

**Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council**

Environmental Services Department

Parks & Open Spaces Division

**OLDHAM'S GREENSPACE STRATEGY**

April 2004

# Introduction

The green spaces around us are vital to our quality of life. They give us aesthetic pleasure, they mark the changing of the seasons, they relieve the harshness of the urban environment, and they provide habitats for wildlife and places for recreation.

Oldham is fortunate in having a rich variety of scenery ranging from the spectacular countryside landscapes of the Pennines to beautifully restored urban parks. But equally important are the hundreds of other green spaces, large and small, within housing areas, in our town and district centres, close to where we work, and alongside roads. Taken together, they form the Borough's 'green estate'.

This estate is in both public and private ownership, but the Council is by far the largest landowner, with responsibility for managing more than 8000 hectares of green space. The Council is determined to give a lead in terms of good practice in the development and maintenance of these areas.

To deliver on this commitment the Council is now taking a more focussed and integrated approach. Whilst in the past responsibility was dispersed across a number of departments, the Council has now

- Formed a single unit, within the Environmental Services Department, which has responsibility for the development, improvement, management and maintenance of all open space under the local authority's control.
- Established a 'Green Budget' by bringing together a number of previously separate sources of funding, and
- Resolved to prepare a 'Green Space Strategy' for the Borough.

# The Aims of the Strategy

The Strategy is being developed in the context of the wider aims and objectives of the Council and its partners as expressed in *Oldham's Community Strategy* and the *Council's Corporate Plan*. The Corporate Plan is arranged around six strategic themes under which the Council's contributions to the delivery of the Community Strategy are organised

The six themes are:

- *Community Cohesion*
- *A Prosperous Borough*
- *Well Educated and Highly Skilled People*
- *An improved Environment*
- *Healthy and Well Cared for People*
- *A Well Managed Council*

The Green Space Strategy will contribute to most of these themes and will complement a number of related strategies and programmes, such as *Oldham's Agenda 21 Plan*, the *Unitary Development Plan* (in future the *Local Development Framework*), plans for *Health Improvement*, and the *Tourism Strategy*. The *Oldham Beyond* initiative to develop a vision for the future of the Borough placed particular emphasis on the need to develop a network of quality green space. The ideas from *Oldham Beyond* will be reflected in the new Community Strategy to be published in January 2005. The Green Space Strategy will help to guide Borough's regeneration programme funded from sources such as *Housing Market Renewal*, the *Single Regeneration Budget*, *New Deal for Communities* and *Lottery Funds* as well organisations' *mainstream resources*.

The Green Space Strategy develops and extends themes that were set out in the current Parks and Countryside Strategies that were produced in 1995.

The aims of the Strategy are:

- *To promote a better understanding of the benefits of green space as a basis for closer community consultation and involvement.*
- *To identify assets and liabilities, issues and problems*
- *To provide a realistic and achievable framework for action.*
- *To provide the basis for a planned programme of investment.*
- *To encourage a long-term approach.*

The Strategy should not be seen as a rigid plan, decided by the Council, but as a means of guiding and assisting the people of Oldham, their representatives and supporting organisations, in determining what they want from their public greenspace network and what needs to be done to achieve their aims.

*It is important, therefore, that the Strategy continues to act as a focus for community debate as a key part of an ongoing process of improvement and review.*

Although the Council already has many years experience and a number of previous consultation exercises and strategies on which to build, there remains much that can be done by both Council and Community to inform and shape the strategic plan, as well as the means of its implementation.

The Strategy is organised into four parts.

The first part, *'Getting the best for Oldham: developing a future vision for greenspace'* deals with the benefits to be gained from a quality greenspace network, and summarises the 'desirable outcomes' which the Strategy aims to achieve.

The second part: *'Current Strengths'* examines the potential of existing resources and sets out the progress achieved under the current Urban Parks Strategy

The third part: *'Future Challenges'*, sets out some of the issues to be resolved and challenges to be met if we are to progress further towards achieving the 'desirable outcomes'.

The fourth part: *'Making it happen: a Framework for Action'* sets out how the Council plans to tackle these issues and obstacles, the resources required, where priorities should be established, and how progress can be monitored.

# 1: Getting the best for Oldham: developing a future vision for greenspace.

## 1.1: What do we mean by 'Greenspace'?

1.1.1: In broad terms, open spaces within towns fall into two categories:

**Civic Space:** any open space that is predominantly hard paved to serve a civic function, such as squares and plazas, market places, pedestrian streets and promenades,

*and*

**Greenspace:** any vegetated land or structure, water or geological feature.

1.1.2: Greenspace may be public or privately owned, and may or may not have public access. It can vary from an intensive sport or recreation area to a remote and protected wildlife sanctuary. It includes:

- Multi-purpose urban parks and gardens,
- Country parks and specialist parks such as nature parks,
- Outdoor sports facilities
- Children's play areas
- Amenity greenspace, including landscaped areas near roads and buildings, street trees, and screen planting,
- Natural greenspace such as commons, woodland, railway embankments and vacant land.
- Green corridors: routes linking different areas of a town with each other and the surrounding countryside and used for walking, cycling, and horse riding.

- Functional greenspace, such as allotments, churchyards and cemeteries.

## 1.2: Why is Greenspace important?

1.2.1: Recognition of the value of open space within towns and cities is as old as civilisation itself, but the benefits of green spaces have become regarded as increasingly important with the progressive urbanisation, pollution, and overcrowding associated with industrial economies. The development of town parks and 'garden cities' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a response to concerns about the health and well-being of urban dwellers, while 20<sup>th</sup> century planning has sought to contain the built-up area and encourage wildlife and other 'countryside' features close at hand. This century begins with the need to fundamentally re-examine the way we live in order to reduce the waste of finite resources and the risk of climatic change through global warming.

1.2.2: The Council of Europe is one of many organisations and individuals who have sought to sum up the value of open space in towns, and they put it like this:

*'Open space is an essential part of the urban heritage, a strong element in the architectural and aesthetic form of a city, plays an important educational role, is ecologically significant, is important for social interaction and fostering community development, and is supportive of economic objectives and activities. In particular it helps reduce the inherent tension and conflict in deprived parts of urban areas in Europe; it has an important role in providing for the recreational and leisure needs of a community and has an economic value in that environmental enhancement, in which the improvement of open space plays a major part, assists the economic*

*revival of cities, not just through creating jobs but in increasing the attractiveness of a city as a place for business investment and sought-after residential areas’.*

### 1.3 Benefits for Oldham

1.3.1: All of this is very relevant to a borough such as Oldham, which has seen the decline of its’ original economic base and is seeking to create a new identity and attract new investment, which occupies a desirable location on the edge of the Peak District National Park, but which still needs to overcome a variety of physical and social problems in order to compete with more favoured parts of the region.

The ‘*Oldham Framework*’, the Borough’s Community Plan, established the four key themes:

- Putting people first
- Creating Confident Communities
- Competing in a wider economy
- Achieving a Quality Environment.

1.3.2: The Council’s Corporate Plan builds on these themes, setting a range of corporate objectives, which include better management, greater consultation and a commitment to sustainable development.

The opportunities presented by the development of the ‘green estate’ have the potential to make a major contribution to many of the Council’s objectives.

These opportunities can be set out as follows:

## 1.4: Putting People First: benefits to individuals.

1.4.1: Most Oldham people, at some time in their lives, will make use of their local greenspace. It is one of the most easily and freely available services that the Council offers, and is available to all, regardless of income, social standing, or handicap. Finding out more about why people use (or avoid) greenspace is of fundamental importance to the success of this strategy. From studies that have been undertaken, both nationally and locally, we know that the reasons are many and varied, and they can only be summarised here.

- Some people are seeking peace and quiet in beautiful surroundings, sometimes as a contrast to busy lives or overcrowded living conditions. They need a place to think, to unwind, to contemplate problems or overcome difficulties.
- Some are looking for the opposite: they want lively activity and the presence of other people.
- Few people in Oldham have extensive private gardens, and for many, visiting their local greenspace is their only opportunity to experience trees, shrubs and flowers throughout the seasons, and to see a range of wildlife.
- For young children and their parents, greenspace offers opportunities for play, adventure, and to experience the wider world outside in a safe environment.
- Older children use greenspace for active recreation and social interaction, for adventure, for riding bikes, for education and study (and for breaking things)
- Some adults play sport, jog, walk dogs, or just walk, while others prefer to tend allotments, play bowls, or sit and talk.
- Finally, the cemetery commemorates lives and sustains memories.

For all these individuals, whatever their circumstances, the quality and accessibility of local greenspace, and the skill with which it is managed, has a direct impact on their view of the Council as a caring organisation in touch with their needs.

## 1.5: Creating Confident Communities: Parks as centres of community life.

1.5.1: Providing a high quality greenspace service to individual residents is, however, regarded by the Council as only the starting point. The Oldham Community Plan recognises that it is when local residents begin to act together to share responsibility for their own future that communities form and real progress is made. The encouragement and nurturing of this sense of 'community cohesion' is fundamental to the Council's corporate strategy.

1.5.2: Communities are not simply groups of people who happen to live near one another: there has to be some shared values, some agreement on problems and needs, some desire to contribute jointly to benefits. Communities organise around these needs and aspirations, and therefore tend to be complex and fluid in nature, with undefined boundaries that often overlap.

1.5.3: Places to meet are vital to community development and such places have long symbolised local organisation: the local inn, the church or village hall, and the community centre. Parks are particularly suitable locations for community buildings because:

- They are familiar and freely accessible,
- Each is unique to the locality and there is a strong sense of local ownership
- They are already centres of community provision for sport, recreation, and play, where local people naturally gather,
- They have space for meetings, events, and fetes
- They provide an attractive environment that generates and sustains local pride.

1.5.4: The success of many of Oldham's 'Friends of the Park' groups in not only regenerating their local park, but in going on to promote community action on crime and antisocial behaviour, to generate funding for new facilities, to organise activities for teenagers, and to provide networks of support for the elderly, confirms the value

of this approach, and it is not surprising that parks with a strong 'Friends Group' are becoming more heavily used, safer, more respected and better managed. Closer liaison between residents, ward councillors, police and council officers creates an ever-widening sphere of influence that contributes to related initiatives aimed at local regeneration.

## 1.6: A Quality Environment:: improving the landscape.

*'A better place, which local people will be proud to call home'.*

1.6.1: The quality of the landscape makes an important contribution to the attractiveness and desirability of any location. The physical characteristics of a good 'landscape for living' include:

- Respect for natural features and systems
- Good planning and design,
- Acknowledgement of local identity in architecture and building practice.
- A hierarchy of green spaces.

1.6.2: Vegetation, in the form of grassland, gardens, shrub areas, and trees or woodlands complements, softens, and unites the built-up area, providing visual benefits which include shade, shelter, screening, natural form and detail, and seasonal change.

1.6.3: The psychological benefits of a living in an attractive landscape are widely accepted, and this is usually reflected in local property values. Looking out across Oldham in summer, it is often possible to identify the best residential areas simply by the degree of tree canopy that can be seen. They represent the fruition of the 'green' planning policies that have been pursued by the Council over a number of years. The greater the extent of these areas, the more Oldham has to offer: not only to its

own residents, but also to tourists and visitors, and to those who may be considering setting up or expanding enterprises which bring wealth and employment to the town.

1.6.4: Achieving this level of quality requires co-ordinated working between a wide range of agencies: a far-seeing policy planning framework, effective regulation, adequate financial support, good developers, designers, and builders, and a healthy local economy. The sheer size and distribution of the 'green estate', will, however, enable the Council to take a leading role and make a substantial contribution to landscape improvement.

## 1.7: Contributing to a sustainable future.

1.7.1: Oldham's Agenda 21 Plan was published in 1998 after extensive consultation with more than 130 participating groups. The issues raised can almost all be addressed, directly or indirectly, by better greenspace provision.

1.7.2: The Plan identified 21 Steps to a more sustainable future, and pointed out the importance of understanding how all the steps are linked, and how people are the key to making it work.

1.7.3: Better greenspace can make a significant contribution to at least 16 of these, including:

- Biodiversity: *improving the range and quantity of wild plants and animals.*
- Pollution: *cleaner land, water, and air.*
- Wildlife habitats: *finding places where plants and animals can live alongside the rest of us.*
- Recreation: *providing people with places to relax and play.*
- Access to Open Space: *the basic need to escape from the confines of the built-up area.*
- Quality of the Human Environment: *creating towns that people will be happy to live in.*

- Transport: *reducing car use, creating 'greenways', encouraging walking and cycling.*
- Energy: *reducing energy demand: providing shelter, encouraging alternative building technologies., biomass planting*
- Recycling: *composting of green and woody waste.*
- Equality: *freedom of access for all.*
- Food: *increased self-sufficiency through gardens and allotments.*
- Employment: *offering a range of skills and opportunities.*
- Planning for the Future: *better public consultation and local involvement.*
- Education & Awareness: *providing an outdoor classroom for the local environment.*
- Health: *creating opportunities for exercise, helping to reduce stress.*
- Natural Resources: *demonstrating conservation and better use of local resources.*

1.7.4: The Agenda 21 Plan presented a vision of Oldham as the people wanted it.

This vision saw a Borough

*'Where there are many green parks and where it is safe to walk, play, or sit. An Oldham of 'green corridors', open spaces and woodland, where wildlife abounds. Where leisure facilities are close to hand and affordable'*

## 1.8: Desirable Outcomes for Greenspace

1.8.1: In summary, the Greenspace Strategy seeks to develop and promote

- comprehensive networks of accessible, high quality and sustainable green spaces
- which contribute positively to the image and overall strategic framework for development of their area
- promote economic development and social inclusion

- with each individual open space planned, designed, and managed to serve a clearly defined primary purpose
- while also delivering important secondary benefits, where appropriate, for local people, bio-diversity, and wildlife.

## 2: Current Strengths

### 2.1 Maintaining Momentum.

2.1.1: The purpose of any strategy is always to look forward: to identify problems and goals, and to identify the actions needed to achieve them. No such plan lasts indefinitely, however, and each time a strategy is reviewed there is a danger that a discouraging new mountain of problems has appeared, and the anticipated benefits are as far away as ever.

2.1.2: For this Strategy to give that impression would be a false perspective, which would not do justice to the many organisations and individuals who have contributed to developing Oldham's greenspace over the past thirty years, whether through large environmental improvement programmes, derelict land schemes, countryside access programmes, cemetery improvements, or the creation of a modest local wildlife areas.

2.1.3: This work, together with the assets derived from its geographical location and historical development, has brought the Borough into a position of considerable strength as it enters the new century, and in spite of the challenges identified below, the tone of this Strategy should be one of excitement at the prospects facing the

town in the area of greenspace development and management. The reasons for this optimistic forecast are summarised as follows:

- Oldham's location among the western foothills and valleys of the Pennines provides the Borough with a landscape setting and scenic advantages that no amount of artificial landscaping could ever match.
- The town has invested in parks, commons, and cemeteries for well over a century, and has a strong network, some of which are of considerable heritage value.
- Following the land reclamation and environmental improvement programmes of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oldham now has extensive areas of strategic and local open space, including countryside areas, woodlands, green corridors and urban commons. Much of this 'new' landscape is well located and distributed, and is maturing rapidly.
- There is increasing national recognition of the value of greenspace to the environment, to the health and well-being of local communities, and to global sustainability. This recognition is beginning to generate substantial funding opportunities from a wide range of agencies, including the promotion of a cleaner environment, more biodiversity, recycling, green transport, social inclusion, community development, heritage restoration, sport development, and healthy living. The timing couldn't be better: Oldham is now in a position to make maximum use of this external funding.
- Local Authorities are changing and re-organising to meet the new challenges: and the new political and managerial structures that are emerging in Oldham have greatly strengthened the Council's ability to address greenspace issues.

## 2.2: Progress under the Urban Parks Strategy.

2.2.1: The Urban Parks Strategy was adopted by the Council in 1995 as a response to the declining quality of the town's parks, in particular the threat to the safety of visitors posed by

the withdrawal of supervision which was occurring as a result of the Compulsory Competitive Tendering regime.

2.2.2: The Strategy set itself three key objectives:

- To undertake a rolling programme of refurbishment of all the Borough's parks by concentrating resources on parks selected for the annual 'Tulip Funday' event.
- To identify ways of engaging local communities in the future development, management, and protection of their parks.
- To improve the level of investment by redirecting existing resources to support the aims of the Strategy, and to seek external funding wherever possible.

2.2.3: Over the past eight years, the Urban Parks Strategy has produced dramatic improvements: Over 12 parks have been improved, including: *Werneth Park, High Crompton Park, Coalshaw Green Park, Stoneleigh Park, Limeside Park, Copster Park, Bullcote Park, and Princess Park* which have all been refurbished as part of the 'Tulip Funday' event. *Alexandra Park* is currently undergoing complete restoration with the aid of a £2.5 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. *Higher Memorial Park* and *Chadderton Hall Park* have both received new facilities, while *Waterhead Park* and *Foxdenton Park* have undergone substantial refurbishment. Two of these parks have now achieved 'Green Flag' status.

2.2.4: The most pleasing success of the Strategy, however, has been the establishment of a network of 'Friends of the Park' groups. Similar groups have been around for more than a century, and many have been credited with securing the future of declining parks, the most famous being the rescue of New York's Central Park and its transformation by a determine 'Friends' group from a crime ravaged no-go area to a thriving community park once more.

2.2.5: The first 'Friends of the Park' group in Oldham was established at Lees Park in 1995, and since then the number of groups has risen to 16. There is now a waiting list for new groups and the idea has spread to cemeteries, with a 'Friends of Royton Cemetery' in the process of becoming established.

2.2.6: Friends groups meet regularly and bring together the local community, council members and officers, police, and other local organisations to discuss issues related to their park. Many groups have now progressed beyond the early infrastructure and management problems of parks and are beginning to address deeper social problems, such as vandalism, which require wider community action. Some groups, such as those at Stoneleigh and Coalshaw Green parks, for instance, now run their own facilities, hold events, organise sports, and draw in external funding independently of the Council.

2.2.7: The growth and success of these groups demonstrate that the Council's aim of enabling communities to have some power and responsibility in raising standards of greenspace in their own neighbourhood is achievable in a relatively short time. In many cases it has provided a means for community groups to gain experience, attract dedicated individuals, and establish networks, thus developing the confidence to tackle wider social issues.

## 3: Future Challenges

Issues to be addressed in the Strategy

### 3.1: Social and Community Issues

3.1.1: Social and community issues are at the heart of the Council's Corporate Plan. Satisfying all of the people all of the time is a complex and demanding aim which requires the co-ordinated work of many agencies. Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of some of these issues, and how they affect people's use and enjoyment of greenspace is fundamental to the success of this strategy.

3.1.2: In the long-term, this Strategy aims to move away from the historical ad-hoc accumulation of open space towards a carefully planned and managed greenspace system for Oldham that meets the needs of local residents in a sustainable and affordable way.

3.1.3: To achieve this requires an understanding of the role which greenspace will be expected to play in the future, which must be considered against demographic trends, economic progress, changing lifestyles, cultural development, competing attractions, and so forth.

3.1.4: The Council is committed to involving local people in this process, and to enable a high level of debate, it is essential that the current level of community understanding, co-operation and involvement be raised. People should be able to base their views on sound knowledge and experience of local facilities.

3.1.5: Unfortunately, it is clear that many people do not make use of their local open spaces because of a fear of exposure to anti-social behaviour or crime. This may range from a simple lack of respect, as in fly-tipping and litter, vandalism and graffiti, through dangerous use of vehicles, personal abuse and rowdiness, to more serious crimes involving violence, theft or drugs.

3.1.6: The Strategy recognises, therefore, that to achieve the aim of true community involvement there are three challenges to face:

- *Tackling anti-social behaviour and removing the element of fear that prevents many people from using their local greenspace.*
- *Achieving meaningful consultation with individuals and communities by building their knowledge, experience, and confidence.*
- *Ensuring that, collectively, communities can influence the higher levels of the strategic planning process.*

## 3.2: Infrastructure Issues

3.2.1: The term 'infrastructure' refers to the physical elements of the landscape within the greenspace system: the woods and trees, buildings and structures, footways and fences, sport and play facilities, signs and drains.

3.2.2: All these elements are subject to continuous change and decay: from weathering and erosion, wear and tear, accidental damage and vandalism. They may also be rendered obsolete, redundant or insufficient by changes in usage. The result of this process, if left unchecked, is a progressive decline in appearance, performance, and safety that may ultimately result in the closure and removal of the facility concerned.

3.2.3: Neglect of infrastructure risks a syndrome of decline which becomes ever more difficult and expensive to recover:

- *Neglected structures often attract further vandalism and damage.*
- *They spoil the appearance of the area and may become dangerous.*
- *The reputation of the Council as a responsible guardian is affected.*
- *Relationships with funding partners may be compromised.*
- *Voluntary and community support is discouraged.*

3.2.4: Oldham's greenspace is extensive, amounting to approximately 12 square miles. Some of it was created over 75 years ago, and much of it was once derelict industrial or residential land that has been reclaimed. Parts of it are exposed to severe weather or heavy public use.

3.2.5: Challenges include:

- *Major defects in important structures such as bridges, retaining walls, and culverts. Dealing with such problems requires resources many times greater than routine maintenance, and failure of these elements may result in closure of important access routes. (Case Study examples: Daisy Nook Aqueduct, Park Bridge Footbridge)*
- *The declining quality of countryside areas, particularly those created out of derelict land, as a result of reduced financial support by external agencies.*
- *Loss of important recreational and community buildings through decay, fire, or vandalism.*
- *Poor quality, badly drained playing fields which are unusable for long periods.*

- *Children's Playgrounds which do not meet current safety standards*
- *Access difficulties for all, and particularly for disabled users.*
- *Inadequate control and security features*

### 3.3: Planning Issues

3.3.1: In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Oldham underwent considerable physical change. Major users of land: industrial, commercial, residential, transport, and waste disposal sectors have all been extensively restructured. The process has been controlled and guided by a variety of strategic plans over time, including the Greater Manchester Structure Plan, Oldham's Unitary Development Plan, and various special and local plans. These plans have all recognised the need for extra greenspace, and they have been supported by government investment through, for instance, the Derelict Land and Urban Programmes. Greenspace has been created opportunistically, often as a result of other aims, such as:

- Cleaning up protected land, such as in the major river valleys, by removing hazards and eyesores and establishing a natural landscape.
- Treating land unsuitable for development, such as refuse tips.
- Creating attractive settings for transport corridors, industrial sites, business and residential areas, to improve the image of the town and attract investment.

3.3.2: Unlike the earlier parks, gardens, recreational grounds, cemeteries and commons that resulted from the recognition of local need, much of the new open space has been created from a desire to 'clean and green' the town. This new open space is extensive and fragmented, ranging from large tracts of industrial or tipped land to tiny corner plots the size of a single terraced house.

3.3.3: This 'green estate' which the Council manages, now needs to be reviewed from a different perspective, which is set out above in *Section 1: Getting the best for Oldham* of this Strategy. This is important for a number of reasons

- *To ensure that the provision of greenspace is properly planned, is in balance with what is needed and is capable of being sustained.*

- *To promote synergy with related policies, strategies and programmes.*
- *To ensure the fair distribution of investment and facilities.*
- *To provide a strategic context for individual projects*
- *To meet the requirements of funding agencies when bidding for resources.*
- *To meet the requirements of government for proper asset management.*
- *To enable optimum efficiency in design, management and maintenance practice*

3.3.4: The issues to be addressed include:

- *How extensive should the green estate be? Is there too much or not enough?*
- *Is it in the right place and easily accessible?*
- *Does it provide the character and facilities that people want?*
- *Would less greenspace of higher quality be better than more of lower quality?*

### 3.4: Management & Maintenance Issues

3.4.1: Management and maintenance represent the ‘front line’ of greenspace provision: the direct interface between provider and user. It is vital that the Council takes a proactive role in managing the Green Estate, and does not simply ‘mow the grass and react to issues as they arise’. For many residents and communities, particularly in deprived areas, the availability of, and access to, the benefits of greenspace are not always clear, and need to be promoted.

3.4.2: The characteristic qualities of the green estate: local distribution, free access, multi-use, will inevitably lead to occasional disagreements between users and neighbours, and the service must address such issues in a positive and consistent way.

Examples include:

- *Conflict between active, noisy activities and the desire for peace and quiet.*
- *Attitudes concerning the behaviour of dog walkers and cyclists.*
- *Striking a balance between informal grass spaces and formal sports pitches.*
- *Attitudes to tree screens: loss of view, excessive shading, leaf nuisance.*

3.4.3: The Greenspace Strategy represents a pyramid of aspiration which rests on a vital base of routine maintenance operations, all year, all weather: cutting grass, collecting litter, trimming trees, mending fences. Any shortfall in delivery of this part of the service has immediate negative impact. Few people will take plans for new features and facilities seriously if it is clear that the Council cannot keep on top of what it already has.

3.4.4: By far the largest proportion of the annual cost of the service is expended on this routine operational work, and clearly the Strategy must address the means by which those responsible for the management of the green estate can effectively and efficiently meet these maintenance demands.

3.4.5: Equally important, however, is how these demands can be reduced or eliminated: for instance by:

- *changing public attitudes to the appearance and style of green areas, reducing the perception that good maintenance equates to manicured lawns, and increasing an appreciation of more natural landscapes*
- *encouraging greater respect and care by information and interpretation.*
- *reducing anti-social behaviour, untidiness and vandalism,*
- *better planning, design, and construction of facilities,*
- *enabling community groups to add value by voluntary activity.*

## 3.5 Partnership Issues

3.5.1 Ever since the Public Health Acts of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, open space facilities in Oldham have been predominately Council owned and managed; **for** the people, but not **by** the people. The Council's current aim of achieving higher standards of provision coupled with greater community participation suggests that this exclusive approach needs to be reviewed, and that in future the Council, while remaining a major provider, will work in partnership with a variety of agencies, with a wide range of levels of involvement.

3.5.2. The Council is committed to this approach, and has already established a number of partnering arrangements with community groups and organisations: for example 'Friends'

Groups and the Groundwork Trust. However, the effective development of such arrangements is hampered by the lack of a clear framework for setting standards, establishing the limits of responsibility, dealing with legal and public liability issues, ensuring access for all and long-term sustainability. Where local communities wish to add value to Council facilities, or develop facilities of their own, they should be encouraged and assisted, but the Council must also ensure that the development and management of public space continues to be properly planned, designed, and maintained

### 3.6: Financial Issues

3.6.1: Developing and sustaining an adequate means of financial support for the green estate is clearly of fundamental importance to the success of this strategy. Greenspace is a complex mix of social, natural, and built environments, all of which demand the application of resources in different ways and at different times. Communities develop and change, opportunities arise, aspirations increase. Security, cleanliness, and damage have to be addressed. The physical aspects of the system, such as vegetation, naturally increase over time, while buildings, structures, and equipment progressively deteriorate. It is the aim of greenspace management to constantly intervene in this process to keep green spaces attractive, accessible, and safe, and to do this effectively requires a core budget that is both reliable and flexible. Establishing the appropriate level for this budget is a key aim, therefore, and addressing the issues set out elsewhere in this strategy, including the extent of public understanding and support, the state of the infrastructure, the degree of planning and monitoring, and effective management practice, will all assist in balancing resources to needs.

3.6.2: Opportunities for additional external funding may also vary widely from year to year, place to place, and subject to subject. Some funding agencies offer direct support: for example heritage parks, sports fields or woodland planting. In many cases, however, open space improvements occur as 'by-products' or secondary benefits to other programmes or developments: environmental improvement, crime reduction, green transport, or S 106 'planning gain'. In themselves, these often produce real, if limited improvements. However, much greater benefits can be gained by a partnership approach where a number of agencies are persuaded to co-ordinate their investment in a single major project. To generate the confidence needed for this approach requires a strong strategic framework, a comprehensive design, a commitment to matching resources, and the ability to guarantee long-term care.

3.6.3: The Compulsory Competitive Tendering regime for Grounds Maintenance led to the development of a range of financial systems, many of which are unnecessarily complex and need to be reviewed as part of the current 'Best Value' approach.

3.6.4: The important financial issues to be addressed in this strategy are:

- How can an appropriate core budget for greenspace be ascertained?
- What cost / benefit relationship is there between development and maintenance?
- Can financial systems be developed which offer greater flexibility?
- How can external financial resources be more effectively targeted?

### 3.7: Establishing priorities for action

3.7.1: The issues outlined above have been organised into categories for the purposes of clarity, in order to highlight each one so that it can be addressed in the action plan. In practice these issues are complex and inter-related, and do not in themselves wholly illustrate the challenges facing the service.

3.7.2: Reference has been made earlier to the contribution made by the current Parks Strategy in highlighting the decline in urban parks and in galvanising action and resources

to arrest this decline and restore Oldham's parks to their proper importance and quality. The pioneering work has given Oldham a lead in an area that is now being recognised and supported nationally. This job is not complete and the Strategy continues to promote the revival of the local park as a centre of community spirit. However, this Strategy now needs to do for other neglected areas of service what the previous one did for urban parks, and the parts of the greenspace network that most urgently require attention are Countryside, Sports Facilities, Children's Play, Community Facilities, and Cemeteries

### 3.8: 'Countryside'

3.8.1: For most urban dwellers, the idea of 'countryside' holds a powerful attraction, being associated with fresh air, space, health, naturalness, and human scale. As towns grew more crowded, ugly, and unhealthy, those who could escape to the countryside did so whenever possible, the rich to their estates, the poor to walk the moors. Planning policy throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century sought to preserve a balanced relationship between town and country, mainly by means of protection from development: National Parks, AONB's, SSSI's, Green Belts and other protected land. Oldham's countryside has benefited from this, and more recent protective designation such as 'Green Corridors'.

3.8.2: However, this did not fully address the problems that were developing as individual mobility increased. Car-borne trippers from nearby towns were overwhelming rural communities, and research showed that these visitors were mainly seeking 'country' surroundings in which to walk the dog or picnic. As a result, Country Parks were developed on the fringe of urban areas to provide for this need and relieve pressure on the 'real' countryside. In the 1970's the concept was broadened to encourage wildlife within the built-up area and use ecologically based management to literally 'bring the countryside to your doorstep'. This concept now forms a vital part of the Agenda 21 Strategy for sustainable urban living.

3.8.3: In Oldham, this movement towards countryside recreation coincided with extensive programmes of derelict land reclamation promoted by Lancashire County Council and Greater Manchester Council, supported by central government. The amount of 'countryside'

created and managed grew rapidly. Land was re-shaped, rivers cleaned, tips covered, trees planted, footpaths and bridleways established. Ranger Services were set up, and Visitor Centres established. A great many benefits flowed from this investment. Many people visit the main centres: Tame and Medlock Valleys, Daisy Nook, and Tandle Hill. Woodlands and wildlife flourished, attracting schools and community groups. Countryside Rangers pioneered many of the techniques of working with volunteers and community groups that now find wider expression in the 'Friends of the Park' Groups. The response to the extensive consultations carried out for Oldham's Agenda 21 Plan demonstrates the high priority that all respondents gave to the benefits of local 'countryside'

3.8.4: Ironically however, as the new 'countryside' has matured and become increasingly valuable, the level of investment in development and management has steadily declined. GMC was abolished in 1986, cutting off a major source of funding. Derelict land grants were diverted to industrial development projects, and Countryside Commission funding of Ranger Services and Information has been reduced to a bare minimum. As a result, extensive areas are being managed with inadequate resources, and the results are beginning to show. Overgrown and worn footpaths, broken fences, clogged ponds, fly-tipping and rubbish, stolen cars and irresponsible motorcyclists are beginning to characterise these areas.

3.8.5: 'Countryside' is much more than a particular area of land that hasn't been built on. It is a concept that still has a great deal to contribute to a healthy, sustainable greenspace network. It goes much further, and potentially offers many more benefits, than the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas behind the typical urban park or garden. The intensive and artificial horticultural displays we all love in parks are concentrated gems, but are not sustainable on a wider scale, whereas the science and art of the 'countryside' landscape is applicable over large areas, reducing costs and contributing to both human and ecological health. 'Countryside' landscapes can penetrate deep into the urban core: to Alexandra Park, or to Oldham Edge, for instance.

3.8.6: An important issue for this Strategy, then, is to review the contribution which 'countryside' design and management makes to the value of green estate, and to distribute resources accordingly.

### 3.9: Sports Facilities.

3.9.1: The widespread popularity of outdoor team sports offers many opportunities to improve health and fitness, build strong community links with young people, burn off energy, and develop a sense of pride in physical skills and ability. It is a key element in the reduction of juvenile crime and vandalism that is central to the aims of this Strategy. The latent demand for good quality outdoor sports facilities, in the form of well-drained pitches and courts, parking and changing facilities greatly exceeds supply. Many of Oldham's pitches are exposed and waterlogged, with poor access and rudimentary facilities. This reduces the number and reliability of fixtures, and consequently club development, which can be an important community service, is restricted.

- Equally important, particularly for teenagers, are facilities for less formal sport, such as basketball nets or kickabout areas, and their absence is often a cause of nuisance and vandalism from youths who have nowhere to let off steam. However, such provision may be opposed by local residents who fear such problems, creating a potential circle of enmity within a community. Mutual understanding, careful design and siting, and sensitive management are needed to resolve such issues.

### 3.10: Childrens Play

3.10.1 The provision and maintenance of children's playgrounds is also a serious issue. The Council currently has 85 playgrounds across the Borough, with local pressure for still more. Each playground has a range of equipment in daily use and subject to progressive wear and tear as well as accidental damage and vandalism. The sites are open and unsupervised, and often used by youths and adults far beyond the intended age range of the facility. The safety of the children is of paramount importance, which places a heavy responsibility on Council staff in detecting faults and flaws before they result in accidents. Many of the sites have equipment and surfaces that are obsolete or do not meet current standards, and there is an increasing tendency to blame the Council for any mishap, resulting in escalating legal claims for compensation.

### 3.11: Community Facilities

3.11.1 Many parks have lost their community buildings or have seen them become disused and vandalised as a result of a lack of resources for maintenance. Toilet facilities are often lacking or achieve only rudimentary standards unacceptable to users. Such facilities elevate the park above other local open space as a place to visit, and their absence or poor quality is a serious disincentive to older people, mothers with young children, and disabled users. The lack of any form of community meeting place in many parks also reduces the effectiveness of Friends Groups in motivating and managing local action and improvements.

### 3.12: Cemeteries

3.12.1: Cemeteries are highlighted in this Strategy because, like aspects of countryside, they are special open spaces that require a careful and sensitive approach to development and management. They commemorate the long-term memory of communities, and are historically valuable. They can be places of great sadness, visited by people who are emotionally vulnerable and upset. We entrust the memory of loved ones to the Council. They remain freely available to the community, however: children play in them, and local residents who are out for a walk with the dog also use them.

3.12.2: A House of Commons Select Committee Inquiry recently reported on the state of the nation's cemeteries. The Committee Chairman, Andrew Bennett MP, said:

*“We were taken aback by the sheer magnitude of the problems facing our cemeteries. The problem of underfunding has been exacerbated by poorly trained staff, confused legislative responsibility, and neglect by both central and local government. The result is unsafe, littered, vandalised, and unkempt cemeteries which shame all society in their lack of respect for the dead and bereaved”*

3.12.3: Oldham's cemeteries are not in as bad a state as those that prompted the Select Committee's reaction, but the problems are real enough:

- *Age, neglect, and vandalism have led to many thousands of headstones becoming unstable and dangerous, posing a serious threat to those who work in, or visit, our cemeteries.*
- *Inappropriate and anti-social behaviour being exhibited in full view of those attending funerals and visiting graves.*
- *A serious lack of investment in the upkeep and maintenance of buildings and infrastructure.*
- *Lack of an overall management strategy to guide maintenance operations.*

## 4: Making it Happen: A Framework for Progress

### 4.1: Meeting the Challenge

- It is essential that a realistic view is taken of the place of this particular strategy in the continuing process of development and change which is taking place in Oldham. As described in the introduction, the Greenspace Strategy forms part of a range of inter-related policies, strategies and programmes that together make up Oldham's Corporate Plan. It builds on many existing themes, and does not represent either the start or the end of the process of improvement. To be effective, however, the Strategy must set out a clear set of actions which will move the process forward in a way that enables progress to be measured.

4.1.2 The aims of the Strategy are set out in the introduction. They are:

- *To promote better understanding of the issues as a basis for closer community consultation and involvement.*
- *To identify issues and problems*
- *To provide a realistic and achievable framework for action.*
- *To provide the basis for a planned programme of investment.*
- *To encourage a long-term approach.*

4.1.3: The purpose of this section is to set out a range of objectives. Some of these are intended to address pressing problems and provide a basis for action, while others take a longer-term view, recognising that action must be linked to a clear sense of direction. It is not the purpose of the Strategy to independently determine what needs to be done: if the communities of Oldham are to have a genuine involvement, they must be part of the process, not simply consulted on the Council's proposals. Some objectives are therefore as much about asking questions as about providing answers.

4.1.4: The objectives are grouped according to four categories, each of which plays an essential part in developing a vision for greenspace, and then turning it into reality.

These are:

- 1: *Securing the understanding and support of the people and communities of Oldham for a common 'Vision' for greenspace*
- 2: *Establishing a 'Green Estate' in the form of well planned, accessible, dedicated and protected open land, infrastructure, buildings, and other assets.*

- 3: *Creating partnerships and increasing financial support and investment.*
- 4: *Ensuring that the process of developing and implementing the Strategy is undertaken by dedicated organisations capable of working together to achieve the efficient delivery of high standards in community liaison, planning, design, management and maintenance.*

For each set of objectives the Council will publish a Report setting out the current situation, which will act as a baseline against which progress can be measured.

#### 4.2: Objectives intended to increase community understanding and support.

Community support is an essential pre-requisite for making the changes necessary to improve Oldham's greenspace network. Genuine consultation requires engagement on an equal basis at a variety of levels and the Council will therefore seek to increase the community's access to information about their greenspace prior to inviting comment on proposals for change.

##### 4.2.1: Information

To enable individual residents and communities to understand the issues and participate in the progress of the Strategy, the Council will seek to share information by producing a series of more detailed papers examining specific issues in greater depth. Typical subjects would include:

- *Children's Play*
- *Healthy Living Sport Active Recreation*
- *Cemeteries & Burial Grounds*
- *'Countryside', Biodiversity & an Ecological Approach to Management*
- *Crime & Antisocial behaviour*
- *Access for All: disabled old, safe routes to parks*
- *Trees and Woodland*

- *Gardens and Horticulture*

Each study would expand the detail of the Strategy by examining the current situation, raise issues, look at best practice from other authorities, and outline options for change. The Council would aim to produce three such papers per year, covering the major issues within the space of three years. Feedback from these papers would inform the strategic 'Vision' on which the development of the Strategic Plan and associated policies would be based. The link between issues, consultation, consensus and strategic vision would be set out in a published report.

#### 4.2.2: Consultation

These studies, together with external consultants' reports, feasibility studies and outline proposals' would form the basis of consultation exercises, including:

- *Direct contact with individuals, through Visitor Surveys and Market Research.*
- *Community consultation through Area Committees, Friends Groups, Minority Groups, Community Groups, Schools, and Youth Groups, using a variety of means including special talks, 'planning for real' exercises, and workshop sessions.*
- *Discussion with other agencies and partners, such as Government, local businesses Groundwork and the Local Strategic Partnership.*
- *Exercises that would link directly to the assessment of local need required by the Government under PPG 17 and set out in the Guide 'Assessing Needs and Opportunities'*

#### 4.2.3: Participation

To encourage people to use and experience their local open space more, the Council will:

- *Provide information and encouragement in the form of advertising, leaflets, on-site signage, and information centres.*

- *Encourage the formation of 'Friends of the Park' and other community groups, and support their efforts and activities.*
- *Develop an events and marketing programme in partnership with other Council Departments and the private sector.*

#### 4.3: Objectives intended to identify, protect and develop the 'Green Estate'

4.3.1: The concept of a network of green spaces, each meeting a variety of local needs, linked to each other and in turn linking the urban area with the countryside around it, lies at the core of this strategy. To ensure that the available land and facilities of this 'Green Estate' are used for maximum benefit, and to identify areas of surplus or deficiency, it is essential that the Council:

- holds clear information about the location, extent, character and usage of all land managed by it as public greenspace
- is able to assess local expectations and needs
- protects existing greenspace
- determines standards of quality and levels of provision
- prepares plans to ensure and demonstrate fairness of distribution, accessibility, primary purpose, and multi-functionality.

#### 4.3.2: Collecting facts and data about greenspace.

To ensure that planning and management decisions are properly informed by accurate facts and data, the Council will conduct an Open Space Audit, compatible with Planning policy Guidance Note 17, recording baseline data relating to greenspace in a Geographic Information Systems format, identifying local landscape and townscape character, heritage, cultural and community values, and the disposition of resources and facilities. The results of such an audit will be published within twelve months of the adoption of the strategy.

### 4.3.3 Identifying local needs.

The Council will undertake Local Assessments of Need in accordance with PPG 17 for all areas of the Borough and publish the results within two years of the adoption of this strategy

### 4.3.4: Protecting greenspace

To ensure that existing greenspace is retained and protected, the Council will designate land and develop policies to protect open space, sport and recreational facilities from inappropriate development. The Oldham Replacement Unitary Development Plan will contain such designations & policies in Section 10: Open Space, Sport and recreation Facilities and Policies R1, R1.1, R1.2, and R1.3.

### 4.3.5 Setting Standards

The Council will develop local provision standards for greenspace in accordance with PPG 17, including a quantitative component (how much new provision may be needed), a qualitative component (against which the need for improvement can be measured) and an accessibility component (covering distance thresholds and user costs) Such standards will be determined as part of the production of the Strategic Plan.

### 4.3.6: Developing a Strategic Plan

The Council will undertake a major review of all its open space and develop a Strategic Greenspace Plan which, together with related Area Plans, will identify a connected parks and green spaces system as an integral part of the planned infrastructure of the Borough. The Plan will take account of other existing plans and strategies of the Council and be developed with full public consultation in line with the Government's recent Planning Policy Guidance Note 17. Draft versions of this plan will be prepared within six months of the adoption of this strategy, and will serve to assist the process of developing a vision and assessing local expectations and needs. A final Plan will be published within twelve months of the completion of the Assessment of Local Needs.

#### 4.4: Objectives intended to encourage partnership working and greater financial investment.

4.4.1 The Council recognises that the strategy will not be successful if ownership and action is confined only to managers of parks and open spaces. Many other groups and agencies, including, for instance, those concerned with social care, health & well-being, youth opportunity, crime prevention, transportation, public art, and biodiversity, will benefit from co-operative working to improve greenspace. The Council will therefore seek ways of encouraging wider partnerships within local government and related agencies.

4.4.2 The Council will also seek to form partnerships with community groups, trusts and private-sector organisations, and will produce a detailed guide to working with external partners, to be available within twelve months of the adoption of this strategy. This guide will cover a range of partnerships from simple volunteer activity to wholly community-managed facilities. It will:

- set out the benefits of partnership working and the Council's aims in relation to the Community Strategy
- describe the various types and levels of partnership available, including examples and case-studies where possible.
- set out a policy framework to guide relationships between Council members, officers, and representatives of partner organisations.

- address the legal questions concerning rights and responsibilities, duty of care, liability, etc
- contain draft Forms of Agreement

#### 4.4.3: Attracting external funding and investment.

The Council will use the Strategy and the Strategic Plan to support bids to a wide range of external funding agencies in order to make maximum use of the opportunities for investment in greenspace and associated facilities. Details of such bids, and the resulting offers of investment, will be reported and published annually. The Council will also, where appropriate, require the provision of new and / or the improvement of existing open spaces and sport & recreation facilities through Planning Agreements associated with new developments.

#### 4.5: Objectives intended to ensure high standards in the design and management of the Green Estate.

4.5.1: Improving the management of urban green space through the public, private, and voluntary sectors and community management processes requires a sound technical base, a clear policy framework and a well informed, efficient and motivated workforce who are capable of providing leadership while being sensitive to public concerns and responsive to change. The Council will seek to ensure that the management of the 'Green Estate' is based on current best practice and the latest scientific and professional information in relation to environmental management, biodiversity, and social practice.

#### 4.5.2 Developing a clear management framework

If the Council is to work successfully with a range of partners as well as seeking to play a leading role in greenspace provision, it is important that a clear framework of management responsibility is set out, to avoid the possibility of confusion and misunderstanding creating duplication or incompatible sets of proposals by different agencies on the same site. To ensure that changes to public open space are made properly and competently, the Council will:

- Issue guidance within six months ensuring that all partners are aware of the political organisation and management structure of the Council and the roles and responsibilities of Members and Officers in relation to greenspace development and management.
  - Issue a Code of Practice for the adoption of new open space projects within six months, setting out policies and design guidance to ensure that the development of new or refurbished open spaces addresses key issues of accessibility, appropriateness, quality and ease of maintenance
- Valuing and developing greenspace staff and volunteers.

The Council recognises that policies and plans will not in themselves produce the results aimed for in the strategy. In the final analysis, it is down to the commitment, judgement, enthusiasm and skill of individuals working in the field, whether they are employees of the Council and its partners, specialist consultants, committee members or volunteers. Building a skilled and committed workforce is an important issue to be addressed, and the Council will therefore:

- seek to recognise and enhance the role, status, and career development of greenspace staff to ensure high standards and appropriate training, the development of an organisational culture which encourages multi-disciplinary and partnership working, innovation and openness, and values communication skills.
- work closely with national agencies and other local authorities to ensure that it is kept up to date with examples of best practice in greenspace management from all

parts of the country and is able to make informed statistical comparisons about service quality and efficiency.

## 4.6: Addressing priority issues.

### 4.6.1: Countryside

The Council believes that the concept of 'countryside' with its emphasis on informal usage, local vernacular tradition, natural appearance, support for wildlife, and low-cost, sustainable management, offers a suitable model on which to base the development of large parts of the greenspace network, linking town and country, providing a setting for more formal features, encouraging biodiversity, and providing an attractive setting for the urban fabric. Within twelve months of the adoption of this strategy, therefore, the Council will review the organisation and objectives of countryside development and management in Oldham, and set out a future vision that maximises the benefits associated with 'bringing the countryside to your doorstep', and incorporates the aspirations of local communities and organisations.

### 4.6.2: Sports Facilities

The Council will review the quality of its outdoor sports pitches, courts and changing facilities, and develop a strategic programme of improvement in consultation with national agencies, local clubs and users. This review will seek opportunities to significantly increase local provision of informal sport and recreation facilities, and will be produced within six months of the adoption of the strategy.

### 4.6.3: Children's Playgrounds

The Council will review the situation in respect of children's playground provision, and within six months of the adoption of this strategy prepare policies for future provision, design, and

management of fixed play equipment in consultation with national agencies, Area Committees, local communities, and users.

#### 4.6.4: Community Facilities in Parks

The Council will review the standard of community facilities in parks in consultation with user groups, and develop a programme of action to secure improved provision and maintenance. A report setting out the results of this review will be prepared within six months of the adoption of this strategy.

#### 4.6.5: Cemeteries

The Council will prepare a review of the state of Oldham's cemeteries, establishing links with local communities through the 'Friends Group' process, and developing a strategic programme of action for the sensitive development, management, and protection of each of the seven cemeteries, with particular emphasis on the care of memorials. A report setting out the results of this review will be prepared within twelve months of the adoption of this strategy.

### 4.7: Organisation and Accountability

4.7.1 This Strategy sets out a series of aspirations and actions intended to drive forward improvements to Oldham's greenspace network and the way it is planned, designed, managed and used. Some of the actions proposed can be undertaken and completed within a finite timescale: others are more open-ended or continuous in nature. The purpose of the Strategy is partly to provide a sense of direction, but also to provide a series of milestones and goals against which progress can be measured.

4.7.2: Reference has been made to the organisational changes already made in order to eliminate the fragmentation of responsibility that undermines accountability. This process needs to be further developed until the provision and management of Parks and Open

Spaces is recognised as a distinct Council service, which is as identifiable and familiar to the public as Education or Highways. The Street scene and Greenspace Division of Environmental Services Department will seek to achieve this level of recognition and accountability, leading the development and implementation of the Greenspace Strategy, and working closely with other departments of the Council, Government Agencies, the Local Strategic Partnership and other partner organisations, Area Committees, community and special interest groups, local people and their councillors.

## 4.8: Monitoring Progress

### 4.8.1: Summary of Objectives and timescale.

Objectives for completion within six months of formal adoption:

- *A guide to the council's management structure*
- *A Code of Practice for the adoption of new greenspace projects.*
- *A Review of Sports Facilities*
- *A Review of Children's Playgrounds*
- *A Review of Community Facilities in Parks*

Within twelve months:

- GIS database of existing greenspace
- Guide to partnership working
- Vision for Countryside
- Review of Cemeteries

Within two years:

- PPG17 Local Assessment of Need

Within three years:

- Standards for greenspace provision
- The Strategic Plan

4.8.2: The Environmental Services Business Plan is the mechanism by which targets are monitored. The Plan is reviewed every six months and progress is reported to the Council. This report will also be available to the general public. The Streetscene and Green Spaces Division will also prepare a more detailed Annual Greenspace Report, examining the progress of the Strategy and reviewing performance against Service Plan targets. This Report will be communicated to Area Committees and local communities, and copies made available generally.