSE Horticultural trainee of the year award in 2004.

When the apprentice posts were advertised locally, the department was pleased to see so much interest from people applying and wishing to make horticulture a career. This has proved to be challenging when selecting the candidates, though rewarding when the apprentices have qualify and making a start in their career path as the next generation of the industry supervisors and managers.

Transforming parks services

Author: Steve Taylor, Environmental Co-ordinator with Salford City Council explains the measures taken to transform the service

Salford City Council's Grounds Maintenance Service (GMS), primarily has responsibility for the maintenance and development of all public open spaces within the City, including parks, housing areas, education establishments, cemeteries and highways areas. This is an extensive service with an annual expenditure of £5.7 million, and an establishment of 140 manual staff.

However in 2004/5 it was a service in trouble. Morale within the service was poor and its reputation with customers was less than impressive. It had an ageing workforce and difficulties were encountered in attracting young people into the service.

The problem with poor service performance was of paramount importance to the GMS management team and one that required immediate and decisive action to be taken. The way forward was to be identified by conducting a formal Best Value Review and by using the results of research work undertaken by an independent specialist consultant.

Using this research, a strategy was developed by the management team that would serve to transform the service into one that would meet the high expectations of all stakeholders. Examples of some of the initiatives that staff at all levels participated in are detailed below.

Staff involvement

The key problems identified by the consultant's analysis served as the basis of the Best Value Review. GMS Management Team approached the key issues by directly involving all levels of staff in all stages of the review. Views were sought on key areas of the service through Best Value Working Groups, staff forums, and through 'warts and all' sessions with a cross section of staff on how they saw the grounds maintenance service at the present time, and more importantly, in the future.

It was openly recognised at these meetings that significant improvements were needed if GMS were to meet the increasing expectations of its customers. Using this open approach, considerable "buy in" from staff was gained who demonstrated clear commitment to the process. All practical suggestions from staff where incorporated into the development of an improvement plan.

Benchmarking

One of the first decisions made by the GMS management team was that lessons should be learnt from sister authorities and the "best in class" horticultural organisations. Consequently, managers along with staff and supervisors visited 5 other local authorities that included:

- South Tyneside,
- Gateshead,
- St Helens,
- Halton Borough Council,
- Sunderland.

These visits enabled staff to gain a vision of what had been achieved in other authorities, hence provided a vision of what could be achieved in Salford.

Service Developments

Perhaps one of the greatest impacts of the empowerment policy resulted when GMS staff were given the decision-making responsibility to determine the level of service on any particular occasion. For instance, historical working

practices were governed by Confirm System "tickets" that specified a pre-determined level of service such as number of grass cuts and hedging standards etc.

However, staff became empowered to move away from this scheduled regime to one where maintenance decisions are made depending on the judgment of the operative undertaking the task.

The development of this Performance Specification approach has prevented nugatory work and has helped target resources to where they are really needed. Mark Wainwright, a GMS team member said:

"**I am writing this to comment upon the positive changes I have witnessed since that very powerful speech all those months ago. I cannot remember in my 15 years tenure in the grounds maintenance department, such a time where the man on the ground can make a difference. I feel I now have a voice within this team and teamwork and morale has never been better as people are now pulling together and beginning to take pride in their work once again**"

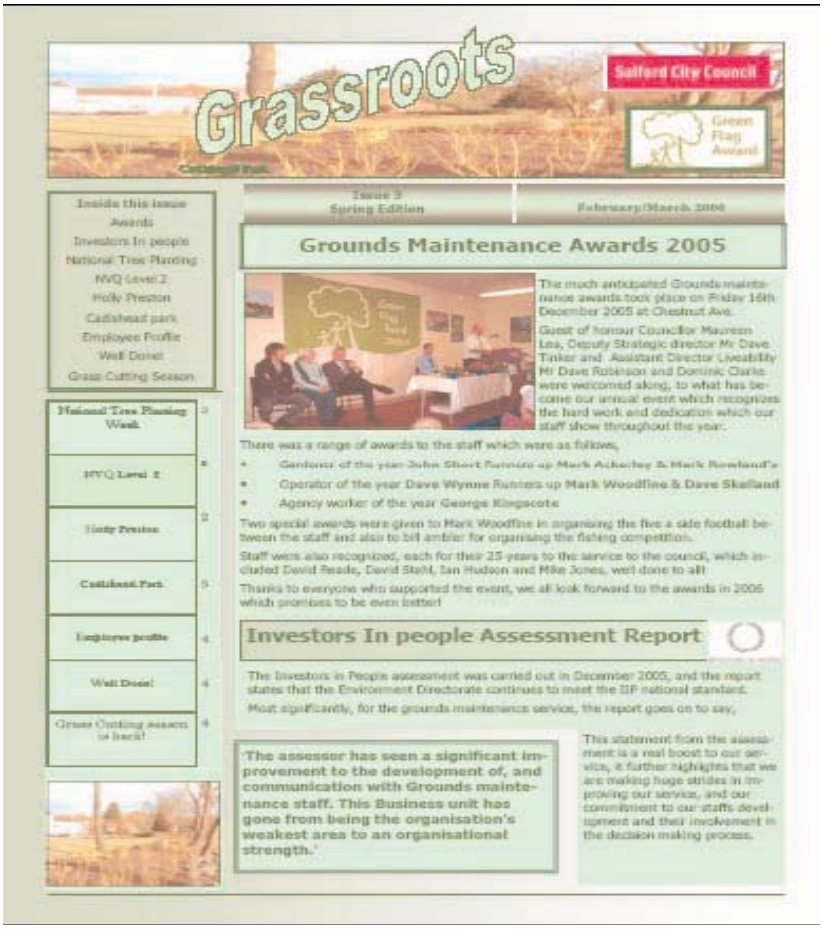
Another area of staff involvement has been with the selection of new machinery and uniforms (pictured right). Here, staff have selected and trialled the new machinery that they believe will be suitable for the task, and the choice of uniforms was also left for teams to select.

Change of terms and conditions

A major part of the Best Value Review was to look at changing some of the terms and conditions of our current workforce. Throughout the negotiations with staff and the unions, staff were kept informed of the need to not only change the way we deliver the service, but also to change some of the current terms and conditions, these included completion payments that set a certain amount of money to be paid on the quality and completion of set amount of work. In addition mechanisms to link training and development with pay have been established and proved to be a major motivational force, demonstrated by one third of the workforce opting to participate in qualification training.

Improving Communications

This activity was seen as vital during the change process. Here, staff were encouraged to design and develop their own internal service magazine as a means of really improving standards of communication. Pictured overleaf is an example of the internal GMS newsletter - Grassroots that is now produced by GMS staff on a quarterly basis and augments other directorate and corporate newsletters.



Grassroots

Salford City Council

Green Flag Award

Issue 3
Spring Edition

February/March 2006

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Well Done!
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Grounds Maintenance Awards 2005

The much anticipated Grounds maintenance awards took place on Friday 16th December 2005 at Chestnut Ave.

Guest of honour Councillor Maureen Lea, Deputy Strategic director Mr Dave Tinker and Assistant Director Liveability Mr Dave Robinson and Dominic Clarke were welcomed along, to what has become our annual event which recognizes the hard work and dedication which our staff show throughout the year.

There was a range of awards to the staff which were as follows,

- Gardener of the year John Short Runners up Mark Ackerley & Mark Rowland's
- Operator of the year Dave Wynne Runners up Mark Woodfine & Dave Skelland
- Agency worker of the year George Kingscote

Two special awards were given to Mark Woodfine in organising the five a side football between the staff and also to bill ambler for organising the fishing competition.

Staff were also recognized, each for their 25 years to the service to the council, which included David Reade, David Stahl, Ian Hudson and Mike Jones, well done to all!

Thanks to everyone who supported the event, we all look forward to the awards in 2006 which promises to be even better!

Investors In people Assessment Report

The Investors in People assessment was carried out in December 2005, and the report states that the Environment Directorate continues to meet the IIP national standard.

Most significantly, for the grounds maintenance service, the report goes on to say,

'The assessor has seen a significant improvement to the development of, and communication with Grounds maintenance staff. This Business unit has gone from being the organisation's weakest area to an organisational strength.'

This statement from the assessment is a real boost to our service, it further highlights that we are making huge strides in improving our service, and our commitment to our staffs development and their involvement in the decision making process.

Improvements Achieved

- 2 Green Flags awarded in 2005 for Victoria Park and Blackleach Country Park and 1 awarded in 2006 for Clifton Country Park.
- APSE Service Team of the Year 2006.
- Performance Awards for staff, in partnership with SGM (GMS's equipment suppliers) and Meridian agency.
- Better training for our staff which includes partnerships with YMCA Training, Myerscough College and SGM and also 'in house training'.
- Investors in People (December 2005).
- Better communication for our staff through regular meetings, such as staff forums, team meetings, Grassroots newsletter.
- Staff empowerment, staff are encouraged to utilize their skills and to take on more responsibility.
- Reduction of complaints about the service and an increase of compliments from our customers and elected members.
- Improved maintenance standards across the City's green space.
- An increase of skills and customer focus within the workforce, resulting in better service delivery (indicated by greater customer consultation results).

LOCAL SERVICES
LOCAL SOLUTIONS

ISO 14001 REGISTERED FIRM GB 11409
ISO 9001 REGISTERED FIRM GB 11132
ISO 27001 REGISTERED FIRM GB 14074
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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