

Edinburgh Open Space Strategy – Consultation Findings

Planning Committee
1 October 2009

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To report the findings of the first stage of public consultation in the open space strategy project and to inform the Committee of key issues emerging.

2 Summary

- 2.1 A city-wide open space strategy is in preparation. It will be informed by a comprehensive audit of open space and information gathered through recent public consultation. The audit is nearing completion, the consultation findings are now available for reporting and the key issues for the strategy have now been identified.

3 Main report

Background

- 3.1 The preparation of an open space strategy is a recent requirement of national planning policy. It will be the first Council strategy to take a detailed and comprehensive look at open space since 1969. The strategy will ensure that a coordinated approach is taken to protecting and developing the city's network of open space. It will be accompanied by 12 action plans, one for each Neighbourhood Partnership area, setting out site-specific proposals for change in open spaces.
- 3.2 Once completed, the audit, strategy and action plans will be used:
- to inform planning decisions on loss of open space and provision in new development;
 - to inform investment and site-management decisions by the Council and potentially other organisations responsible for open spaces.
- 3.3 The strategy is being prepared corporately with close working between central functions and the six Neighbourhood Teams. The working arrangements set

out in the project brief were approved by the Planning Committee in February 2009 and the Policy and Strategy Committee in May 2009. The revised project timetable is:

2009	May	Report draft audit
	May-July	First public consultation
	Sep/Oct	Report consultation findings
	August-October	Analysis
	December	Report finalised audit and draft strategy and action plans
2010	January-March	Second public consultation
	May	Report and publish final strategy and action plans
2010+		Implement and monitor action plans
2015		Review and update strategy every five years

It was previously intended to also report the finalised audit in September/October but it has been decided to move this to December to allow more time for consideration of the quality survey findings by the six Neighbourhood Teams.

First Consultation

3.4 The draft open space audit was the basis for public consultation carried out over eight weeks from May to July. The aims of this consultation were:

- to provide the public and other stakeholders with an opportunity to comment on the classifications of open spaces set out in the draft audit;
- to seek views on the quality and use of open spaces directly from the relevant communities and users;
- to raise awareness of the project and ready interested parties for consultation on the draft strategy and action plans.

3.5 Consultation activities included the following events (detailed in Appendix 1) and actions:

- presentations and discussions at 17 meetings of Neighbourhood Partnership boards and/or subgroups;
- 12 evening public workshops;
- staffed exhibition stalls at 11 other public events;
- a mailshot to 600 groups and organisations;
- a questionnaire survey on quality and use of individual open spaces,
- available online and as a freepost leaflet, which resulted in 650 responses;

- a separate survey looking at play space provision carried out by school classes and other children's groups resulting in 450 responses.

3.6 The consultation results are set out in Appendix 1 by Neighbourhood Partnership area. The recommended Council response to points raised will be reported with the final audit and draft strategy. A number of comments received relate directly to the classification of sites in the audit, a matter dealt with in the next section. Many comments relate to issues which will be addressed in the setting of draft standards and actions at the next stage of the project. Those issues are outlined later in this report.

Towards a Finalised Audit

3.7 Several hundred changes are being made in the finalisation of the audit. These mostly arise from comments received during consultation and site checking by the project team.

3.8 Key changes are likely to include:

- Removal of sites which have been developed or on which development is already approved, such as land at Heriot-Watt Research Park.
- Removal of sites outwith the urban area and with no clear open space function but which were included in the draft audit in error, such as land adjacent to the runway at Edinburgh Airport.
- Inclusion of sites identified by consultees and which meet the classification criteria. Most of these are residential amenity spaces.
- Updating of school sites to take account of completed new school building works and to clarify boundaries of main areas of open space.
- Inclusion of spaces in the Old Town which are below the general 0.05 hectares size threshold but which are significant due to the special character of the area.
- Greater consistency in the separate identification of tennis courts and bowling greens within parks.

3.9 A number of respondents requested that areas of beach and foreshore be included in the audit. While such areas can have a recreational role and in some cases are managed by the Council, they are outwith the definition of open space set in Planning Advice Note 65 and should remain excluded from the audit.

3.10 The finalised audit will include the findings of an extensive field survey carried out by Planning staff. This assessment surveyed the quality of some 700 residential amenity spaces, green corridors and sites classified as other semi-natural greenspace. The survey method combined aspects of the Council's parks quality assessment with a simplified version of a methodology provided by Greenspace Scotland. The survey covered site in Council ownership and

privately owned sites. The findings are now being reviewed by the Neighbourhood Teams and compared with any relevant responses to the questionnaire survey.

- 3.11 A brief overview of the findings will be added to the main audit text. Maps and a sample of the survey score sheets are available as background documents.
- 3.12 This new quality information complements that already available for sports pitches, play parks and parks and gardens. It is intended to include the results of the 2009 parks quality assessment information in the finalised audit.

Towards the Draft Strategy

3.13 The main strategic issues currently being considered are highlighted below.

3.14 General issues:

- The strategy is an opportunity to identify and ultimately complete a citywide green network. This will be based on the recently designated Core Path network and the content of the Council's Access Strategy and will connect with the wider Edinburgh Green Belt and emerging Central Scotland Green Network.
- The strategy will need to set standards in terms of accessibility, size and quality. There may be different kinds of standards for different types of open space.
- The action plans will propose changes intended to help meet those standards which will be carried out by the Council, its public sector and voluntary partners and the private development sector.
- It is intended that both strategy and action plans be reviewed every five years.
- A key issue is whether standards should be limited to reflect what is achievable in the next five years given the resources available to the public and private sectors or whether they should represent the standard of open space provision considered appropriate for the city and achievable in the longer term.
- In some areas actions may include opening up or improving access to existing open spaces, including those owned by institutions and other private interests. In other cases the project is an opportunity to resolve 'problem' sites, which for planning reasons should remain open space in the long term but which are owned by parties unwilling or unable to manage them properly as such.
- Issues outwith the scope of this project include the need for a check on whether the Council's open spaces citywide have Common Good status. This is the subject of a recent report to the Corporate Asset Management

Group (2 September 2009). As Common Good information becomes available it can be added to the online version of the open space audit.

- Another issue raised but outwith the scope of this project is the idea of temporary open space use on sites awaiting development. This project deals with permanent and long term open space provision.

3.15 Parks and gardens issues:

- Consideration is being given to standards which combine accessibility distances with the size and quality of parks and those which set a target number of Green Flag parks in each Neighbourhood Partnership area.
- There may be a need to resolve the dual role of those spaces which are nominally parks but which are heavily used as playing fields and are classified as such in the audit. This is likely to be necessary if park standards are to be achieved and demand for high quality pitch capacity is to be met.

3.16 Sports pitch issues:

- The current Sports Pitches Strategy is being implemented through investment in pitches and pavilions and partnership working through the South East Sports Facilities Project Group. Two of six proposed high quality pitch centres have been established at Meggetland and Saughton. However, there are still not enough high quality pitches to meet demand for formal booking by sport clubs without relying on poorer quality grass pitches in parks and playing fields. There are also anecdotal indications that the creation of new high quality facilities has stimulated new demand not anticipated in the pitch strategy.
- Synthetic pitches are now widely accepted by users as more reliable and they increase the city's pitch capacity but they are generally unsuitable for multi-purpose parks and the associated fencing and floodlighting have a visual impact which needs to be constrained in conservation areas or in the Green Belt.
- High quality synthetic pitch provision has been established in several schools. It has also recently been agreed that booking management of six school playing field locations should be shifted to Edinburgh Leisure in order to make more efficient use of those facilities through a centralised booking system. There may be further secondary school sites where spare capacity can be used to meet wider formal pitch demand. This potential is being investigated by the Community Access to Schools Initiative, which is expected to make a report to the Education, Children and Families Committee in November.
- Supply and demand for formal pitch provision (i.e. bookable pitches for clubs and schools) is addressed in the current pitch strategy and operations of Edinburgh Leisure but there is not a standard for informal playing field provision, which can be important for children and young people.

- For these reasons it is intended to use the open space strategy project to update the Council's position on pitch provision ahead of a wider review of the Council's sports estate to be carried out by Corporate Services. The draft strategy and action plans will be prepared in consultation with SportScotland, Edinburgh Leisure and representatives of the four main pitch sports (Scottish Football Association, Scottish Rugby Union, Cricket Scotland and the Scottish Hockey Union) and the public consultation in 2010 will target the city's sport clubs and organisations.

3.17 Golf and other sports issues:

- The audit identifies golf courses, tennis courts and bowling greens. The consultation findings suggest that there are not major strategic issues relating to tennis court supply and demand. There are indications that demand for bowling greens is declining, but this may require further investigation.
- Indications of falling demand for golf suggest potential overprovision of courses. Set in the context of significantly increased demand for other facilities such as allotments and sports pitches, this raises major strategic issues for open space, as golf courses constitute a significant proportion (quarter) of the city's total open space resource. This issue will be investigated in the preparation of the draft strategy in consultation with Edinburgh Leisure, the city's golf clubs and the relevant national organisations.

3.18 Play space issues:

- The Council currently implements a quality and safety standard for its equipped play areas. There are also many play areas which are privately owned and maintained but which are publicly accessible.
- There is not currently a distance standard for access to equipped play areas. In recent years the Council has sought to provide high quality all-ages (toddler, junior and senior) play areas in a limited number of locations across the city, and has established one facility intended to perform a citywide role (at the eastern Meadows).
- An initial summary of the results of the play survey is available in the Groups Rooms as a background document. The results suggest that children and parents/carers are willing to travel further for higher quality play areas and on average children walk 750 metres (10 minutes) to equipped play parks.
- Some individual responses to the survey confirm that children also regularly play in unequipped play spaces. These are not formally designated as such and can include residential amenity spaces and areas of semi-natural greenspace, such as woodland.

- Consideration is being given to setting a distance standard for access to play space in general and using the action plans to formally identify sites as unequipped play spaces.
- It is intended that the strategy and the relevant action plans will include existing proposals for two new citywide play facilities serving the west and north of the city at Saughton Park and Leith Links.
- The open space strategy has the potential to fulfil the role of a play park strategy. The latter was requested at a previous meeting of the Policy and Strategy Committee (24 February 2009).

3.19 Allotment and community garden issues:

- A revised allotments strategy is currently in preparation. Demand for Council allotments continues to increase. There is now a waiting list of over 2,100 for 1,230 Council plots.
- The allotment strategy review has identified potential new allotments sites. It is likely that the draft strategy and action plans will include many of these as proposed actions.
- In addition to those sites, the open space strategy project is an opportunity to consider sites currently in another open space use for which there may be declining demand or no need in terms of the proposed standards. Such sites may be better used as allotments.
- The consultation process has highlighted a trend for community gardens. These are usually communally cultivated and tend to be established in shared private residential open space. Such spaces are outwith the scope of the audit and strategy, but the finalised audit will note where a community garden has been created in an audit site. Community gardens are supported generally by the Council and facilitated where appropriate by the Neighbourhood Teams.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The cost of preparing the audit and strategy and carrying out consultation will be met by existing budgets for City Development and Services for Communities. The audit is likely to have indirect financial implications through its influence on the subsequent strategy action plans. The strategy and action plans are likely to identify projects along with their potential cost and funding sources.

5 Environmental Impact

- 5.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment of the strategy is being carried out as the project progresses.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The first stage of the open space strategy project is nearing completion. Extensive public consultation and site surveys have been carried out. The audit of open space is being finalised using this information. The main issues to be addressed by the strategy and action plans have now been identified.

7 Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) notes the process and findings of the first stage of consultation (appendix 1);
- b) notes the emerging issues set out in paragraphs 3.13 – 3.19 of this report; and
- c) refers this report to the TIE Committee for its information.

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Appendices 1 Findings of first public consultation

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Wards affected All

Single Outcome Agreement

Supports National Outcome 6 – We live longer, healthier lives.

Supports National Outcome 10 - We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.

Supports National Outcome 12 – We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.

Supports National Outcome 14 – We reduce the local and global impact of our consumption and production.

Supports Local Outcome – There are more attractive and accessible green spaces across the city.

Background Papers

Summary of 2009 play survey

Results of 2009 quality survey of residential amenity, green corridors and other semi-natural greenspaces

Edinburgh Open Space Strategy – Draft Audit, reporters to Policy and Strategy Committee, 12 May 2009 and Planning Committee, 14 May 2009

Edinburgh Open Space Strategy – Start of Project, report to Planning Committee, 26 February 2009

Review of Play, report to Education, Children and Families Committee, 13 January 2009

Motion by Councillor Buchan – Play Park Strategy, Item 6, Policy and Strategy Committee, 24 February 2009