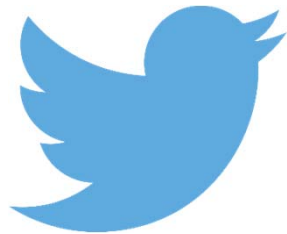


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The History and Management of Open Spaces



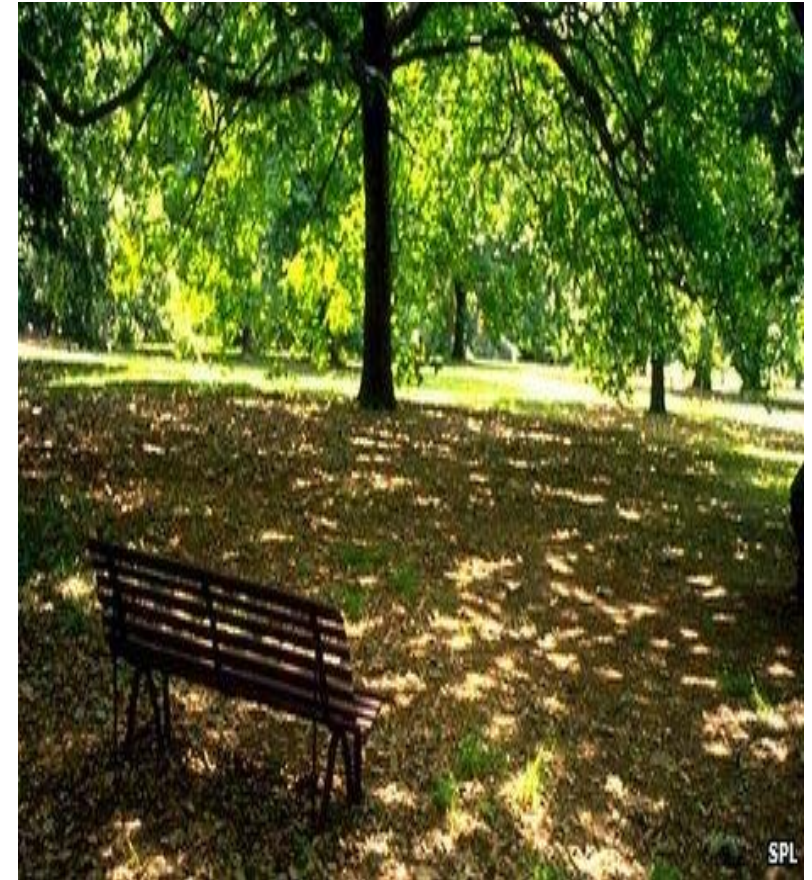
WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE?

Open spaces are often seen as: *'open, public accessible spaces'*.

Open spaces can be hardscape or **green spaces**.

The focus will be on the definition contained within National Planning Policy Framework which defines open space as:

'All open spaces of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canal, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity'



T TYPOLOGY OF GREEN SPACES

- There are a broad range of open spaces that may be of public value: **parks and gardens** - including urban parks, country parks and formal gardens;
- **natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces** - including woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (e.g. downlands, commons and meadows) wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and derelict open land and rock areas (eg cliffs, quarries and pits
- **green corridors** - including river and canal banks, cycle ways, and rights of way;
- **outdoor sports facilities** (with natural or artificial surfaces and either publicly or privately owned) - including tennis courts, bowling greens, sports pitches, golf courses, athletics tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor sports areas.
- **Green belt areas**

THE HISTORY OF OPEN SPACES

From the earliest times greenspaces whether formal or informal have had an attraction for society.

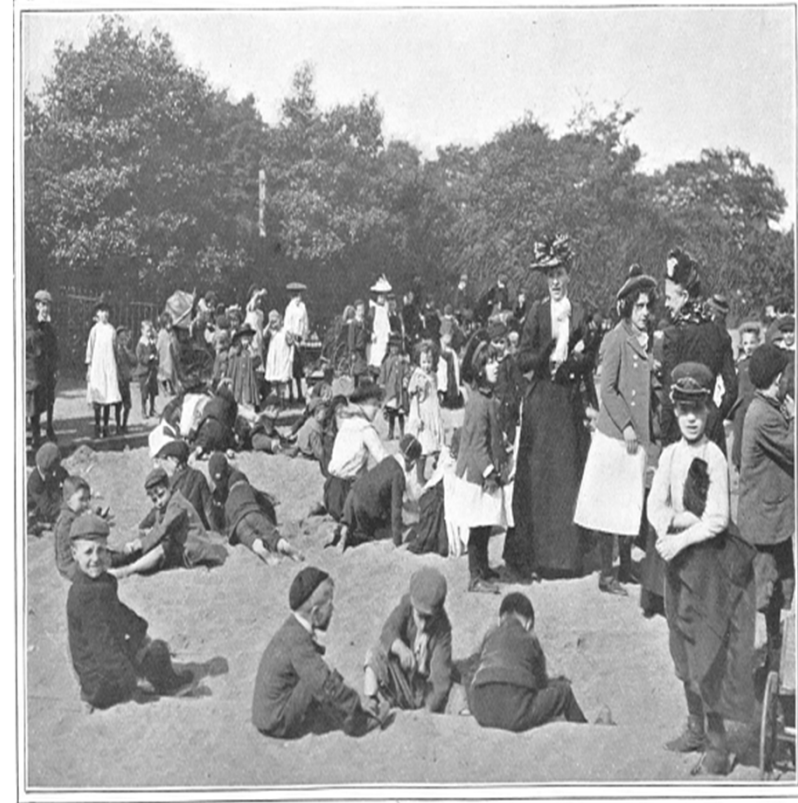
- Sacred groves
- Royal gardens
- Food growing and hunting
- Churchyards and cemeteries
- Public parks



THE NEED FOR PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

In the 19th century the move from the countryside to urban towns in search of regular work led to increasing pressure on living space and led to disease and unhealthy life styles

- Public parks - conceived as spaces for contact across social divisions where working classes could learn '*civility*'.
- Philanthropists bequeathed land to establish parks to ensure the health and well-being of their workforces.
- The concern in the 1930s and 40s for the physical and moral welfare of the young, and the need to make them "fit to fight", shifted the emphasis to recreation and sports grounds.



VICTORIA PARK : THE SAND-PIT.

URBANISATION AND THE THREAT TO OPEN SPACES

- Increasing urbanisation and the threat to open land led to the creation of the **Open Spaces Society** in 1865 which aimed to protect and increase public enjoyment of commons, town and village greens and other open spaces and public rights of way in English and Welsh towns and countryside.
- 1906 passing of the **Open Spaces Act** of which Section 20 determined open space as being any land, whether inclosed or not, on which there are no buildings or of which not more than one-twentieth part is covered with buildings, and the whole of the remainder of which is laid out as a garden or is used for purposes of recreation, or lies waste and unoccupied.”
- The Act gave local authorities powers to acquire land by agreement for open space purposes - primarily recreation and amenity.



OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Within the 1906 Act the following was identified a way local authorities could acquire open space land:

- **Acquisition** by agreement from trusts, organisations, charities and individual benefactors – most usually have conditions that the land is used for recreation and public good. This can also include disused burial grounds.

Other options include:

- A **compulsory purchase** order may be made under the Local Government Act 1972 in conjunction with the 1906 Act to acquire open space. Land may also be acquired under the Town and Country Planning or other Acts and later appropriated to the Open Spaces Act.
- Housing Act 1985 and the Education Act 1996 allows local authorities to provide and maintain open spaces for the well being of residents and school needs e.g. green spaces and playing fields

MAINTENANCE OF OPEN SPACES AND BURIAL GROUNDS BY LOCAL AUTHORITY

- Section 10 of the 1906 Open Space Act states:
- "A local authority who have acquired any estate or interest or control over any open space or burial ground under this Act shall, subject to any conditions under which the estate, interest or control was acquired:
 - hold and administer the open space or burial ground in trust to allow, and with a view to, the enjoyment thereof by the public as an open space within the meaning of this Act and under proper control and regulation and for no other purpose ; and
 - **maintain and keep the open space or burial ground in a good and decent state,**
 - and may inclose it or keep it inclosed with proper railings and gates, and may drain, level, lay out, turf, plant, ornament, light, provide with seats, and otherwise improve it, and do all such works and things and employ such officers and servants as may be requisite for the purposes aforesaid or any of them.

BYELAWS RELATING TO OPEN SPACES

Byelaws – Open Spaces Act 1906

A local authority may, with reference to any open space or burial ground in or over which they have acquired any estate, interest, or control under this Act, **make byelaws for the regulation thereof**, and of the days and times of admission thereto, and for the preservation of order and prevention of nuisances therein, and may by such byelaws impose penalties recoverable summarily for the infringement thereof, and provide for the removal of any person infringing any byelaw by any officer of the local authority or police constable.



THE PROBLEM WITH PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

- During the 1970 and 1980's financial savings caused councils to reduce staffing numbers and other parks infrastructure.
- Many familiar features such as cafes and playgrounds were lost
- Changing patterns of social life left parks empty, whilst neglect, decay, and anti-social behaviour from a small minority reinforced the impression that parks should be avoided rather than visited..
- There was need to reassess what parks and open spaces should be about.
- The Green Flag Awards helped establish a benchmark for quality
- A series of research papers and Government Task forces began to look at how parks and greenspaces could be improved.



THE FINDINGS

- Understand the values needs and aspirations of local people
- Understand the green space itself
- Develop a clear and shared vision for the space
- Form a collaborative and enabling partnership
- Secure political and organisational support
- Plan sustainable management and maintenance arrangements
- Ensure long term viability and sustainability
- Recognise and promote (changing) heritage and cultural values

Urban Green Spaces Task Force 2002, Green Spaces Better Places.

NEW MONIES, NEW PROBLEMS.

- Over the last 25 years The National Lottery has invested more than £950m in public parks and cemeteries of national, regional or local heritage value for the enjoyment and recreation of local people.
- Much of the money invested was in the form of capital investment leaving the responsibility of revenue maintenance with local authorities at a time when budgets were being reduced as a result of austerity measures.
- It is estimated over the last decade local councils have lost £10 billion in funding for parks and greenspaces.

THE MANAGEMENT OF OPEN SPACES



THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH

- Urban parks and open spaces are generally used for gentle recreation, dog walking, sports activities and exercise.
- Victorian infrastructure with formal horticultural features.
- Created in a way which demands high maintenance and high cost.
- More aimed at social experience and aesthetics.
- Playing fields and recreation grounds used by relatively few people and seasonal.
- Quality of experience is an issue for many parks and green spaces.
- Following a traditional pattern of management in a changing world.

DEVELOPING A NEW MIND-SET

- Urban greenspaces are now more widely recognised as providing a **multitude of benefits** to humans, fauna and flora and the wider environmental ecosystems.
- Where greenspaces are present, they are **not always evenly distributed, nor easily accessible**. Often it is in those areas where greenspace is lacking, that its presence would have the most beneficial effects in terms of health improvement, reducing loneliness, promoting community cohesion and providing greater contact with nature.
- The importance of greenspace has also been recognised within the UK Government's '**25-year plan to improve the environment**' which acknowledge the essential role that the natural environment and greenspaces play in people's physical and mental health, and the need to improve population health and wellbeing by forging a closer connection between people and the natural environment.
- However these greenspaces are now under **increasing pressure from a number of different threats** including the growing demands for new land for housing, reducing council maintenance budgets and from the increasing impacts of climate change

NATURAL CAPITAL AND ECOSYSTEMS SERVICES

People have tended to pay attention to the aesthetic, social, and recreational contributions of urban parks whilst ignoring their **ecological benefits** which are many.

Natural Capital: geology, soil, air, water and all living things,

Ecosystem services include: climate regulation, natural flood defences, the prevention of soil erosion provided by forests, the billions of tonnes of carbon stored by peatlands, the pollination of crops by insects, and water purification provided by our rocks, soil and wetlands.

There are also **cultural ecosystem services** such as the inspiration we take from wildlife and the natural environment and our sense of place within the natural world.

Parks provide several ecosystem services, such as water and air purification, wind and noise reduction, carbon sequestration, microclimate regulation, wildlife habitat, and social and psychological well-being.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF PARKS

Roles and responsibilities of the 21st century parks professional



CREATING THE NEW NORM

Open Space strategies need to ensure:

- open space is protected, managed and effectively planned for in the future.
- involves public, private, voluntary sector partners and community groups.
- sets new standards for open space.
- that new development makes proper provision for open space (Local Plans / Biodiversity net gain).
- open space is seen as a critical part of wider improvements to the public realm.
- open space allows for choice and play, and for people to experiment with using and experiencing them in different ways.
- consider how spaces might adapt to changing social, economic and environmental conditions .
- recognise the value of open spaces to attracting economic investment.
- Strategies need to be adaptable to changing needs.

LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES

- Climate change Strategy
- Regeneration strategy
- Health strategy
- Culture strategy
- Education strategy
- Crime and disorder strategy
- Local transport plans and strategies
- Climate change strategy
- Biodiversity strategy
- Equalities and access strategy

NEW LAND MANAGEMENT AND HORTICULTURAL APPROACHES

- Naturalisation of parks and open spaces (biodiversity, pollinators, reduced maintenance, reduced use of herbicide/pesticides, natural planting, communications)
- Climate change horticulture – reduced watering, increased tree planting, new plant types, street trees, mini forests, sustainable urban drainage systems. increased cooling effects/carbon sequestration.
- Supporting pollinators - wildflower meadows/verges,
- Rewilding, natural regeneration where appropriate



‘LOOSENING THE REINS’

- Traditional approach of local authority being responsible for planning maintenance and promotion.
- Devolution of responsibilities:
 - ‘sliding scale approach – Cornwall model. (town and parish councils)
 - Community-led parks and green space management. (FoP, Community organisations, Wildlife Trusts)

<https://mycommunity.org.uk/files/downloads/Community-ownership-and-management-of-parks-and-green-spaces.pdf>

- Developers taking on responsibility for open space management associated with their development (costs to residents)

OPEN SPACE STRATEGY REVIEW

Focus on

- health,
- play,
- recreation,
- open space standards and quality,
- equitable provision,
- accessibility.

Importance of open spaces and the benefits they bring reflected in Local Plan/ designation of local green spaces/planning requirements .

Still very much key elements of any open space review



NEW CONSIDERATIONS

- **National Planning Policy Framework (2019)** highlights importance of open spaces (greenspaces) to combatting the effects of climate change and protecting biodiversity, flood risk and coastal change.
- Opportunity to use new funding (Biodiversity net gain, woodland creation grants etc.) to re appraise the additional benefits open spaces bring and how we use them.
- Climate change and biodiversity plans etc. now relying heavily on open spaces to deliver targets.
- Public Health England championing green spaces – especially during pandemic
- Increasing number of stakeholders looking to open spaces to provide solutions.
- Growing public demand for better quality greenspaces and desire to be involved.
- Naturalisation, rewilding becoming more relevant linked to reduced use of chemicals.
- Natural capital and ecosystems provided now fully recognised and valued.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.

- Need to more fully integrate environmental considerations and benefits into open space review
- Increase opportunity for communities and partners to shape the review and ultimately take on some elements of open space planning and management
- Consider new operational and horticultural open space management practices.
- Communicate reasons for any changes or new approaches to as wide a user base as possible.
- Ensure future developments provide sustainable open space management and funding
- Need for local authority to champion open spaces across as many services and partner organisations as possible, highlighting the benefits open spaces bring to their agendas.
- Accept that open space planning and management will have to be fluid in order to meet changing environmental, social and cultural needs.

NEW MUNICIPALISM

Delivering for local people and local economies

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