

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

# Green Space Strategy Review 2014

A sustainable network of **good quality green spaces** that are safe, healthy, rich in biodiversity and distinctive in character; **celebrating what is special about Solihull**



**Solihull**  
METROPOLITAN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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# executive summary

The importance of Green space within Solihull should not be underestimated, it is what makes Solihull. There are over 1000 hectares of accessible green space within Solihull providing a backbone of green infrastructure running throughout the Borough. This equates to over 5 hectares of natural areas, parks, open spaces, play areas and allotments per 1000 head of the population. Visitors to green spaces have expressed a 93% satisfaction rating with the green space services provided by SMBC. The borough now has 10 Green Flag Award green spaces, which is level with Birmingham City and surpasses the majority of comparable local authority areas within the West Midlands. All of this is delivered within the framework of strong community partnerships and one of the lowest 20% of local authority spending on sport, play and parks.

More however will need to be done and in the face of emerging issues such as localism and the implications of further cuts in spending, the future strategic and operational delivery of green space in Solihull will need to adapt and change. This document therefore sets out to review the extensive Green Space Strategy completed in 2006 and consider the implications of relevant policy and cultural changes. For example the health and well being agenda has come to the fore in recent years. Green spaces in Solihull will therefore have a clear role to play in terms of tranquillity for mental well being but also as safe venues for active lifestyles.

The review has been undertaken to provide a framework to inform the strategic planning of green space and ensure links are made with operational delivery.

## Key issues for the future will focus on:

- **Spatial planning** - Meeting zone action plan standards for quality, quantity and accessibility as part of Local Plan policies;
- **Community** - Helping communities take a lead to deliver the localism agenda;
- **Natural environment** - Ensuring that any proposals accord with green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity strategies;
- **Strategic alignment** - Ensuring that provision of green and open spaces respond to cross cutting agendas such as health and well being;
- **Resources** - Continuing to provide value for money and increase income.

An action plan is provided as part of the review process. The actions will be implemented by the Green Space Strategy Group and an annual review will take place with Council Members. ■



## 1.1 The need for a green space strategy

Green space is what makes Solihull. From the leafy lanes to the Cole River Corridor and Elmdon Park to every local neighbourhood play area, Green space binds the structure of our diverse Borough. The need for a Green Space Strategy is motivated by a range of factors, which include financial priorities, changes in legislation, rising customer expectations and the need to plan for new green spaces in the Borough. In 2006 a Green Space Strategy (GSS) for Solihull was developed to help plan, manage and maintain Solihull's Green Spaces. The strategy was developed to set priorities for the future, especially in terms of planning policy. Since 2006 a lot has happened and a lot has changed. Globally there are increased financial pressures and this is having an impact on local services. Local government has not been immune to the economic downturn and the original 2006 GSS needs to be reviewed in the light of new and emerging factors.

The need for a coherent and appropriate Green Space Strategy for Solihull is now more relevant than ever. Faced with increased pressures on resources, new policies from the coalition government and the planned growth of Solihull in the future the GSS 2006 needs to be interpreted and updated. The Green Space Strategy completed in 2006 presented various aspirational targets, many

of which are still pertinent today. However what is required is a re-examination of the original intentions of the GSS 2006 in relation to future strategic demands and operational delivery.

This document therefore seeks to retain many of the principles established in 2006 and as part of the review process reinterpret the strategic vision and aims in light of recent changes.

## 1.2 Background to the review

This Green Space Review for Solihull forms a reassessment and updated version of the Green Space Strategy completed in 2006. This document brings together previous studies, new policies and emerging issues to understand the context of Green Space in Solihull.

### The overall purpose of the strategy is to:

- Review Solihull's Green Space Strategy 2006;
- Consider local and national directives such as the Local Development Framework;
- Incorporate and respond to local and national directives;
- Provide an overarching approach and deliverable action plan;
- Provide a strategy that can be regularly updated and understood by a range of stakeholders.



## 1.3 Defining Green Space

Green space can mean something to everyone and there is no one set definition. Green space has, over the last ten or so years, come to represent a generic term for open spaces, parks, gardens, wildlife areas, allotments and churchyards that are usually managed by local authorities. In planning

policy terms the newly established National Planning Policy Framework (2012) does not provide a definition of green space. However for the purposes of this review, the term green space will refer to sites or areas within the typologies provided in the now superseded Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG 17).

**These are summarised in table 1 below:**

PPG17 Typology	Primary purpose
Parks and gardens	Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events.
Natural and semi natural green spaces, including urban woodland.	Wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.
Green corridors.	Walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel, and opportunities for wildlife mitigation.
Outdoor sports facilities.	Participation in outdoor sports, such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls, athletics or countryside and water sports.
Amenity green space.	Opportunities for informal activities close to home or work or enhancement of the appearance of residential or other areas.
Provision for children and young people.	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, ball courts, skateboard areas and teenage shelters.
Allotments, community gardens and urban farms.	Opportunities for those people who wish to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion.
Cemeteries, disused churchyards and burial grounds.	Quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

*Table 1: PPG 17 green space typologies*

Green space within this review document is not exclusively about spaces managed by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC), as many sites that provide public benefit are owned and managed by charities, parish councils or private individuals.

**In broad terms however, green space within this document will focus on:**

- Areas, sites or features that have public benefit e.g. recreational facilities such as children’s play;

- Areas sites or features that have unrestricted access i.e. you don’t have to pay to enter or be a member of a club;
- Areas, sites or features that have special landscape, heritage or ecological value that is important to the culture of Solihull;
- Areas, sites or features that allow people to access and connect with the natural environment e.g. cycle routes.

## 1.4 The scope of the review

Green space is, by its very nature, intricate and multifaceted and is not necessarily just about parks. Green space brings people together, helps biodiversity to thrive and provides freely accessible places for everyone to enjoy, relax and be healthy. This can involve a number of stakeholders, interest groups, community groups, specialist policy and technical advisers, managers and contractors. Figure 1 shows the connections groups and individuals have with green space in Solihull.

The extent of involvement in green space delivery is complex and demanding. For example spatial planning within Solihull needs to consider the future provision and extent of green space and how this links with the existing green network. Operationally any additions or changes in green space provision need to be budgeted and resourced accordingly. The essence of any green space strategy is therefore to balance the priorities of a range of influences, expectations and demands from those concerned with the delivery and management of

green space. This needs to be considered from both a strategic perspective through to operations on the ground. The breadth and depth of these issues cannot realistically be meaningfully dealt within one document. The scope of the review could potentially focus on any number of aspects but the overall approach is to provide an overarching framework that brings together other strategies and plans.

**The scope of the review therefore takes into consideration a range of issues and focuses on the following elements:**

- **Strategic spatial planning** - interpreting policy requirements, setting standards and providing actions for service improvement and delivery;
- **Customer focus** - delivering localism and a high quality customer experience;
- **Service development** - setting priorities for improving the delivery of green spaces managed and maintained by SMBC.

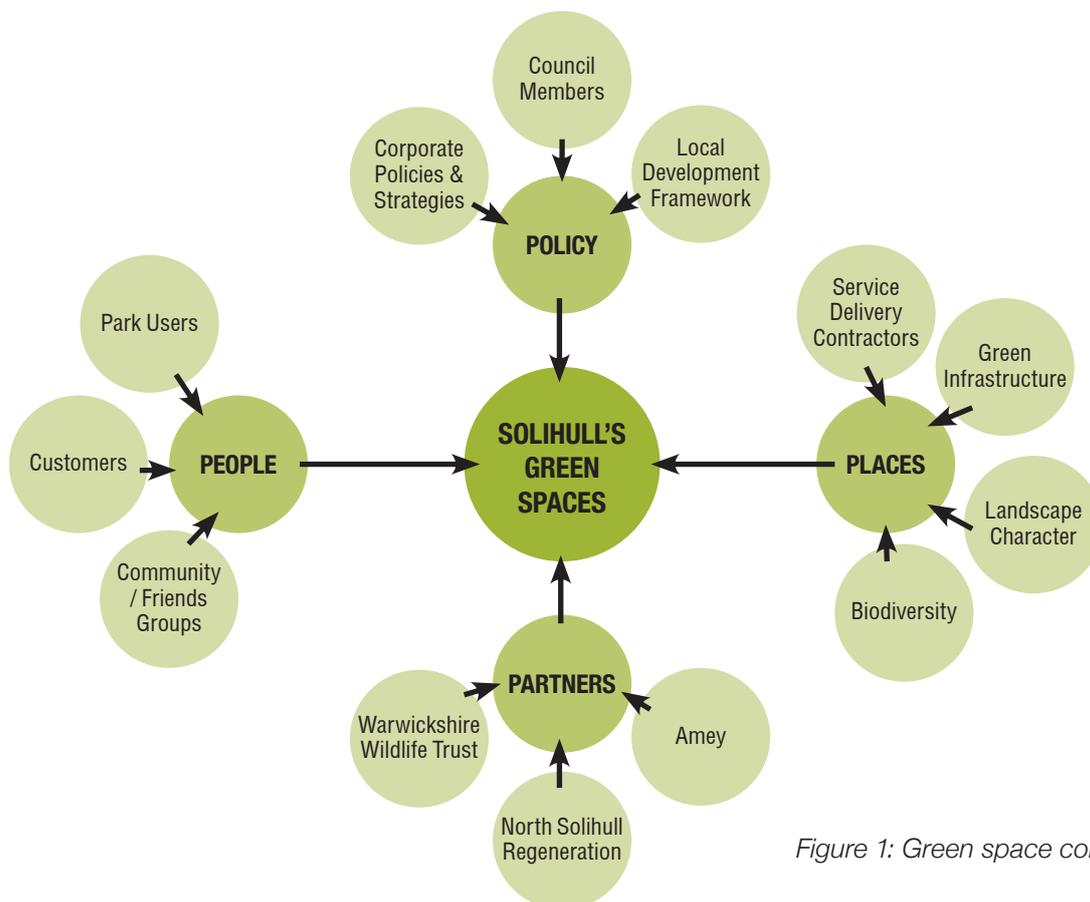


Figure 1: Green space connections

# 1 introduction

The Green Space Strategy Review 2014 also seeks to provide an overarching document that links strategy with delivery. This is important so that all stakeholders understand the framework of green space in Solihull and can plan accordingly.

To aid wider understanding and assist in providing an integrated approach the framework of the review

will focus key themes, aims and actions using the context of the Green Flag Award. The Green Flag Award is the national standard for green space management.

**The scope of the review will therefore refer to the Green Flag Award assessment themes, which are summarised in table 2.**

Green Flag Award Themes	Principles
A welcome place	All green spaces should be of a high quality and accessible to a wider range of people as possible within the context of each site.
Healthy, safe and secure	All users should have the opportunity to enjoy green spaces that are safe and secure. Green spaces should also contribute to health and well being.
Cleanliness and maintenance	Each green space should have a defined standard for maintenance and cleanliness appropriate to the context of the site.
Sustainability	Green spaces have an inherent role in environmental, social and economic sustainability. Planning and delivery should consider environmental enhancements and potential impacts.
Conservation	Green spaces have a primary role in the protection and conservation of heritage, culture and biodiversity.
Marketing	Strategic planning and operation delivery should understand the needs of all customers and adapt provision and management of green spaces accordingly.
Community involvement	Green spaces are community assets. The planning and delivery of green spaces should seek to involve and engage with people at a number of levels. Facilities should respond to community needs.
Overall management	Long term strategic planning of green spaces should ensure quantitative and qualitative provision to meet the prescribed standards for Solihull. Spatial plans, management plans, financial planning and performance monitoring should all coalesce to achieve a long term vision.

*Table 2: Green Flag Award criteria and principles*

In summary the GSS review and update will focus on the standards formulated with the GSS 2006 and interpret actions for the next five years. The emphasis of the review will be to have a useable and fit for purpose document that can be readily

understood by a range of audiences, which include elected Members, Council Officers, community groups, Parish Councils and key partners such as Service Delivery Contractors, Sustain, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and North Solihull Regeneration. ■

## 2.1 The context of Solihull’s Green Space Strategy

Strategic planning for green space in Solihull can trace its roots back to the Parks and Open Space Strategy first published in 1999, which focused on enhancing the principal parks such as Malvern and Brueton. As a natural progression of this, Solihull’s first Green Space Strategy was adopted by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in August 2006. The strategy provided a full assessment and analysis of green space assets and provision across the Borough. The vision for the strategy was:

**“By 2025 Solihull aims to provide a network of attractive, high quality, accessible green spaces that are managed and developed, recognising the Borough’s landscape character and local distinctiveness, to meet the diverse needs of the community and the natural environment. Our green spaces should be safe, clean and maintained in a sustainable way, becoming an important element of everyday life, for the future enjoyment and well-being of all.”**

### The scope of the 2006 strategy included:

- An audit of the existing green spaces and their associated features and facilities;
- Mapping of the audit findings onto a computer based mapping system (GIS);
- Consultation with stakeholders through topic based and individual meetings;
- Consultation via a household survey (5000 randomly selected households from across the Borough);
- Review of the existing policies and strategies, including the planning policies and approaches towards developers’ contributions;
- Consideration of other policy objectives, including those related to conservation measures;
- Comparison with other local authorities and any relevant ‘national standards’;
- Development of a Green Infrastructure Plan which is the network of spaces across the authority;

- Development of proposed ‘local standards’ for different types of green space;
- Development of an Implementation Plan that sets out the actions necessary to achieve the vision and the local standards;
- Development of Zone Action Plans.

The context of the 2006 strategy focused predominantly on planning issues to meet the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance 17. The resulting strategy for the first time provided a detailed investigation of the overall provision of green space in the Borough. A large amount of data and information was collated to provide a robust evidence base for planning policy information in terms of spatial land use within the Borough and to determine standards and hierarchies for green space provision. The outcome of the analysis culminated in the creation of six Zone Action Plans across the Borough, each with their own aspirational targets for delivering green space. Zone action plans were defined based on local landscape characteristics and community aspirations.

**Table 3 outlines the zone areas which applied to the 2006 strategy.**

Zone	Action plan area
Zone 1	Lyndon, Olton and Elmdon
Zone 2	Silhill and St Alphege
Zone 3	Shirley East, Shirley West and Shirley South
Zone 4	Bickenhill and Meriden
Zone 5	Blythe, Dorridge and Hockley Heath, and Knowle
Zone 6	Castle Bromwich, Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst and Fordbridge, and Smiths Wood

*Table 3: Zone Action Plan areas*

## 2 where are we now?

Within the scope of the GSS 2006, there were a number of limitations. Although the vision for the GSS 2006 extended until 2025, the strategy did not provide any definitive timescales for achieving the prescribed standards or aspirations for each zone. This has meant that day to day planning has been in some instances limited and unfocused. In addition the size and complexity of the final document has been difficult to interpret by stakeholders. This is not a criticism of the document but more a retrospective observation in relation to completed activity since 2006. However it is considered that much of the information and use of individual zones is still relevant today and provides a useful platform in which to plan for the future.

### 2.2 Progress since 2006

The Green Space Strategy completed in 2006 proposed the establishment of a steering group to lead on the implementation of the strategy and specific zone action plans. Much of the structure and planning around key actions were however ad hoc given capacity and resources limitations. However in 2011 the Strategic Green Space Group was formed. The group consists of key officers from departments across SMBC and the group has the overall mandate to provide a strategic and coordinated approach to the management and development of Solihull's green spaces. The group coordinated the updating of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and the tracking of zone action plans in 2011.

#### Key learning points since the creation of the strategy also include:

- The need for coordination of planning and coordination across a range of SMBC departments;
- The need for a more “user friendly” document that can be implemented and monitored by a range of stakeholders;
- The need to update and have a current understanding of comparative quality of green spaces with the borough;
- The need for a live document that captures the requirements of the 2006 GSS and adapts to changes.

#### Overall there have been a number of achievements since the adoption of the 2006 Green Space Strategy, which can be summarised as follows:

- £1.4m improvement project for Tudor Grange Park;
- Solihull's Playbuilder Project enabled the redevelopment and improvement of 23 play spaces with £962,143 over a 3 year period 2008–2011;
- Securing £200k funding from the Environment Agency for the development of an Urban Drainage System in Babbs Mill Park;
- Delivering the 2010 Local Area Agreement reward target for increase in Green Flag Parks, including Meriden park in North Solihull;
- Increasing the number of Green Flag Awards from 4 in 2006 to 10 in 2012;
- Knowle Park Heritage Project 2010;
- Successful joint project with Solihull Cycling Club to deliver the first of its kind purpose built 1km Cycle Circuit available to the general public;
- £600k Shirley Park Improvement Project;
- Delivery of the 5 year Local Nature reserve designation plan. With a total of 17 Local Nature Reserves throughout Solihull;
- Tudor Grange Youth Engagement Project 2011/12;
- Living Roots: Open Spaces Youth Project 2012, Babbs Mill, delivered in partnership with Regenerating North Solihull;
- Living Roots: Nature through the lens 2012, Meriden Park - funded by Community Development Foundation;
- Establishment of Friends of Elmdon Park, Friends of Dorridge Park, Friends of Babbs Mill, Friends of Damson Parks and Hillfield Park Improvement Group;
- Provision of Raglan Way Public Open Space 2010 (Zone 6);
- Provision of Doveway Park 2013 (Zone 6);
- Elmdon Park, Community Spaces, Big Lottery Funding £35,000 - 2011 - delivered a new interactive nature trail, improvement access with LNR, training for friends groups, educational engagement sessions.

In relation to the zone action plans within the 2006 GSS, table 4 summarises achievements to date.

Zone	Action plan area	Achievements since 2006
Zone 1	Lyndon, Olton and Elmdon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Redevelopment of Jilcott Road Allotment site with an increase of 26 full size plots</li> <li>■ 1 Junior football pitch provided at Elmdon Heath Recreation Ground</li> <li>■ Green Flag Award status for Elmdon Park achieved</li> <li>■ 3 sites designated with Local Nature Reserve status- Olton Jubilee Park (2008), Hobbs Moat (2009) and Elmdon Coppice (2010)</li> </ul>
Zone 2	Silhill and St Alphege	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Additional green space of 0.71 hectares</li> <li>■ Green Flag Award status for Malvern / Brueton Park achieved</li> <li>■ Tudor Grange Refurbishment work completed in 2010</li> <li>■ Cycle Track Lighting project 2012</li> <li>■ Malvern &amp; Brueton Park Run route 2011</li> <li>■ Green Flag Award Tudor Grange 2012</li> </ul>
Zone 3	Shirley East, Shirley West and Shirley South additional green space of 0.71 hectares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Green Flag Award status for Shirley Park achieved</li> <li>■ Shirley Park Improvements Project 2012</li> </ul>
Zone 4	Bickenhill and Meriden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 1 new allotment site at Holly Lane Balsall Common with 20 full size plots</li> <li>■ 3 senior football pitches, 1 junior football pitch, 2 Cricket Squares at Bickenhill Recreation Ground.</li> <li>■ Green Flag Award status for Lavender Hall Park achieved</li> <li>■ 3 sites designated with Local Nature Reserve status- Marston Green Park (2007), Lavender Hall Park (2008) and Marston Green Millennium Wood (2010)</li> </ul>
Zone 5	Blythe, Dorridge and Hockley Heath, and Knowle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 1 new allotment site at Chadwick End with 9 full size plots</li> <li>■ 1 senior and 2 junior football pitch at Chadwick End</li> <li>■ Green Flag Award status for Knowle and Dorridge Parks</li> <li>■ Redevelopment of Blythe Valley Country Park achieved</li> <li>■ 2 sites designated with Local Nature Reserve status- Hillfield Park (2008) and Dicken's Heath Country Park (2010)</li> <li>■ Green Flag Award Hillfield Park 2012</li> </ul>
Zone 6	Castle Bromwich, Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst and Fordbridge, and Smiths Wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 3 new skate parks facilities created</li> <li>■ 5 new multi use games areas created</li> <li>■ 2 new junior football pitches at Bluebell Recreation Ground</li> <li>■ 3 new senior, 1 junior and 1 cricket square created at Arden Hall</li> <li>■ Adventure Playground established 2008</li> <li>■ Green Flag Award Babbs Mill 2012</li> <li>■ Green Flag Award Meriden Park 2010</li> <li>■ Local Nature Reserve Status Chelmsley Wood LNR (Meriden Park)</li> <li>■ Establishment of Bluebell Community Garden 2011</li> </ul>

Table 4: Zone action plan achievements since 2006

## 2 where are we now?

Since the adoption of the original Green Space Strategy in 2006 there have been considerable political, legislative and financial changes. Major factors such as the economic down turn in 2008 and local government funding cuts has resulted in a changing dynamic.

For example many of the planned regeneration proposals have not materialised, which has reduced the overall potential for securing green space

provision and enhancements through planning gain. Successful achievements have however been made through efficient resource management, increased partnership working and prioritising services.

Outstanding priorities for each zone will still be an aspirational target for the green space strategy. These will be evaluated and lead into the annual action plan, outlined in section 4.3.



## 2.3 Green space and Solihull

Solihull is a Borough well known for its economic vitality and strategic communication network. It is however a Borough of contrasts. To the north are areas of multiple deprivation while the south is formed by mature suburbs and rural settlements. Green space is reflected in all aspects of the Borough from the historic landscape fabric of the Arden Forest, the network of green spaces and connecting corridors such as the towpath canal routes. Within Solihull there is estimated to be 1000 hectares of accessible green space. On average this provides approximately 5 hectares of accessible green space per 1000 population. Depending on the location this can vary from 3 to 11 hectares per 1000 population.

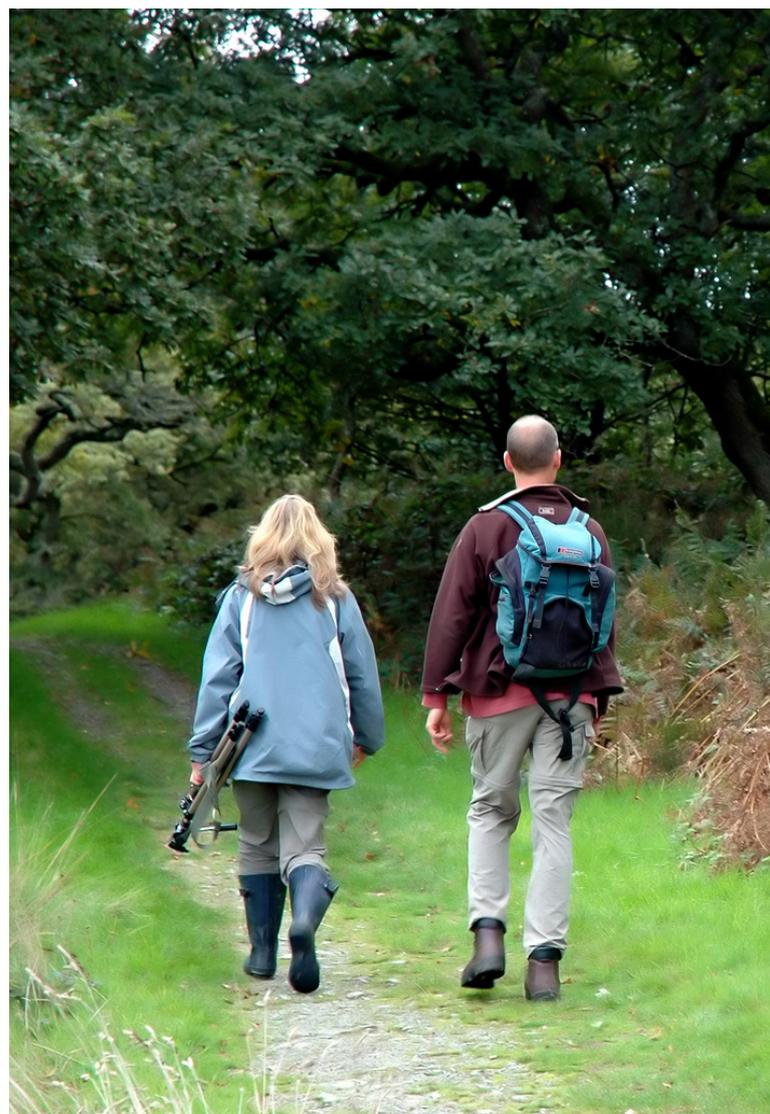
**Since the 2006 strategy there have been a number of local initiatives that need to be considered as part of this review. Primary factors include:**

- Drafting of a Green Space Strategy for North Solihull;
- Developing, commissioning and implementing the Strategic Environment Contract with Amey;
- Completion and submission of a new Local Plan in September 2012;
- Green Flag Award strategy completed on 2008/9; to deliver LAA key performance indicators and reward funding;
- Creating and supporting six Friends Groups for parks and open spaces;
- SMBC departmental staff restructures;
- Service requirement to complete topic strategies relating to Play and Allotments;
- Authority Pilot for Green Flag Award- Towards an Excellent Service;
- Exemplar authority for the delivery of Playbuilder and play facilities;
- Development of Meriden Park Adventure Play Area;

- Delivery of 3 year Playbuilder project to develop and improve the boroughs play areas;
- Delivery of a number of significant park improvements projects such as the £1.4m Tudor Grange Park development;
- Development of a Green Infrastructure Study.

## 2.4 Service delivery: past performance and trends

Since 2006, SMBC have taken a proactive approach to delivering green spaces services. This has included monitoring trends and performance. Past performance and bench marking relates to a number of issues, which are summarised overleaf.



# 2 where are we now?

## 2.4.1 The Green Flag Award

The Green Flag Award has been a key component in steering the way the service is managed. Since 2006 service managers have sought to structure the delivery of green space services around the criteria of the Green Flag Award. This cuts across the entire

service area and provides a framework for focusing resources on all green spaces within the Borough. Overall SMBC has achieved 10 Green Flag Award since 2002. 60% of these have been secured since 2006.

Figure 2 summarises Green Flag Award achievement dates.

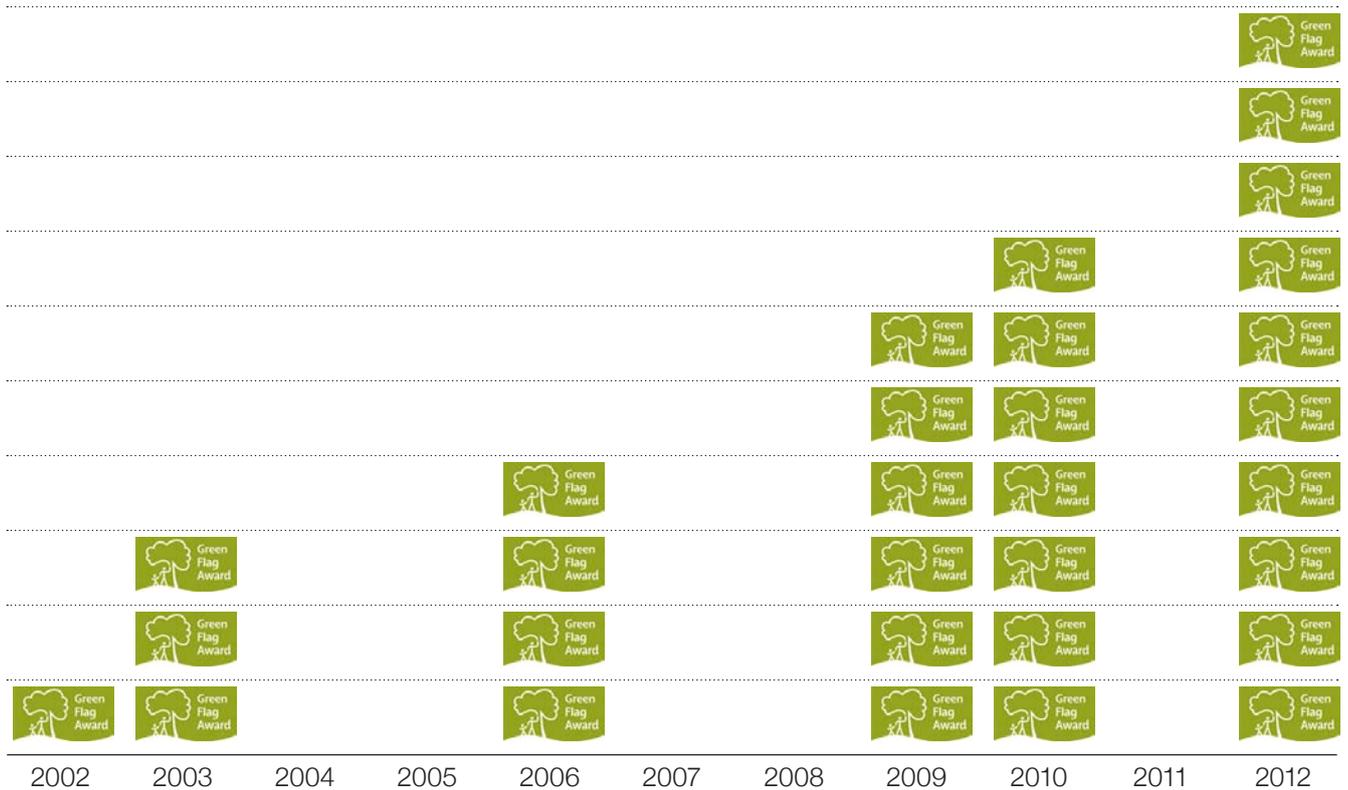


Figure 2: SMBC Green Flag Award Achievements.

The achievement of Green Flag Awards should be seen in the context of overall service delivery and not just for each park or green space. The achievement of the Award is seen by many organisations, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, as an indicator of the quality of overall service delivery. The principle being that a local authority manages a range of sites and the achievement of Green Flag Awards is a general reflection of the approach and implementation standard set by service managers. The Green Flag Award provides a consistent approach in terms of assessment criteria and is widely used as a benchmarking to assess overall

management of green spaces services. The awarding body for Green Flag has recognised this factor and recently embarked on a pilot scheme to assess the potential viability of using the award to assess local authority provision of green spaces as part of the Towards an Excellent Service (TAES) model. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is part of this pilot project and the results are due to be incorporated into the suite of Green Flag Awards in 2013/14.

**Table 5 benchmarks our number of Green Flag Awards against other local authorities within the West Midlands.**

Local Authority	Total No. Green Flag Awards (2012)
Birmingham City Council	10
Solihull MBC	10
Sandwell MBC	6
Wolverhampton MBC	4
Coventry City Council	4
Dudley MBC	3
Walsall MBC	3
Redditch BC	3
Worcester CC	3

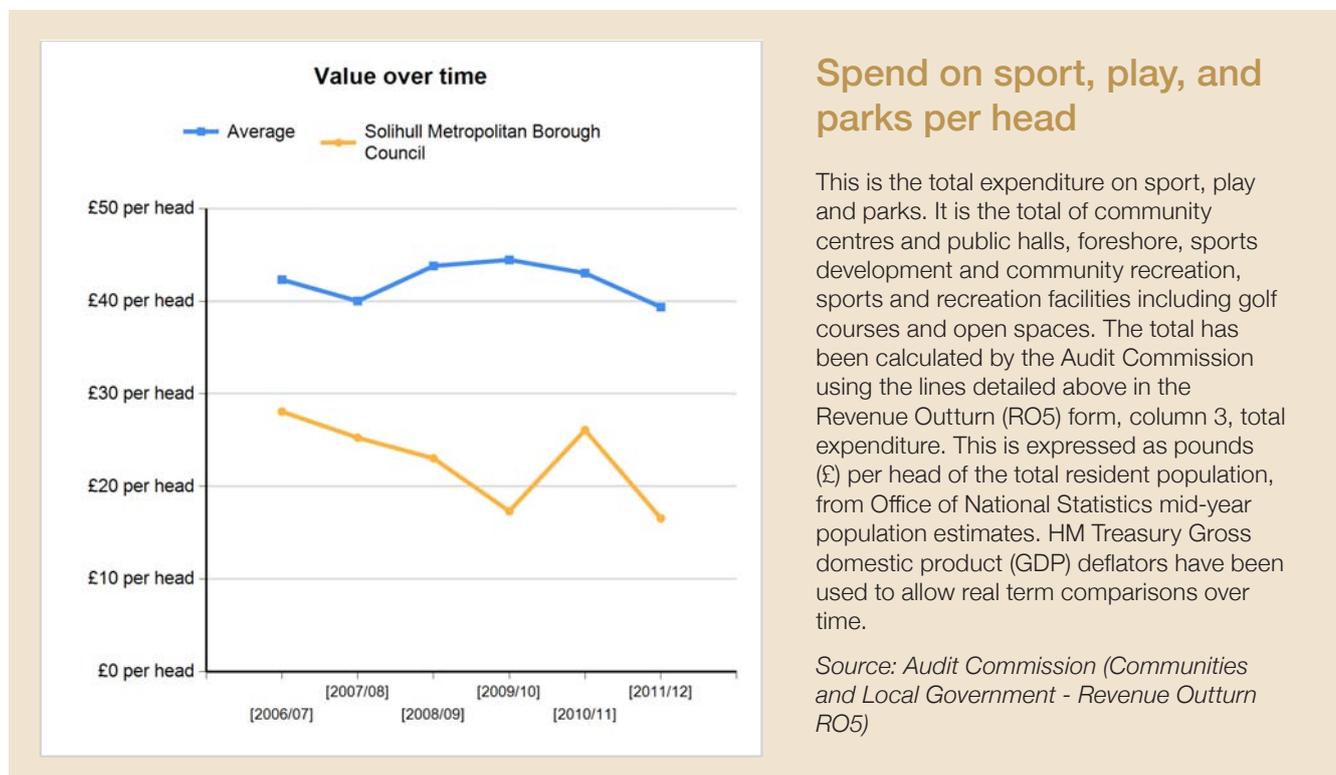
Table 5: Green Flag Award Local Authority benchmark

Nationally, in 2012 1,424 green spaces achieved a Green Flag Award standard. In the West Midlands 86 green spaces achieved the award. Solihull MBC therefore has over 11% of the Green Flag Awards in the West Midlands.

### 2.4.2 Value for Money

Solihull MBC has a total planned revenue budget of £144.9m for 2012/13. The management and delivery of parks and open spaces accounts for approximately £0.5m (0.34%). SMBC has a strong track record of delivery high quality green space, whilst achieving value for money. This can be demonstrated using the Audit Commission Value for Money Profiles. In 2011/12 SMBC was in the lowest 20% of authorities in relation to spend per head on sports, play and parks, when compared with statistically nearest local authority group.

It should be noted that this is not a direct comparison as the SGSG are not responsible for sport provision.



### Spend on sport, play, and parks per head

This is the total expenditure on sport, play and parks. It is the total of community centres and public halls, foreshore, sports development and community recreation, sports and recreation facilities including golf courses and open spaces. The total has been calculated by the Audit Commission using the lines detailed above in the Revenue Outturn (RO5) form, column 3, total expenditure. This is expressed as pounds (£) per head of the total resident population, from Office of National Statistics mid-year population estimates. HM Treasury Gross domestic product (GDP) deflators have been used to allow real term comparisons over time.

Source: Audit Commission (Communities and Local Government - Revenue Outturn RO5)

Figure 3 provides a summary of spend and income levels in relation to comparative groups.

## 2.4.3 Customer perspectives

One of the key functions of green space in Solihull is to provide safe, accessible and useable outdoor spaces for all walks of life. Customer perspectives are important indicators of how particular aspects of green space functions are being delivered, managed and maintained. Customer feedback is collated via qualitative and quantitative methods.

### Qualitative Feedback

In recent years SMBC has facilitated a number of friends groups for parks and green spaces. Six groups are now supported and service managers meet regularly with each group to resolve any issues and receive feedback for incorporation into individual site management plans. As well as the friends groups, the service continues to support the 1000 strong Solihull Environmental Champions and the local conservation volunteer group.

### Typical activity by the groups and SMBC include:

- Playing an active role in the management and development of parks and open spaces;
- Dealing with and resolving anti social behaviour;
- Planning, organising and delivering community events;
- Identifying and undertaking practical projects in accordance with site management plans;
- Sourcing and applying for external funding.

### Quantitative Feedback

As part of the 2006 Green Space Strategy a survey was issued to over 5000 randomly selected households. The data collated revealed a broad range of issues, concerns and positive feedback.

### In summary key points include:

- Most people in the Borough have access to green space within 400m of their home;
- 60% of people surveyed use green spaces at least once per month;
- Local green space are important with the most used spaces approximately 5 minutes from homes;
- Main barriers to wider use were anti social behaviour and personal safety;
- Main areas for improvement focused on cleanliness, toilet provision, better play equipment and enhanced landscape maintenance;
- Investment priorities for customers focused on parks, play areas, green corridors and nature conservation.

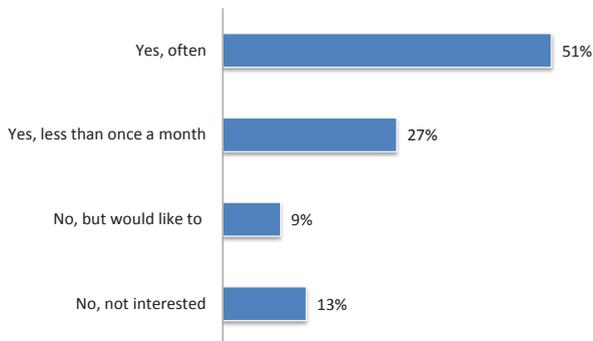
As part of the commitment to understand the views of the community, The Strategic Green Space Group has undertaken annual park user surveys. This provides a quantitative snap shot of community perception. In 2012, 220 people were interviewed and in summary the following data was obtained.



## Overall users have a 93% satisfaction rating for green spaces in Solihull

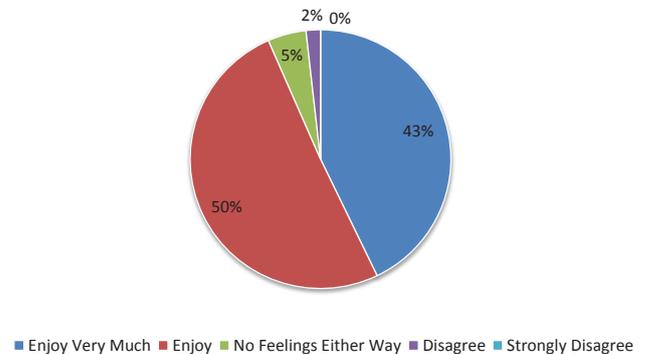
Usage of parks.

Total number of responses = 220



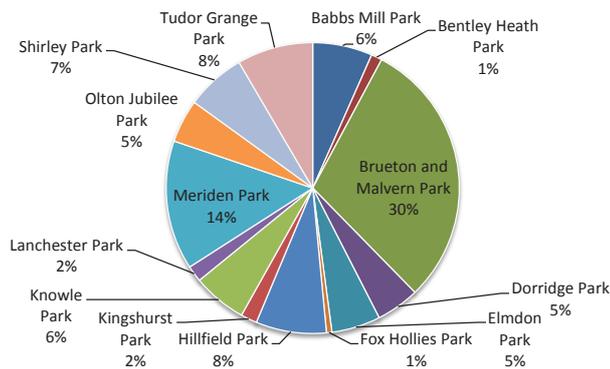
Park Visitor Enjoyment.

Total number of responses = 168



Parks Visited by Survey Participants.

Total number of responses = 167

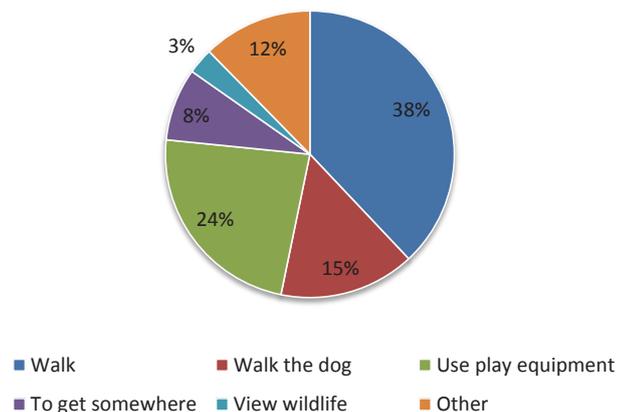


### 2.4.4 Community safety

Local communities have, in the last few years, become increasingly concerned about crime, personal safety and anti social behaviour in green spaces. In 2012 incidents within parks and green spaces began to be monitored closely using the Councils Covalent data capturing system and working closely with the Police and the Councils observatory. This information continues to form part of the ongoing performance monitoring for the Strategic Green Space Group and is used to proactively manage and target both SMBC and Police resources to tackle issues and provide preventative measures such as environmental design, engagement events and recreational inclusion activities (see overleaf).

Reasons for Using the Parks.

Total Number of Responses = 171



## 2 where are we now?

### 2.5 Drivers for change

The dynamics of green space management and delivery are ever changing. Since 2006 there have been substantial changes in policy and strategic requirements coupled with local requirements to reduce budgets and deliver leaner services.

#### **UK Central:**

UK Central is the unique concentration of strategic economic assets in Solihull that includes Jaguar Land Rover, Birmingham Airport and the NEC which offers an opportunity for growth on a scale that is of national significance. UK Central includes a commitment to maintain and invest in the area's green infrastructure which integrates high quality amenity and landscape assets, creating sustainable urban systems and ecological corridors. The Green Space Strategy is fundamental in supporting this work, and through this Green Space Strategy Review, the importance of the UK Central project is recognised and supported, specifically with regards to the development of high value, strategically placed green infrastructure.

#### **Solihull Local Plan 2013:**

The Council has a statutory duty to prepare, monitor and review a development plan for the Borough. The Solihull Local Plan 2013 sets out the long-term spatial vision for how its towns, villages and countryside will develop and change over the Plan period (2011 - 2028), and how this vision will be delivered through a strategy for promoting, distributing and delivering sustainable development and growth. The Solihull Green Space Strategy was used to inform the development of the Solihull Local Plan with regards to setting out a clear commitment to developing high quality green space. This is reflected within Policy P20 of the Solihull Local Plan. The Green Space Strategy Review identifies the need to work with developers to maximise contributions through Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Level (CIL) funding and to fundamentally commit to the provision of quality green space.



The rationale for change is summarised in figure 4.

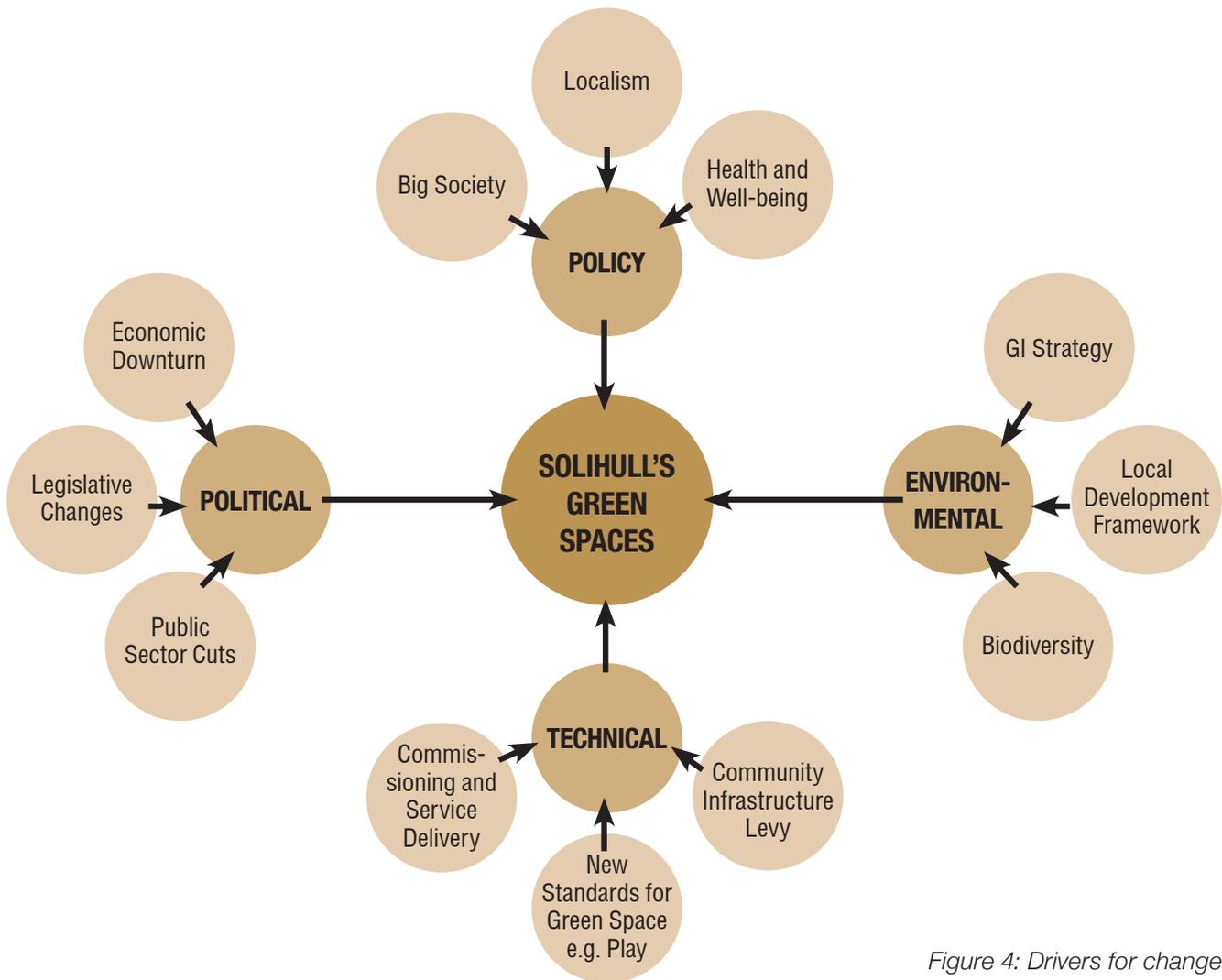


Figure 4: Drivers for change

**Some of the distinct areas that need to be considered for the future include:**

- Adoption of draft planning policies within the Solihull Local Plan 2013;
- Changes in planning policy guidance e.g. PPG17 and PPS9 since the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012;
- Adoption by SMBC of new standards for play provision in 2008, to meet Play England guidance;
- Responding to Big Society issues and the Localism Act;
- The provision of the Strategic Environment Contract;
- Considering the rights of communities to manage and buy community assets;
- Responding to requirements of the Community Infrastructure Levy;
- Implications of community's ability to designate Local Green Space;
- Shift in policy emphasis by governing bodies such as Sport England;
- Changes in external funding opportunities e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund;
- National emphasis on commissioning and enabling services.

# 3 where do we want to go?

Set against the GSS 2006 and the current strategic and operational delivery of green space across the borough of Solihull, the initial position statement, Where are we now? highlights a range of issues.

The review of the GSS 2006 does however emphasize a number of options for moving forward, which are summarised within the following section- Where do we want to go?

## 3.1 Issues, constraints and opportunities

The future of green space delivery and management in Solihull will clearly be influenced by a number of factors and issues. Primarily the focus for taking forward both the strategic spatial provision and operational delivery of green space will need to consider overall constraints and opportunities.



Using the principles of the Green Flag Award outlined in table 2 on page 8, table 6 outlines the strategic and operational constraints and opportunities for green space provision.

Green Flag Award Themes	Strategy		Delivery	
	Constraints	Opportunities	Constraints	Opportunities
A welcome place	Limited understanding of current condition/ quality of green space	Potential to improve overall quality and accessibility through revised assessment of green space	Available resources to realise increased quality across service provision	Build on high levels of customer satisfaction and increase accessibility
Healthy, safe and secure	Restricted strategic cross cutting role for green space to deliver outcomes e.g. health and well being	Improved strategic links with health and well being agendas	Potential for poor perception of green space associated with anti social behaviour/ crime	Work with partners and agencies to improve safety and security
Cleanliness and maintenance	Absence of defined quality standards for green space typologies	Enhanced provision through Community Infrastructure Levy and planning gain	Restricted resources with framework of existing operational delivery	Work with delivery partners in new ways to realise better quality outcomes
Sustainability	Limited spatial opportunities to realise quantitative provision requirements of green space	Potential links with green network/ infrastructure to enhance green space as part of Local Plan	Limited understanding in relation to enhancing sustainability	Potential to use green space assets for green technology
Conservation	Absence of detail in relation to standards, specification or design requirements to strategic aims	Potential to enhance strategic links across conservation themes	Improve understanding of local landscape character and biodiversity	Incorporate heritage, landscape and biodiversity within service delivery plans
Marketing	Quantitative data from customers needs to reflect aspirations of 2013 onwards	Wider links with partners to demonstrate benefits of green space	Limited data and qualitative feedback about green space	Embrace new technology and ways of communicating with customers
Community involvement	Absence of topic strategies e.g. play for community facilities	Develop topic strategies to identify future community needs	Resource commitments for support community groups in light of Big Society/localism agendas	Potential for further partnership work with communities to devolve management
Overall management	Resources to implement strategic planning of green space	Strengthen reporting of monitoring and performance	Limited financial resources to delivery aspirations	Potential to increase value for money through increased external funding and income

Table 6: Green space constraints and opportunities

# 3 where do we want to go?

## 3.2 Evaluation

What is clear since the adoption of the 2006 Green Space Strategy is that the world has changed and green space in Solihull will need to adapt to respond to changes in wider strategies and local needs. At the same time Local government is changing at a rapid pace to meet tough targets reducing spending. The traditional relationship between service provider and recipient is also being tested. Communities are now empowered to take on management of community assets.

### The future is therefore likely to mean:

- Adapting service delivery to realise efficiencies;
- Ensuring green space provision standards are maintained;
- Greater partnership working to realise mutual agendas;
- Enabling and supporting communities;
- Maximising sources of revenue and capital funding;
- Change methods of delivery to be smarter and leaner.

Future priorities for the Strategic Green Space Group will therefore need to focus on the following:

- **Spatial planning** - Meeting zone action plan standards for quality, quantity and accessibility as part of Local Plan policies;
- **Community** - Helping communities take a lead to deliver the localism agenda;
- **Natural environment** - Ensuring that any proposals accord with green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity strategies;
- **Strategic alignment** - Ensuring that provision of green and open spaces respond to cross cutting agendas such as health and well being;
- **Resources** - Continuing to provide value for money and increase income.



### 3.3 The future: strategic themes for green space in Solihull

In taking stock and evaluating the previous and current provision of green space in Solihull, table 7 outlines the rationale for planned future strategic themes.

Green Flag Award Strategic Themes	National and local factors	Strategic alignment with SMBC	Rationale
A welcome place	Being healthy and active	Sustainable Communities Strategy Solihull Health and Well Being Strategy	Green space provides venues for both informal and formal recreation, helping people to keep people healthy and active.
Healthy, safe and secure	Staying safe	Sustainable Communities Strategy	Green space has key role in ensuring people are happy and tackling the perception of safety.
Cleanliness and maintenance	Providing a quality experience	Sustainable Communities Strategy Solihull Draft Local Plan and Local Development Framework Strategic Environment Contract	Green spaces reflection of the community. Good quality green spaces engender positive perceptions about places. Quality green space has a direct relationship with quality of life and well being.
Sustainability	Delivering sustainable development and facilitating regeneration and renewal	North Solihull Regeneration Sustainable Communities Strategy	Green space provides a template for successful development and adds value to planned and existing developments.
Conservation	Creating a green network and promoting landscape character and biodiversity	Green Infrastructure Strategy Arden Landscape Character Area	Green space provides the mechanism for achieve species and habitat biodiversity at a landscape level.
Marketing	Ensuring value for money	Audit Commission Value for Money	Well planned and orchestrated marketing that provides customer expectations with services is key to establishing financial priorities for green space.
Community involvement	Enabling positive involvement	Localism and Big Society	Green space assets have the potential to increase community involvement and management.
Overall management	Effective management and performance	Solihull Draft Local Plan and Local Development Framework	Green space is a core element of the Supporting Communities Policy 20. The provision of green space will need to accord with minimum standards of this Green Space Strategy.

Table 7: Green space strategic themes

# 4 how are we going to get there?

## 4.1 Vision and aims

The revised vision for green space can be defined as:

A sustainable network of good quality green spaces that are safe, healthy, rich in biodiversity and distinctive in character; celebrating what is special about Solihull.

In supporting the vision the strategic and operational delivery of green space will be achieved within the framework outlined in table 8.

Green Flag Award Themes	Aims
A welcome place	To provide high quality and accessible green spaces
Healthy, safe and secure	To work in partnership and support green space projects that increase healthy and active lifestyles
Cleanliness and maintenance	To improve overall quality score for green spaces
Sustainability	To ensure sustainable and diverse green spaces through planned landscape and biodiversity initiatives
Conservation	To maintain visitor and customer satisfaction levels
Marketing	To ensure customers continue to receive value for money
Community involvement	To improve overall customer satisfaction
Overall management	To maintain and seek to increase Borough average and zone action plan for green space provision

Table 8: Aims

## 4.2 Setting the standard: green space provision in Solihull

To inform the strategic planning of green space in Solihull this review will seek to retain and build on the hierarchy and standards outlined in the 2006 Green Space Strategy. In essence the required standards for quantity, quality and accessibility will not change for the original 2006 strategy. However it is recognised that as further topic strategies are developed e.g. allotments, new standards may emerge, which will supersede or supplement prevailing standards.

The information provided below sets out the global aspirational green space standard for the borough

in terms of quantity, accessibility and quality. The standard is based on the provision of a range of hierarchies generated as part of the original GSS 2006.

Further information is then provided in relation to specific requirements for new developments within the borough and the requirements of sites with specialist or specific standards e.g. children's play. It should be noted that the terminology and definition of the hierarchies and site specific standards have been updated to conform to changes in national standards and to provide a consistent approach.

## 4.2.1 Borough Standards for green space

The borough standards for green space are based on the GSS 2006. The standards have been informed through community consultation, national standards and detailed data analysis of provision within Solihull. In relation to the long term strategic provision of green space within the borough the standards for each hierarchy of green space are outlined in table 9.

Hierarchy definition (updated 2013)	GSS 2006 hierarchy definition	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
Principal green space	Principal parks	Multifaceted green space with play, sport, landscape, heritage and high levels of community participation	Over 8 ha	Unrestricted public access within 2km of settlements over 5000 people	Green Flag Award status achieved and retained for each site
Major green space	Other major parks and major green space	Large open spaces with less defined characteristics. Emphasis of on specialist land use such as nature conservation or outdoor sport	Over 8 ha	Unrestricted public access	Managed using Green Flag Award principles
Local green space	Local area parks/ local area green space	Component part of green space network at a local level with varied characteristics associated with play, informal recreation and outdoor sport	1.5 to 8 ha	Unrestricted public access within 1km of settlements over 300 people	General best practice in design conforming to governing bodies or local strategies e.g. biodiversity action plan
Neighbourhood green space	Neighbourhood green space	Component part of green space network at a neighbourhood level with varied characteristics associated with play, informal recreation and outdoor sport	0.2 to 1.5 ha	Unrestricted public access within 400m of homes in all settlements with more than 300 people	General best practice in design conforming to governing bodies or local strategies e.g. biodiversity action plan

Table 9: Borough Green Space Standards

## 4 how are we going to get there?

Where the standards are met in terms of quantity and accessibility, enhanced provision will be sought for existing sites to raise overall quality standards.

A specific action of this review will be to undertake a

quality assessment of accessible green space. This will be used to determine specific quality standards for each hierarchy and set priorities for general enhancement and contributions from planning gain.

### 4.2.2 New developments: general green space standards

In addition to the standards outlined in table 9 opposite, where new developments are proposed the standards in table 10 will also apply.

Typology definition (updated 2013)	GSS 2006 typology definition	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
Green space	Green space facilities/types	Green space provision in new developments consisting of a range site specific standards and typologies include play, sport and allotments (see table x below)	2.86 ha	Unrestricted public access per 1000 population	
Informal green space	Internal/informal green space	Incidental areas within new developments providing general amenity green space in addition to general green space of 2.86 ha	0.4 ha	Unrestricted public access per 1000 population with a minimum area of 0.2ha for all settlements with more than 300 people	General best practice and British Standards

Table 10: Additional standards for new development sites

### 4.2.3 New developments: site specific standards

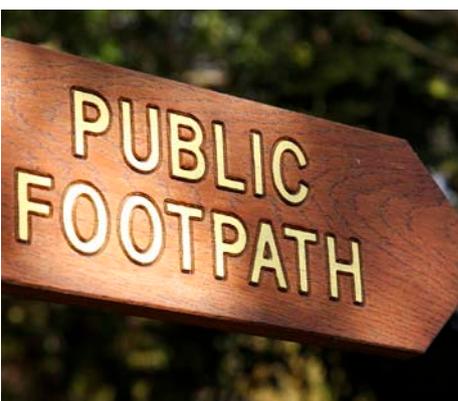
In relation to proposed new developments the standard for green space will be 2.86 ha per 1000 population. This will consist of a range of site specific standards based on the following outlined in table 11. Note definitions for children's play have been revised as a result of the SMBC's adoption of new standards in 2008.

Typology definition (updated 2013)	GSS 2006 typology definition	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
Door-step spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation	Not defined in GSS 2006 but equivalent to a Local Area for Play (LAP)	A small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults	Minimum activity zone of 100m <sup>2</sup>	Unrestricted public access with 60m straight line distance from home	All design proposals to meet Play England and Fields In Trust guidance  A vision for play space in Solihull
Local spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation	A Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP)	A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease	Minimum activity zone of 400m <sup>2</sup>	Unrestricted public access within 400m of housing in settlements greater than 500 population. Minimum of one site per 4300 population in urban areas.	All design proposals to meet Play England and Fields In Trust guidance  A vision for play space in Solihull
Neighbourhood spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation	A Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP)	A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences	Minimum activity zone of 1000m <sup>2</sup>	Unrestricted public access within 1000m of housing in settlements greater than 1000 population. Minimum of one site per 8,600 population in urban areas.	All design proposals to meet Play England and Fields In Trust guidance  A vision for play space in Solihull
Provision for young people	Skate facilities and Multi use games areas (MUGA)	Outdoor provision within green spaces specifically for 12- 18 years. Facilities to include areas for wheeled activities e.g. BMX and ball games e.g. basket ball	Minimum one site per Zone. Subject to completion of topic strategy- Green space provision for young people	Minimum one site per Zone. Subject to completion of topic strategy- Green space provision for young people	Minimum one site per Zone. Subject to completion of topic strategy- Green space provision for young people  A vision for play space in Solihull

# 4 how are we going to get there?

Typology definition (updated 2013)	GSS 2006 typology definition	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
Informal outdoor sports	Other outdoor sports	General provision for outdoor sports on amenity grass areas, excluding football, rugby and cricket. Excluding provision for artificial turf pitches.	0.42 ha	Unrestricted public access per 1000 population	All design proposals to accord with Sport England, relevant National Governing Bodies and Solihull Sports Pitch Strategy
Formal outdoor sports	Grass playing field sports	Specific pitch provision for rugby, cricket and football	1.64 ha	Unrestricted public access per 1000 population	All design proposals to accord with Sport England, relevant National Governing Bodies and Solihull Sports Pitch Strategy
Allotments	Allotments	Provision of accessible space for growing produce	0.3 ha Minimum site size of 0.5ha	Unrestricted or partially restricted access per 1000 population. Settlements greater than 1000 population should have allotment sites with 1000m of housing	All design proposals to accord with vision for allotments in Solihull document

Table 11: New developments site specific standards



## 4.2.4 Green Infrastructure standards

As part of the planning for green space, strategic links such as wildlife corridors, canal towpaths, railway lines and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) will provide connectivity between green space typologies. To support the Green Infrastructure Strategy in the Borough the prescribed standards in table 12 will apply.

Typology definition (updated 2013)	GSS 2006 typology definition	General description	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Qualitative standard
Strategic green space route	Strategic routes	Traffic free routes for leisure activities such as cycling and walking connecting green spaces	None	Unrestricted public access	Appropriate facilities in key area such as secure cycle parking, information/signage, refreshments and toilets
Strategic green space link	Wildlife corridors	Natural features such as rivers, hedgerows and ditches linking green spaces	None	Unrestricted public access	Local biodiversity strategies and site specific management plans
Natural green space	Accessible	Semi natural areas including ponds, meadows and woodlands usually with statutory designation for bio/geo diversity e.g. Site of Special Scientific Interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Local Nature Reserve- 1 ha</li> <li>ii) One 0.9 ha natural green space</li> <li>iii) One 10 ha natural green space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Unrestricted public access per 1000</li> <li>ii) Unrestricted public access within 300m of homes in settlements greater than 300 population</li> <li>iii) Unrestricted public access within 2km of homes in settlements greater than 5000 population</li> </ul>	Proposal in accordance with Natural England guidance

Table 12: Green Infrastructure standards

The GSGS will continue to support the development of Green Infrastructure and this will be reviewed as part of the annual action plan.

# 4 how are we going to get there?

## 4.3 Green Space Strategy action plan 2014-2019

Strategic and delivery requirements will be delivered within the Green Flag Award themes by the Strategic Green Space Group (SGSG) with the action plan outlined in table 13.

Action	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Progress
<b>A welcome place</b>						
Review and set revised/detailed standards for provision of green space hierarchies and typologies in anticipation of revised quality assessments.		■				
Following the revision of standards, undertake an assessment to determine actions for each green space.			■			
<b>Healthy, safe and secure</b>						
Work with partners to develop green space projects for promoting healthy living and lifestyle.		■				
<b>Cleanliness and maintenance</b>						
Ensure annual cleanliness assessment of green spaces.	■	■	■	■	■	
<b>Sustainability</b>						
Work with SGSG to incorporate green infrastructure requirements in to green space strategy.		■				
Support implementation of North Solihull Green Space Strategy aspirations (ongoing).	■	■	■	■	■	
<b>Conservation</b>						
Continue to support management and maintenance of local nature reserves.	■	■	■	■	■	
Continue as local authority lead for allotment Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Solihull, Coventry and Walsal.	■	■	■	■	■	
Continue to support the implementation of Project Kingfisher.	■	■	■	■	■	
<b>Marketing</b>						
Work with partners to deliver effective marketing for green spaces.			■			
Update and develop web based feedback by embracing social media.			■			

Action	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Progress
<b>Community involvement</b>						
Develop the Vision for Play Spaces in Solihull.	■					
Develop the Vision for Allotments in Solihull.	■					
Monitor, report and take action on anti social behaviour and crime in green space.	■	■	■	■	■	
Revise and update terms of reference for green space friends groups.			■			
Determine level and requirement of support to community groups.	■					
Prepare a Statement of Community Involvement to promote community leadership and ownership.	■	■	■	■	■	
<b>Overall management</b>						
Continue to progress green space standards for zone action plans (ongoing).	■	■	■	■	■	
Increase number of Green Flag Award sites from 10 to 13 by 2018.					■	
Work with partners and community groups to increase income generation (ongoing).	■	■	■	■	■	
Review and set format for green space management plans.		■				
Work with developers to maximise contributions through Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Level (CIL) funding and to fundamentally commit to the provision of quality green space.	■	■	■	■	■	
Commit to supporting the development of the UK Central project, specifically with regards to the development of a high value, strategic places green infrastructure.	■	■	■	■	■	

Table 13: Green Space Strategy Action Plan 2014-19

### 5.1 Key Performance Indicators

The Green Space Strategy action plan will be reviewed and reported on annually. In addition to this, Key Performance Indicators for green space (table 14) in the borough will also be monitored and reported.

Key Performance Indicator	Description	Base: 2013	Year 1: 2014		Year 2: 2015		Year 3: 2016		Year 4: 2017		Year 5: 2018	
			Target	Actual								
Green Flag Award	No of Green Flag Awards achieved within Solihull boundary.	10	10		11		12		12		13	
Customer complaints	Number of SMBC stage 2 complaints received per year.	5	5		5		5		5		5	
Cleanliness of green spaces	Monitoring of green spaces in accordance with NI: 195.	<2% failure rate	<2%		<2%		<2%		<2%		<2%	
Green space quality	Self monitoring of green spaces as part of Strategic Environment Contract.	98% of sites with a pass rate.	98%		98%		98%		98%		98%	
Community involvement	Implementation of localism	The successful implementation of the localism agenda and community ownership will be reviewed annually as part of the Statement of Community Involvement. This 'soft' target will be reported to the Director of Places.										
Crime and anti social behaviour	Incidents and perceptions of crime in green spaces.	The nature and context of crime and anti social behaviour within Solihull's green spaces will be reported to the Green Space Strategy Group. Actions will be agreed collectively and implemented in partnership with other agencies.										

Table 14: Key Performance Indicators

## 5.2 Monitoring and review

Overall the responsibility for the strategic and operational delivery of green space will be governed by elected Members of SMBC. The Strategic Green Space Group (SGSG) will oversee, implement and report on the delivery of the Green Space Strategy. New issues or matters relevant to the Green Space Strategy will be discussed by the SGSG and incorporated within the action plan as agreed.

The action plan outlined above will be reviewed by the SGSG at each meeting. Each year the SGSG will report overall progress on actions to the relevant SMBC Cabinet.

Figure 5 below outlines this relationship.

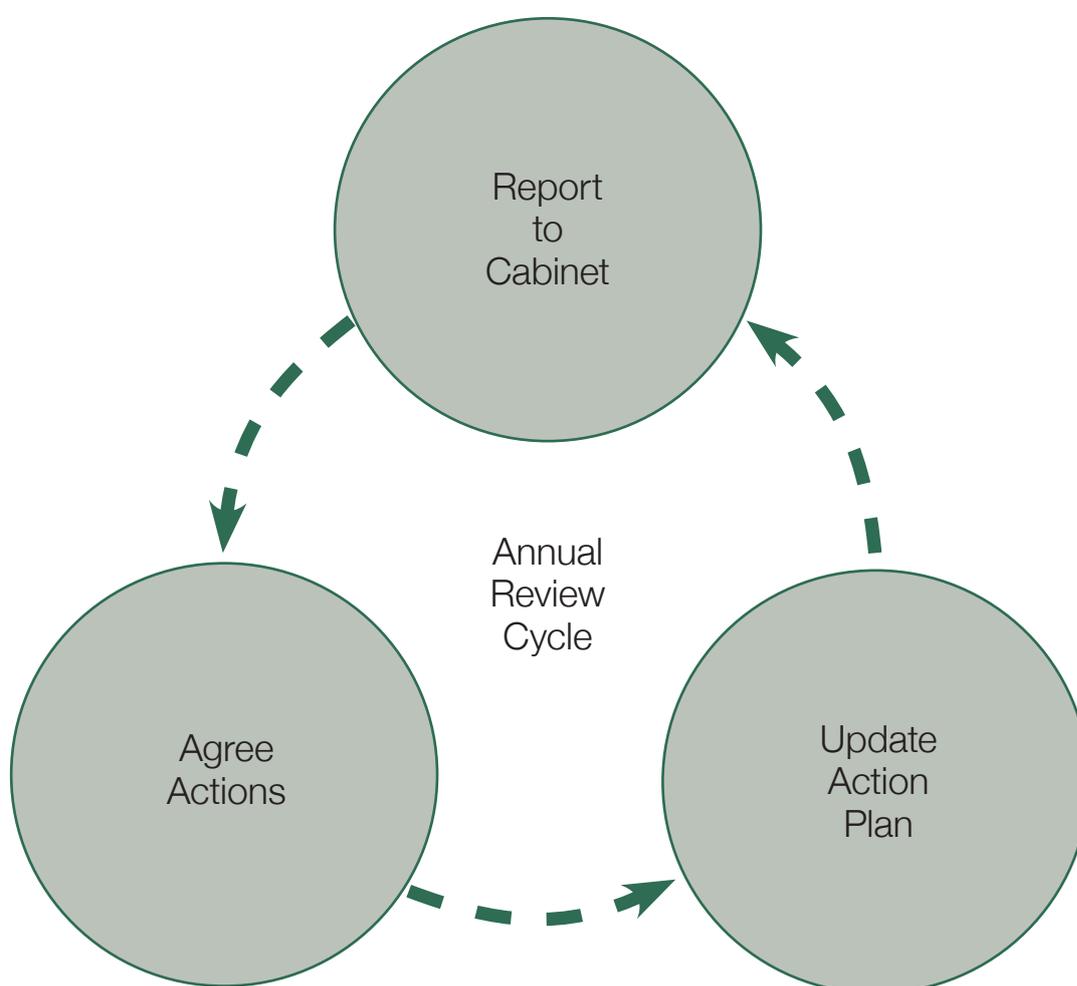


Figure 5: Monitoring and review process





# Green Space Strategy Review 2014

A sustainable network of **good quality green spaces** that are safe, healthy, rich in biodiversity and distinctive in character; **celebrating what is special about Solihull**

Red Kite Network Limited for and on behalf of Amey

- *Report issue:* **April 2013**
- *Report status:* **Final client issue**
- *Project ref:* **107.12**
- *Report compiled on behalf of Amey by:* **Red Kite Network Limited**  
Ironbridge Business Centre,  
Wesley Rooms, Jockey Bank, Ironbridge, TF8 7PD.  
T: 01952 433380 | M: 07929 003768 | E: nat@redkitenetwork.co.uk  
www.redkitenetwork.co.uk
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