

5.2.2 Green Spaces

Research has shown that green spaces can reduce the impact of deprivation and improve the health and wellbeing of residents¹. Living close to green spaces is associated with reduced mortality and contributes to narrowing the gap in life expectancy²; access to the natural environment helps people recover from illness and reduce stress³.

A recent study by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE, 2010) found that:

- *Where people perceive green spaces to be good, they are more likely to be satisfied in general with their neighbourhood and more likely to report better health*
- *When people feel safe in their local green space they are more physically active*
- *Almost half of respondents stated that better facilities would make them use their local green space more*
- *Less than 1% of those in social housing used the green spaces on their own estate due to fears about personal safety or lack of facilities*
- *Local parks accounted for 90% of the green spaces used*

About a third of the borough is green, open space. This is made up of premier parks such as the Arboretum, King George V and George Rose and Willenhall Memorial parks, countryside such as Merrions Wood and Barr Beacon as well as play areas and managed tree plantation. Recreational facilities within these can include waterways for fishing, bandstands for concerts, lido/water features for young children's play, as well as venues for healthy walks.

Walsall has developed a Green Space Strategy for the 5 year period 2012-17. This Green Space Strategy is the second such strategy for Walsall which sets out a five year plan for the future management, maintenance and development of all green space across the Borough. The first Green Space Strategy produced in 2006 was effective in providing a framework for securing investment in Walsall's Green Spaces, raising green space quality and putting in place a series of service and process improvements. As part of the development of this new strategy the Green Spaces Working Group found that over 90% of the recommendations had been delivered.

Over the last five years there has been significant change in the economic and political climate at a national and more local level. Resources for public services are being reduced and this will have an impact across all Council service areas including Green Spaces. This Green Space Strategy has been developed against this backdrop and sets out the

¹CABE: Community green: using local spaces to tackle inequality and improve health; CABE (2010)

²Mitchell, R and Popham, F; Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study; The Lancet: 372,2008

³Natural England, Health and the Natural Environment:
<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/health/default.aspx>

contribution that green spaces make to the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan. Walsall Council will be responsible for leading on the delivery of this strategy but it will need to be a partnership approach to deliver the vision and aims within this document. This will include building on existing partnerships with agencies such as West Midlands Police, Walsall CCG, with friends groups and community based organisations. It will also require the development of new partnerships with other agencies, the third sector and Walsall's diverse communities.

The Green Space Strategy was developed based on extensive consultation with Walsall residents through a household survey and with children and young people through an online survey. The Council has also consulted with parks and green space Friends Groups and other community based organisations involved in green space management and improvement.

Through a series of workshops the Council has also involved a range of agencies, organisations and stakeholders to develop and set priorities for Walsall's Green Space. The Green Spaces Working Group, part of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel has also made a significant contribution to the development of the strategy through their work which resulted in the vision for the strategy:

"We want Walsall's green spaces to be public assets that everyone has pride in and that help secure the sustainable future of the borough for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of the whole community".

Indicator

- *The number of Green Flags in the borough's Premier Parks*

Priorities for action:

In order to achieve the strategy the analysis and recommendations are set out under a series of 7 aims which were discussed and prioritised through a series of workshops. The aim for the Walsall Green Space Strategy are to achieve:

- *Green Spaces that Make the Borough an Attractive Place to Live, Work and Socialise;*
- *Safer and More Secure Green Spaces;*
- *Green Spaces Contributing to Greater Health & Wellbeing;*
- *Well Maintained and Accessible Green Spaces;*
- *Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity and Geo-diversity;*
- *More engaged communities & neighbourhoods;*
- *Stronger Partnerships and Innovation.*

The Walsall Green Space Strategy⁴ sets out how these aims will be delivered in a detailed action plan covering the five years from 2012 to 2017.

⁴ http://inside.walsall.gov.uk/staging/green_space_strategy_finalv6_opt.pdf