

**An Investigation into the De-centralisation of Urban Parks and
Green Spaces in the UK: 2007**

Submitted by Kelley Green

The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London

MPhil in Town Planning

UMI Number: U593805

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U593805

Published by ProQuest LLC 2013. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

The author would like to thank Claudio de Magalhães, Quentin Stevens and Cecilia Wong for their help and guidance with this research.

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the State in providing recreational open space to the public in the UK. Provision is looked at in the context of global economic pressures for State de-regulation and the impact this is having on civil society. It focuses on how the modern style of local governance, with its emphasis on partnership working, influences local open space and the communities that use it. Recent domestic policy changes bearing down on open space have been examined, including a close examination of The Final Report of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force, which recommends more partnership and private sector involvement in open space provision (DTLR, 2001b, p.40). Planning policy guidance has also been looked at, in particular 'Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation'. The research involves an analysis of the recently published open space assessments from 25 English Local Authorities, itself a requirement of PPG 17. This analysis helps identify the extent of local strategic support for alternative methods of open space delivery. The data provides an indication of low willingness by local planning authorities to devolve their open space responsibilities to private and community organisations but a high willingness to dissolve them to raise funds and provide sites for built development. Interviews with professionals in the field also revealed the lack of democratic involvement in the decision-making process for the disposal of open spaces. This evidence assists with an over-view of the social impacts of the new approach. Leading to a conclusion about the wider effects of rolling back the State service, its effect on the spatial distribution of open spaces and the detrimental effect on civil society.

Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	9
1.1	Thesis Structure	13
2.0	Literature Review	18
2.1	Neo-liberal Politics	19
2.2	The Influences of Globalisation	22
2.3	Public Participation as an Antidote	28
2.4	The Changes Government is Putting in Place	35
2.5	Political Debate on Rolling Back State Services	40
2.6	Shrinking Public Budgets	44
2.7	A Brief Historical Review of Open Spaces	53
2.8	New Policies Influencing the Provision of Open Space	59
2.9	Summary of the Secondary Evidence	66
3.0	Research Questions	72
4.0	The Data Collection Methodology	74
4.1	The Open Space Assessments	74
4.2	Methodology	75
4.3	The Interviews	79
4.4	Methodology	79
5.0	Data contained in the Open Space Assessments	82
5.1	Open Space Provision	82
5.2	Patterns of Ownership	83
5.3	Stakeholder Involvement	85
5.4	The Quality and Quantity of Open Spaces	87
5.5	Funding of Open Space Provision	89

5.6	The Strategic Vision	93
5.7	Strategic Funding Options	95
5.8	Interim Summary of the Data	99
5.9	The Need for Open Space	102
5.10	Justifications for Disposal of Open Space	104
5.11	Patterns of Possible Disposal	106
5.12	Summary of the Findings from the Assessments	107
5.12.1	Neo-liberal Reform and Funding	108
5.12.2	Neo-liberal Reform and Partnership Working	108
5.12.3	Neo-liberal Reform and Public Participation	108
5.12.4	Local Constraints on Neo-liberal Reform	108
6.0	Analysis of the Results from the Open Space Assessments	112
7.0	Data obtained during the Interviews	115
7.1	The General Outlook on Open Spaces	115
7.2	Financial Pressures	117
7.3	Central Funding	119
7.4	The Scrutiny of Open Spaces	122
7.5	Options that Exist for the Disposal of Open Spaces	124
7.6	Use and Value	128
7.7	Type and Location of Open Spaces Most at Risk	131
7.8	Powerful Stakeholders	134
7.9	Strategic Approach	136
7.10	Summary of the Findings from the Interviews	139
7.10.1	Neo-liberal Reform and Funding	139
7.10.2	Neo-liberal Reform and Partnership Working	140
7.10.3	Neo-liberal Reform and Public Participation	141
7.10.4	Local Constraints on Neo-liberal Reform	142
8.0	Analysis of the Results from the Interviews	144
9.0	Analysis of the Effect of Neo-liberal Reform on Open	

Space in England	149
10.0 Analysis of the Characteristics of De-centralised Open Space Services in England	155
11.0 Conclusion and Recommendations	162
12.0 Bibliography	165
13.0 Appendices	175

List of Figures

Fig. 1	Key Issues Affecting Open Space Provision in England	18
Fig. 2	Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969, p.1)	30
Fig. 3	Student Protest Poster (Arnstein, 1969, p.1)	64
Fig. 4	Distribution of Local Authorities in the Research Sample	77
Fig. 5	Frequency of different Consultants used to complete Assessments for Local Authorities	97
Fig. 6	Value Calculations expressed by W.S. Atkins	104
Fig. 7	Ely Weekly News, 19/7/07 (Morgan, 2007, p.5)	126
Fig. 8	Leisure Proposals for the Northern Perimeter of Ely, East Cambridgeshire reproduced from ESRI (UK)'s MapExplorer 2.0	127
Fig. 9	Bid Rent Curve (Heikkila, 2000, p.82)	137

List of Tables

Table. 1	Thesis Structure	14
Table. 2	Final Recommendations of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force (DTLR, 2002, pp.78-82)	60
Table. 3	The Number of Open Space Assessments identifying Specific Land Owners	84
Table. 4	Partnership Co-ordination	85
Table. 5	The Number of Local Authorities with Localised Deficits or Surpluses	88
Table. 6	Recommendations to Increase Revenue Funding for open Space	90
Table. 7	The Adequacy of Local Authority Funding	92
Table. 8	Local Authority Recommendations for Obtaining Resources	93
Table. 9	Total number of Local Authority Recommendations for Increasing Provision	93
Table. 10	Number of Local Authorities Examining Various Sources of Funding for the Procurement of Open Space	95
Table. 11	Local Authority Provision Cross-tabulated with Policy Recommendations for Disposal of Assets	106
Table. 12	Evaluation Matrix from the Companion Guide to PPG 17 (ODPM, 2002, p. 69; 10.27)	130
Table. 13	Neo-liberal Influences on Open Space Provision from the Evidence in the Assessments and the Interviews	153

1.0 Introduction

Open space provision is an aspect of British culture that, over the years, has become very diverse in location, type, design and purpose. History would appear to show its evolution as being a fairly linear process, from monastic gardens in the medieval ages, large private estates like Blenheim Palace in the 1700's, Victorian public parks, post-war municipal areas and the 'community gardens' that we know today. However, rather than a linear process, it is more likely that open spaces have been in constant flux, being created and abandoned, then recreated elsewhere. They have also been influenced by overseas, producing a wonderful variety of styles as well as an interesting spatial mix. Design and management techniques have been influenced by the formal Italian water gardens, French modernism and rock gardening from The East, to name a few. As part of this hybridisation affecting open spaces, British culture has also exported 'the taming of the wilderness' and 'the English country garden'. These processes show that open spaces are a changeable entity, subject to influence and also part of a global system.

People who choose to work in association with open spaces can go into design, management or maintenance at the front line of the service. Horticulture and arboriculture offer further choices where people can specialise in forestry, plant breeding, pest control or commerce. The choices are enormously diverse but together they come under the banner of the 'open spaces sector'. This sector has good systems of co-ordination, mainly the professional bodies but also trade magazines, conferences and training events. Unlike other sectors however, it has little political influence. Government responsibility is divided between departments for agriculture, tourism, bio-diversity, natural heritage and the built environment. The areas that are cared for by the open space sector, including urban parks and green spaces are collectively defined as 'open space' but this is also a very broad concept. It captures a wide range of areas from parks, to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), as well as beaches, picnic areas and National Parks. The term 'open space' itself, shows how land over which the public have access rights have been grouped together in a policy context, and

perhaps not given the individual recognition they deserve. This may be evidence of a scant regard for different types of open spaces, or simply a pragmatic use of the language that irks researchers.

Thankfully there is a legal definition in Section 20 of the 1906 Open Spaces Act, which states:

The expression 'open space' means 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.

This research is concerned with overarching issues influencing open spaces so the general definition is very helpful, never-the-less it focuses on informal open space and urban parks and green spaces in particular rather than open space used for sport, to simplify the analysis process. The evidence it uncovers may equally apply to other kinds of open space subject to similar political pressures.

The gradual increase in the size and composition of open spaces, especially since World War Two, has added to the burden on the public purse. Although pressure for environmental improvements is increasing this trend, in recent years open spaces have captured the attention of politicians and been influenced by economic policy. The disconnectedness of the sector has made lobbying government on issues like State funding very difficult. Changes have tended to manifest themselves slowly as policies work through systems of local government and planning control. They are sometimes recognisable in falling standards of maintenance and open space abandonment but this kind of outcome can be characteristic of a Local Authority protesting to funding cuts. Highly visible cuts in services have been used to raise the profile of open spaces in recent years. However, other open spaces have simply disappeared and it has largely been left to planning bodies like the London Planning Advisory Committee to try to offer open spaces protection from the funding storms.

This research aims to identify the risks that open spaces face, at this critical time when public services are being rolled back in most post-industrial countries. It is based on an assumption that public open space has been shaped by Fordist managerial systems and people have become accustomed to certain levels of State provision, which can no longer be sustained. The UK government is carefully dismantling many of these types of services and trying to put alternatives in place without provoking a crisis. This is not an easy process. It requires the gradual withdrawal of state funding and continuing support by the public. In order for open spaces and other services to be delivered to the same standard as before, new funding streams also have to materialise. On paper the difficulties seem fairly obvious, they include;

- Few new sources of funding
- Public discontent with changes to the service
- Loss of jobs in the sector
- Government unpopularity
- Difficulty meeting the Post-modern agenda
- National inefficiency and lack of competitiveness because of high tax burdens to pay for open space provision

Because of the significance of these issues, it is hardly surprising that the government is carefully managing the way open spaces are delivered. It has introduced a raft of economic reforms aimed at financially squeezing the sector, and simultaneously introduced new policies aimed at identifying new private sources of funding. It is a carrot and stick approach. This research will explore the economic reforms on the one hand, and the new policies for private sources of funding on the other.

An investigation into the reform of open spaces using secondary evidence alone would be difficult. Most of the data is official policy and this would only give a one sided view. The 'de-centralisation of open spaces', in which responsibility is being devolved from the state to other lower levels of administration is also difficult to investigate because there is no single means by which to measure it. Clues need to be sought out at the local level, especially the extent to which Local Authorities have given up their managerial role. It seems surprising given the changes government has indicated, that there has been very little backlash to de-centralisation but it shouldn't be

assumed that Local Authorities are fully compliant with the new agenda. This research explores tensions in the relationship between central and local government. Related to this is an exploration of the way Local Authorities have tended to cope with pressure for reform without necessarily delivering the government's goal.

It is against this background that the research tries to establish the likely outcomes of de-centralisation. It seems possible that it could take place in a number of ways, with some apparently more socially just than others. On the one hand, services could be vastly improved, with high quality open spaces being cared for by community groups and private organisations. This would help, at the same time, to reduce the tax burden on local people. On the other hand, there could be wholesale loss of open spaces to prop up failing authorities and a much greater reliance on remote areas of open space like those in rural areas. The outcomes are being decided at the current time, within Local Authority decision-making processes about how to plan open space provision. It continues to be influenced by central policy development and ways that Local Authorities are delivering the State service. This research is therefore a step-by-step process, looking for evidence on the extent of reform and the effects on open space to be able to comment on the overall picture.

The literature review deals with the first of these issues, and identifies pressures coming from a number of sources. These are:

- Neoliberalism
- Globalisation
- Government reform
- The limitations of partnership and public participation
- Shrinking public budgets
- The history of change in open spaces
- Planning policy guidance

It identifies four key thematic areas relating to neo-liberal reform and funding, neo-liberal reform and partnership working specifically public-private partnerships, neo-liberal reform and public participation specifically 'Stakeholder' involvement, and local resistance to neo-liberal reform. These

four themes provide structure for the analysis of the evidence obtained during the next stages of the research.

The collection of primary data began with the open space assessments completed by Local Authorities. These assessments were not completely aligned with the research questions but they were broadly enough attached to the government's neo-liberal agenda to obtain relevant evidence in the following areas:

- Patterns of ownership
- Local authority partnerships
- The quality and quantity of open spaces
- Existing funding
- Funding options
- The strategic vision
- Local Authority priorities
- The need for open space
- Justifications for the disposal of open space
- Patterns of possible disposal

The findings from the assessments were then used to inform the second phase of data collection, interviews in the field. These interviews provided evidence to close the gaps and help to answer the three research questions.

The thread of this research is the transition from Fordist to Post-modern styles of service delivery. Information from Local Authorities is used to support the research hypothesis; that a shift is occurring in urban parks and green space provision, which is not only a political shift from the State to lower levels of administration, but also a physical shift away from central areas. If this hypothesis can be supported it will lead to the finding that Post-modern restructuring is leading to spatial change in the distribution of open spaces. This will be taken as an indication that there is growing social exclusion from open spaces. Such a finding would indicate that neo-liberalism is giving rise to greater levels of social polarisation by virtue of the State rolling back its involvement in open spaces.

1.1 Thesis Structure

Investigating the de-centralisation of urban parks and green spaces in the UK incorporates many avenues of exploration, partly political, partly economic and partly social. The impetus is to identify a new trend in provision but recognising the inherent difficulties in researching a subject that crosses so many other academic boundaries. The research is positive, offering an explanation of what is happening and some of the reasons why. It focuses on providing an interpretation for those involved in current affairs so that they may see how policies of today are affecting open spaces. Apologies are due for any ideas that may have more to offer than this research was able to extract. Other people may be able to shed more light in the fullness of time. However, if the general hypothesis is accepted to be true, omissions should be accepted as part of a much wider phenomenon, linked to globalisation and social polarisation, of which the de-centralisation of open spaces is only one part.

The thesis structure is set out below to enable the reader to understand how evidence was gathered and where the ideas to gather that evidence originated. This should guide the reader in understanding how the various pieces of the jigsaw were put together, starting with the basic problem of investigating a subject that had no previously recognisable definition.

Action	Reason Why	Intended Outcome
Develop hypothesis	To explore some of the observations made whilst working at a policy level within local government	To understand more about the future of public open space provision within the UK



Secondary Evidence			
Literature review	Neo-liberal politics	To understand the neo-liberal agenda	To place the research in the context of current affairs
Literature review	The influences of globalisation	To investigate the apparent hegemony behind neo-liberal politics	To understand how globalisation might be influencing the provision of open space
Literature review	Public participation as the antidote	To look at one of the UK government's most prominent national policies and the way it is used to compliment neo-liberalism	To ascertain the extent to which public participation promotes the de-centralisation of open space
Literature review	The changes government is putting in place	To examine the tools government is using to get compliance with its neo-liberal agenda	To identify the main drivers of change at the local level

Literature review	Political debate on rolling back state services	To break down arguments for and against the neo-liberal agenda	To understand the range of positive and negative outcomes that may impact on open spaces
Literature review	Shrinking public budgets	To explore the economic profile of Local Authorities	To understand the pressure on State services especially open spaces
Literature review	A brief historical review of open spaces	To review the way open space has been provided in the past	To understand the vulnerability of open space and the impact its loss could have on disadvantaged people
Literature review	New policies affecting the provision of open space	To drill down into political issues directly relevant to open space provision	To understand the extent to which government has directly applied its neo-liberal agenda to open spaces



Development of Research Questions		
Research Question One	To investigate policy change at the Local Authority level	To ascertain the extent to which Local Authority delivery of open spaces reflects the neo-liberal agenda
Research Question Two	To investigate changes to open space	To ascertain the effects of neo-liberal Reform on open space
Research Question Three	To investigate any shift in the provision of open space	To ascertain the character of any changes occurring to open spaces and identify any spatial themes



Primary Evidence from Local Authority Open Space Assessments			
Analysis of:	Open space provision	To see what open space Local Authorities are currently responsible for	To put the research in context
Analysis of:	Ownership	To see what proportion of open space is managed by the public authorities	To establish the relative importance of the State in providing this service
Analysis of:	Partnership co-ordination	To explore whether partnership is happening	To establish the extent of administrative de-centralisation
Analysis of:	The quality and quantity of open space	To explore the level of State provision	To identify standards in open space provision
Analysis of:	Funding of open space provision	To investigate the economic profile of the state service	To identify the economic pressure for de-centralisation
Analysis of:	The strategic vision	To see whether open space provision is planned into the future	To establish the aims of Local Government
Analysis of:	Strategic funding options	To investigate Local Authority resource planning	To establish the sustainability of the State service
Analysis of:	Local authority priorities	To help summarise how Local Authorities are coping with the neo-liberal agenda	To understand the direction of policy development at the local level
Analysis of:	Justifications for disposal of open	To see what justifications there are for disposing of open space	To understand whether disposal of open space is a typical feature of

	space		neo-liberal politics
Analysis of:	Patterns of possible disposal	To see what open spaces are most at risk	To understand what type of open space is most likely to be lost and who could be most disadvantaged



Summary of the Evidence			
Results	Research question one	Summary of the evidence from the assessments and analysis of policy and provision	Obtain the evidence to support the research hypothesis and identify gaps for the next phase of data collection



Primary Evidence from Local Authority Interviewees			
Analysis of:	The general outlook on open spaces	To gain general information and establish a dialogue about open spaces during the interviews	To gain a good insight into what is happening at the Local Authority level.
Analysis of:	Financial pressures	To see whether economic pressures are keenly felt by Government Officers	To understand whether financial issues are likely to affect the future distribution of open spaces
Analysis of:	Central funding	To see whether conflicts are evident	To identify resistance or compliance with the neo-liberal agenda
Analysis of:	The scrutiny of open spaces	To see if Local Government Officers perceive that open spaces are at risk	To understand the risks to open space
Analysis of:	Options that exist for the disposal of open spaces	To explore the popular disposal of open spaces	To measure physical de-centralisation
Analysis of:	Use and value	To see whether Government Officers are following the government guidance in PPG 17	To understand whether open spaces are viewed within Local Government as an economic asset or as a community facility
Analysis of:	Open spaces most at risk and the spatial character of the areas	To see what changes are taking place	To establish the characteristics of change on public open space
Analysis of:	Powerful stakeholders	To see who makes the key decisions about open spaces	To identify whether open space provision is planned and transparent
Analysis of:	Strategic approach	To see whether strategies exist for the comprehensive provision of open space	To establish whether Local Authorities are balancing local needs for open space



Summary of the Evidence			
Results	Research question one	Summary of the evidence from the assessments and further analysis of policy and provision	Obtain the evidence to support the research hypothesis and inform research questions two and three
Results	Research question two	Cross-cutting analysis of the evidence from the assessments and the interviews of the effect of neo-liberal reform	Obtain the evidence to support the research hypothesis and inform research question three
Results	Research question three	Cross-cutting analysis of the evidence from the assessments and the interviews of the character of any changes to open spaces and identify any spatial themes	Obtain the evidence to support the research hypothesis



Conclusion

Table 1. Thesis Structure

2.0 Literature Review

There are eight key areas that influence the subject of this research project. These are discussed in turn, beginning with neo-liberal politics, to create a backdrop for the rest of the information, and they cascade from the global level to the local level, concluding with a discussion about open space policy in England. In reality the relationships between these key areas are very interconnected. They influence each other as much as they influence the developing open space situation. The following diagram illustrates how this might be interpreted:

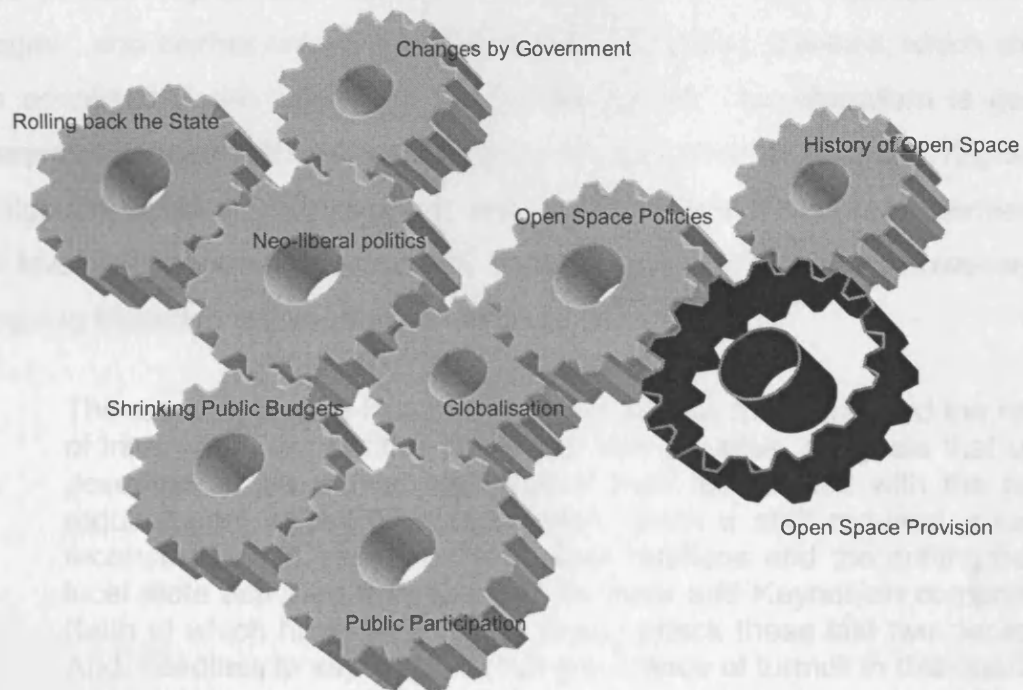


Fig 1. Key issues affecting Open Space Provision in England

The following sections try to explore the relationship between these areas and the main research subject of open spaces. The primary concept is decentralisation, and whilst this is not new in the context of urban politics, it is quite new in an environmental context. The lack of material specific to the decentralisation of open spaces means parallels frequently have to be drawn with other sectors, like planning and transport in order to understand what changes might be occurring. This review maps out the research topic by creating a

fuzzy picture of what is happening at a policy level and points to other valuable sources of evidence to find out about what is happening to open spaces.

2.1 Neo-liberal politics

Neo-liberalism is a term that describes the style of government that has been adopted in most western countries. It is a 'perspective' or 'label' rather than a theory, so its definition is fairly flexible but it appears to be the main driver behind much of the recent policy coming out of Whitehall. The portrayal given by Perrons (c2004, p. 56) is as a perspective whereby, 'The role of the state should be confined to providing a stable framework within which free markets and private capital can flourish; it should not therefore regulate prices or wages...and neither should it be involved in productive activities, which should be privatised if not already in the private sector'. Neo-liberalism is geared towards economic efficiency and, since the influence of post-war Keynesian philosophies started to deteriorate around the 1970's, it has been permeating all levels of government in the UK. As David Harvey highlights however, the ongoing transition is less than smooth:

The recovery and re-inforcement of [capitalists traditions] and the revival of inter-urban competition these last two decades, suggests that urban governance has moved more rather than less in line with the naked requirements of capital accumulation. Such a shift required a radical reconstruction of central to local state relations and the cutting free of local state activities from the welfare state and Keynesian compromise (both of which have been under strong attack these last two decades). And, needless to say there is strong evidence of turmoil in this quarter in many of the advanced capitalist countries in recent years (Harvey, 1989, p. 15).

Harvey is a social theorist of international standing and he has been responsible for some of the most poignant ethical critiques of neo-liberalism. Others have also written about the negative effect it has on poverty and say it marginalises excluded groups including women (Barnes et al, 2007, McDowell, 1991). The view of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank appears to be different, as these organisations have encouraged developing countries to adopt neo-liberal policies to gain financial aid. Neo-liberalism is seen, therefore, for good or bad as one of the key drivers behind globalisation.

To understand how the neo-liberal agenda might start to affect open spaces it is helpful to use the widely cited 'Washington Consensus'. This is a list of the reforms with which it is associated (Rodrick, 1996, p.1). These are:

- Fiscal rectitude,
- Competitive exchange rates,
- Free trade,
- Privatisation,
- Undistorted market prices, and
- Limited state intervention.

The UK government can be seen to have supported most of these policy reforms throughout successive governments since the 1980's. When the Labour party came to power in 1997 it continued the previous Conservative government's neo-liberal approach by freezing public spending and pledging not to increase income tax. The Treasury gave control of interest rates to the Bank of England and public spending fell as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Long-term growth occurred in the economy, sustained by low inflation and high employment, so the reforms were seen as highly successful. Rydin described it as a restructuring of the domestic economy, which was 'profound'. She linked it to globalisation and referred to the policy approach as one of 'flexible specialisation or post-Fordism' stating, 'These were the circumstances in which sub-contracting replaced many in-house operations, flexible working replaced traditional labour practices, and jobs became more short-term and work pressures more intense' (Rydin, 2003, p.71).

The grounds maintenance systems used by local government have already become streamlined in recent years, contributing to the post-Fordist approach described above. Many of the core grounds maintenance tasks that used to be provided by the State, like grass cutting and litter collection, have been devolved to the private sector in a continuation of the privatisation policies ushered in during the Thatcher era. This is supported by Harvey (1989a) who believes local government has become more entrepreneurial than managerial.

The neo-liberal reforms, especially 'fiscal rectitude', 'privatisation' and 'limited State intervention' have further potential which could, in turn, further affect public open spaces. The public sector, as a whole, would have fewer direct employees and less involvement in the production of goods and services. This has met with resistance by workers unions opposed to privatisation and by left-wing activists disenchanted by what they see as the attrition of the Welfare State. It is not completely clear yet what the long-term outcomes of this conflict could be but Perrons' interpretation is that:

It is not a question of the state's powers diminishing but more a question of how its role has changed to meet the requirements of the new dominant social groups, specifically the nationally based global elite which has been very effective in seizing hegemony within individual nation states and within supra national institutions, and having done so has encouraged the adoption of neo-liberal policies with scant regard to their unequal outcomes or implications for social reproduction (Perrons, c2004, p.253).

Some researchers identify social polarisation as one of the negative characteristics of globalisation, although the evidence equally points to it being the consequence of national policies like 'limited state intervention'. Deprivation and neo-liberalism may go hand in hand and there is certainly growing evidence of inequality in the UK. England's capital city is a world leader in finance and banking but recent reports show it has had little success in stopping a social, financial and educational gap opening up between rich and poor. The educational success of children is now heavily influenced by where they live (Frean, 2007, p.1). Fifty-two percent of children in inner London are living below the poverty line and children from ethnic backgrounds are most disadvantaged with 89% of children in Pakistani families in London falling into this category (GLA, 2006, p.1). It seems to leave serious questions for politicians about the benefits of neo-liberal policies.

Open space provision is particularly vulnerable to the ravages of 'limited State intervention'. This is because, like all public goods and services, the cost of provision is now going to be more heavily scrutinised, alongside the method of delivery. However, it is not a statutory service, meaning Local Government is not legally required to provide it. Only a very enlightened authority would be

able to balance neo-liberal reform with the need to ensure that open space was appropriately protected in order to help people's quality of life. In the face of increasing pressure to dispose of many State run amenity areas, there is a potential pitfall for the government's equality agenda but it uses language to re-assure people. It tells us that Local Authorities should be 'Steering not rowing', presumably full speed ahead. The use of language as a means of gaining public consensus is criticised by academics in the field of discourse analysis. Chouliaraki and Fairclough believe there is a:

Compelling need for critical theorisation and analysis of late modernity which can not only illuminate the new world that is emerging but also show what unrealised alternative directions exist – how aspects of this new world which enhance human life can be accentuated, how aspects which are detrimental to it can be changed or mitigated (c.1999, p.4).

The way government uses language has become an increasingly contentious part of its approach and been popularly labelled in the press as 'the rhetoric of government', or 'media spin'. The issues are disseminated in Fairclough's book, 'New Labour, New Language' in which there is a description of the, 'Re-invention of government' bringing about, 'A new form of control from the centre based upon business corporation models, including promotional means for managing consent' (2000, p.4). Examples used include focus groups and citizen's juries. The issues that Fairclough discusses are a striking criticism of the use of language by the State. These arguments emphasise the pertinence of this research, given the importance of reform in open space policy.

2.2 The Influences of Globalisation

Globalisation stems from a perception that there are economic forces dominating world trade and individual Nation States are powerless to stop their influence. They must either embrace them or lose out economically. The paradox could be that globalisation has quickly become hegemonic and the negative side effects are starting to outweigh the positive. An underlying premise here is that greater levels of interconnectedness, which in turn feed international trade and competition, are encouraging the exploitation of people and resources. This situation seems not to have been helped by the fact that

government is encouraging 'limited intervention' or to use another currently fashionable phrase 'rolling back services' that traditionally prevented such exploitation.

The theory of globalisation belongs to Saskia Sassen, developed in her ground-breaking work 'The Global City – London, New York, Tokyo' published in 1991 (Sassen, 1991). It incorporates information about structural changes showing how globalisation is having significant impacts on the composition of society and the layout of the urban environment. Sassen's view point is that sectoral and occupational trends have widened social inequalities and income distribution in three ways, due to:

- The growing inequality in the profit making capacities of different economic sectors and in the earning capacities of different types of workers,
- The polarisation tendencies embedded in the organisation of service industries and the casualisation of the employment relation, and
- The production of urban marginality, particularly as a result of new structural processes of economic growth rather than those producing marginality through abandonment.

There is also an assertion that socio-spatial forms are created as an expression of the relationship between urban space and the new economy in post-industrial cities (Sassen, 1991, p. 257). In the US this was thought to be reflected in the suburbs expanding, whilst the inner city was declining, a form of structural change that could also be said to be typical of UK cities, especially in the 1980's.

Globalisation has the potential to impact on the geographic, or spatial distribution of open spaces because it energises the processes of de-centralisation. It can influence the capacity of Local Government to provide parks and green spaces, because they are required to focus on economical competitiveness instead. The trend has been for profitable services to be 'de-centralised' or sold to private organisations in order to lower the tax bill. Unprofitable services, such as open space provision, are being 'devolved' to other 'stakeholders'. Unfortunately, the difference in the demand for varying

open spaces is linked to their levels of use, and market forces can only crudely measure this.

The value of recreational areas is typically hard to measure, because it is a public good, but demand appears to be greatest in central areas where the population is most concentrated. These are the locations where the cost of land is greatest, creating huge conflicts. The drive for greater competitiveness has helped 'fiscal rectitude' to dominate local politics, and made it harder for public goods and services to be provided, which in turn, creates economic conflict for Local Authorities. It has, conversely, made it easier to justify the disposal of public goods and services, like open space, that are expensive to manage. Open space has consequently become more vulnerable to disposal than it was historically. Fordism dictated that the State should be instrumental in providing infrastructure. The neo-liberal approach of current times has led to new patterns of distribution are heavily influenced by market pressures rather than social pressures and this could be contributing to what it referred to above as 'urban marginality' (Sassen, 1991).

De-centralisation is described as a positive force for economic development by providing consumer choice and driving down costs. In 'Splintering Urbanism', Graham & Marvin (2002, p.90-135) identify some of the reasons why western governments wanted to do this:

- The collapse of the long capitalist boom from the 1950's to the 1970's where the modern infrastructural ideal reached virtually hegemonic dominance,
- Profound economic, political and cultural shifts surrounding the emergence of an inter-connected global economy,
- Fiscal crises in Western nations,
- Strained notions of the ability of publicly built infrastructure to stimulate the economy,
- Selling of infrastructure assets to private transnational firms,
- Neo-liberal critiques of the inefficiencies of centralised public control,

- Assertions about the moral superiority of individual choice,
- The influential lobbying of transnational firms,
- Social and cultural critiques about social, gender and environmental biases in provision,
- The demise of the idea that it is possible to 'plan' order into the life of cities,
- Failures of controllability, certainty and security by the state.

Graham & Marvin state that society should regret the loss of monopolistic types of service delivery, which they refer to as 'modernist', being characteristic of the post-war system (ibid.). They explain how increased competition in the provision of infrastructure has led to increased global poverty. Graham & Marvin see capitalism as a fundamentally uneven mode of economic development, with investment flowing to the places where most profits can be made and flowing away from other places where people suffer as a result. Other research supports this interpretation. Recent changes in the geographies of production are leading to new spatial divisions of labour (Massey, 1984). Post-modern cities are identifiable by growing income inequality whereby the gap between rich and poor is widening (Hamnett, 1996a; Sassen, 2001). It is paralleled by a trend towards the growth of unemployment and greater insecurities in the labour market (Burgers, 1996). Huge income gaps arise between those in society from transnational elites at the top and low skilled workers at the bottom, creating new class divisions. These post-modern changes have been accompanied by large-scale migration causing further changes in the way jobs have evolved (Friedmann, 1995, p. 324). These concepts are likened to an 'hour-glass' with an expanding top and bottom but a contracting middle section representing the loss of middle income groups (Marcuse, 1989).

The overall effect is a more fragmented urban form (Soja & Scott, 1996 p.433) otherwise expressed by Graham and Marvin as 'segmentation' (op. cit.). They believe that, 'Infrastructure is currently being customised to integrate and interconnect affluent and powerful spaces and users, and increasingly being built and configured to bypass less valued intervening ones, where access to

even basic networked services becomes undermined.' They ask, 'What has become of cities *as a whole* in the context of the parallel dynamics of fragmentation and splintering that so often seem to accompany globalisation?' (2002, p. 382, emphasis in original). Applying this concept to open space infrastructure would lead to the conclusion that affluent communities will have increasingly greater access to open space in the future whilst less affluent communities will have ever decreasing access. A characteristic of this process would probably be the loss of open space in deprived areas, especially the loss of open space managed by the State. In these circumstances, the rolling back of open space services would be contributing to the social deprivation experienced by those at the bottom of the 'hour-glass'.

There are two main counter-arguments to the concept of social deprivation as an inevitable consequence of the new global economy. The first is based upon State intervention. Hamnett, (1996a) for example, argues that Sassen's interpretation of the causes and forms of social polarisation gives insufficient weight to the limited US welfare system, alongside other factors such as high levels of immigration from poorer countries. He wrote an article in *Urban Studies* in 1996 entitled 'Why Sassen is Wrong: A Response to Burgers' to explain why State support can heavily affect the outcome of economic restructuring. Preteceille (1990) also put forward a strong case for political processes as a means of reducing the negative effects of inequality. These researchers do not dispute the existence of a new global order and the quickening pace of economic change but neither do they see an inevitable outcome for poorer people, because of the possibility of intervention by the State. The main body of research relates to State services like health and welfare, but it equally applies to infrastructure, like open spaces, which can assist deprived areas and help break down structural and spatial inequalities.

The other main counter-argument to the concept of social deprivation as an inevitable consequence of the new global economy is based on the positive aspects of public participation in policy making. This is a fairly deterministic approach, which anticipates a reduction of the role of the State in supporting society when it is faced with increasing international competition. Harvey, for

example believes that 'Urban 'governance' means much more than 'government'. He sees it as:

Unfortunate that much of literature...concentrates so much on the latter when the real power to re-organise urban life so often lies elsewhere or at least within a broader coalition of forces within which urban government and administration have only a facilitative and coordinating role to play (Harvey, 1989a, p.6).

Burns et al have also criticised government systems saying that:

Power needs to be as decentralised as possible if citizen is to be able to express opinions, learn about other views, engage in decision-making and organise politically (Burns et al, 1994, p. 50).

The UK government has adopted arguments like these, for greater participatory democracy but overlooked the calls for greater State intervention, seeing them as uncomplimentary to the neo-liberal agenda. It now promotes stakeholder involvement and especially encourages Local Authorities to devolve decision-making responsibilities, enhancing the process of the political de-centralisation. Perrons, who regards current attempts at participation and empowerment as, 'A new tyranny...something that is imposed on people in order to appear to be more inclusive, but in reality only secures local legitimation for plans effectively determined elsewhere' (c2004, p. 301) shows her support for the underlying premise of participation by saying that 'Recognising diversity and looking at ways of analysing problems and designing solutions in inclusionary ways is clearly a necessary condition for moving towards a fairer society' (c2004, p. 303).

State intervention, although not a favoured part of national policy, cannot be written off as means to prevent social polarisation. In the journal article 'Globalisation from below', Henry et al (2000) showed that spending on public services in Birmingham supported the re-invention of the city when international competition arrived. It could have been devastating because this city had such a strong economic reliance on manufacturing, which went into sharp decline. Instead, the trade networks that had already been fostered within ethnic communities helped the city to re-invent itself. This was largely

made possible because the Local Authority had previously had the foresight to allocate public resources to racial integration, helping with English language skills, for example. The ex-colonial communities had been helped to achieve economic stability in their own right, and this ultimately contributed to a stronger, more diverse local economy. This was a crucial factor in ensuring Birmingham was successful in overcoming the loss of the automotive industry, and produced a very different outcome from that of Detroit in America, which suffered huge population loss and racial tensions when *its* car industry went into decline (Detroit News, 2005).

2.3 Public Participation as the Antidote

Questions remain over how to overcome the negative impacts of globalisation such as increasing social inequality. Some believe that government should take a more pro-active role, by creating a safety net in the form of a strong Welfare State. Others believe that there should be more political control by the masses, in the form of participatory democracy. The government favours the latter of these approaches, i.e. public participation as the best means of addressing inequality, and it hopes that resources will be re-distributed through networks in society, rather than the State. This has led it to continue with its programme of devolving services, especially through the mantle of 'public-private partnerships'. It is not readily clear whether this dual approach of greater stakeholder involvement alongside more private sector delivery of services will work. In order to identify the two elements of the current government's approach, which seems to hold the future for open spaces in the UK, it is helpful now to look carefully at both branches of policy and understand how they compliment one another.

If the negative social effects of private sector service delivery (Perrons, c2004, Graham and Marvin, 2001, Burns et al, 1994) can be counter-balanced by the positive effects of stakeholder involvement (Barnes et al 2007, Healey, 1996, Harvey, 1989a) the UK could be on a post-modern course to global affluence *and* social equity. It could avoid the pitfalls that have so far come to characterise many other post-industrial economies. It's difficult to tell the

strength of influence that each branch of policy will have, not least because partnership, a seemingly simple term is hotly debated with regard to its real meaning. It emerged as a policy tool in the Conservative era in the UK, in the Department of the Environment Manual, 'Involving communities in Urban and Rural Regeneration: A Guide to Practitioners' (DoE, 1996). Successive government ministers have developed partnership policies and researchers have paralleled the trend by developing their understanding of the term as well as its effectiveness as a policy tool.

Michael Carley wrote 'Urban Partnerships, Governance and the Regeneration of Britain's Cities' in 1999. He gave the following recommendations (p.280-292):

- Broadening the base of partnership, in particular those players who have a hand in influencing the quality of life of disadvantaged households,
- A new financial regime including greater empowerment of Local Authorities,
- Genuinely involving the community to get away from the feeling that too much community involvement in partnership tends to be tokenistic,
- Fostering better local governance as an aid to regeneration because partnership, regeneration, community participation and local governance are one and the same,
- Vertical integration to foster a chain of sustainable development,
- Supportive Regional Development Frameworks to co-ordinate the activities of partnerships, and
- A national development policy promoting balanced spatial patterns across the country.

Carley's critique came before the proliferation of Labour policy when the government was still seen by many as a fresh force for change. He asserts that partnership and community participation are one and the same but it has gradually become less the

evident. His perception showed echoes of Arnstein's work from 1969 on the 'Ladder of participation', which defined participation in the early days. It portrayed partnership as a sophisticated form of participation, giving a high degree of citizen power. Since Carley's work popular concerns have arisen about the government's agenda especially the extent to which the use of the word partnership has become much more differently interpreted.

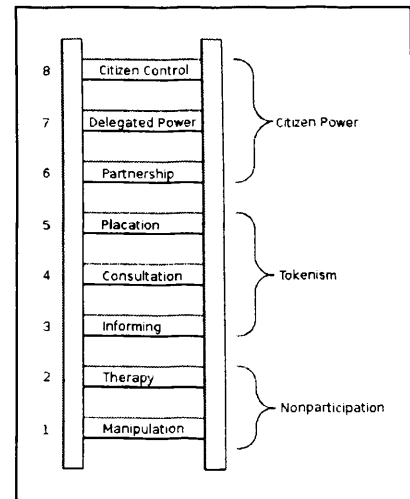


Fig. 2 Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969, p.1)

It is unlikely that partnership would be seen now as a form of citizen power. Its use has come to be more associated with partnerships between the public and private sector, as in the term 'Private Finance Initiative' (PFI) for example. Its frequent interpretation is demonstrated by the following reference from Atkinson:

There is no single authentic mode of assigning meaning to terms such as partnership...[its] meaning is constructed (i.e. produced and reproduced) in a context of power and domination which privileges official discourse(s) over others (Atkinson, 1999, p. 59).

He sees the government's use of the word as misleading. This seems to be correct because, as may be expected of a political rather than a literal idea, strong views have subsequently developed, both supporting and opposing partnerships.

Those opposed to the government's policies on partnership rally around two different camps. There are those that are fundamentally opposed to private sector involvement, and those who see it as a term conceptualised by politicians. Atkinson wrote in an article in *Urban Studies* in 1999, that partnership was construed to encourage local government to accept, 'Municipal forms of collectivism are no longer tenable' (p.63). Fairclough discusses his opposition to the use of the term 'partnership' in his work 'New Labour, new language?' He calculates that in a document entitled 'Labour into Power', produced before the general election in 1997, the word 'partnership' is

used 126 times (2000, p. 128). His analysis shows it was the fourth most frequently used word in New Labour material and a word he feels was used to, 'Give a more favourable gloss to privatisation' (ibid.). His view is probably influenced by his simultaneous belief that the State is, 'The only real defence against the barbarism of the market' (p. 16). It seems compelling evidence of the way discourse could have been used to hi-jack the political agenda, by somebody whose work is so closely given to isolating real meaning.

Participation seems an equally controversial concept for different reasons. The debate centres on whether effective participation can really be achieved. This is summarised by one researcher on this subject as, 'Thorough-going empowerment of communities is unlikely, not least because of the confusion which surrounds [this] term, but equally because the organisational contexts in which discursive practices operate are also sites of power relationships and contestation' (Atkinson, 1999, p.68). He suggests that training and capacity-building are key aspects of the empowerment process but questions the extent to which they could actually function to create genuine community empowerment rather than a political attempt to 'manage the community' (ibid.). Barnes et al suggests that, 'More participation does not necessarily equate to more democracy and, in relation to public participation initiatives more widely, closer examination is needed to determine their impact on services, outcomes and democratic renewal' (2007, p.28). Support for public participation is based around the unlikelihood of the State being able to manage the growing needs of the economy, society and the environment in the way it has done previously. A range of evidence has been produced showing that power has already been so widely dispersed, that a point has been reached where the State cannot always intervene and support every new initiative (Stokier, 2004, Sabatier, 1999, Harvey, 1989b).

In discussing the urban environment, Rydin's solution to such ideological conflicts is that there should be a rationale based on three imperatives:

- We are experiencing a period of socio-economic instability, in which reference to soundly produced plans is critical,

- In this period of transition and restructuring we need to plan for the best of possible futures; and
- We are responsible for the ongoing maintenance of our natural and built environment (Rydin, 2003, p336).

This positive outlook nurtures the belief that order can be obtained by adhering to traditional techniques such as professionally led town planning, but there is no escape at present from the policy net. Everything is being designed around participation and partnership. Local government officers including planners are amongst those expected to co-ordinate this approach, influencing the degree to which New Labour's dual model will succeed.

The Planning System has been a testing ground for the de-centralisation of local government services. The seeds of this change can be found in the work of Habermas (1992) on communicative rationality and Healey (1996) on collaboration. Healey was very influential in identifying some of the potential problems as government moved away from the role of provider and focussed her research on the poor links between business and socio-cultural infrastructure. Her work was based on a concern that economic interests would outweigh social ones and dominate the decision-making process to the detriment of society. She developed planning theories and advocated a consensus building approach. In the journal *Planning in Practice* Healey stated:

We need to give [collaborative planning] policy attention, and work out how to enable people, in their neighbourhoods and cities, in their companies and workplaces, and other associations and agencies which provide nodes in our social life, to engage in relation building work through which a rich capability for managing collective affairs...can be generated (Healey, 1996, p.211).

Stakeholder involvement has since come to be enshrined in planning policy. Some of the key requirements for Local Authorities stem from the need to provide a community strategy, supported by the Local Development Framework. The planning Green Paper from 2001, 'Planning: Delivering a fundamental change', outlines how this should happen:

Local authorities have a new duty to prepare Community Strategies, which they develop in conjunction with other public, private and community sector organisations...Community Strategies will play a key role in informing the preparation of Local Development Frameworks. In turn, the Framework must assist in delivering the policies in the Community Strategy' (DTLR, 2001, p. 13; 4.7).

The Green Paper criticised previous approaches to consultation and community engagement and proposed an additional 'community statement' as part of the new Local Development Framework process, it suggested:

'The [Community] Statement will set the standard for good practice in engaging those with an interest in proposed development. It will offer a simple and clear guideline that will enable the community to know with confidence when and how it can expect to be consulted and will provide a benchmark for applicants for planning permission about what is expected of them. It might, for example, include contact details for key organisations, both local and other consultees, who need to be aware of a particular application' (DTLR, 2001, p. 16; 4.22).

Other policy flowing from this Green paper helped develop the stakeholder concept. 'Sustainable communities: Delivering through Planning' describes one of the key themes of the planning reform as:

Better community involvement which takes into account the needs of all those with a stake in the system' (ODPM, 2002, p.6).

This new approach increased expectations within the open spaces sector, that consultation relating to open spaces would be carried out in a much more meaningful way. Other work supported these optimistic expectations. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 included a requirement for Local Access Forums to be set up to give independent advice on, 'The improvement of public access to land in their area for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area' (p.9; 94.4). Evidence also continued to flow from the open spaces research community, like the report from Birdlife International, circulated by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (2007), which described how access to natural green space improves society's physical and mental health. It demonstrates how stakeholder involvement could add greatly to the potential to improve open spaces.

The public parks we know today were born out of a social need to relieve pollution around the time of the industrial revolution when they were referred to generally as the 'Lungs of the city'. The fresh air and space they provided has enabled generations of city dwellers to exercise and socialise with one another. Recent research has been aimed at exploring the social benefits of open spaces with the objective of improving the benefits to local communities. A national survey commissioned by Sport England in 2003 found that open space provision is currently biased towards white, privileged people. Disabled people and people from black and ethnic minority groups were shown to have low levels of participation (p.22). The executive summary to this report states, 'There may be inequalities in the level and nature of take-up across the different parts of society when it comes to engaging in culture, leisure and sport ' (p.6).

Research cited in the Hackney Open Space Assessment (p. 42) from a group called RSGB in 2003 produced similar findings:

The extent and nature of participation in leisure and recreation change with a person's age. Generally speaking, participation in leisure activities declines with age, although there are variations according to one's income level, personality, interest, health condition, ability level, transportation, education level and a number of social characteristics.

Social issues were explored in the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in their report, 'The Value of Public Space (2004). It attempted to define social benefits with the aim of encouraging better park design and management to encourage more inclusive use of public spaces. The following year CABE also published 'Decent Parks? Decent Behaviour? – The link between the quality of parks and user behaviour' (2005). It showed that not only do good parks benefit local communities but also poor ones disadvantage them. This gave further impetus to the need for greater collaboration in the protection of open spaces. The government responded with a requirement for Sport England to meet a public service agreement (PSA 3) to increase the take up of cultural and sporting opportunities by priority

groups, such as those people in lower socio-economic groups (Sport England, 2007, p.1). It was devised to compliment other public service agreements with the Department of Communities and Local Government for greater equality in open space provision, under the banner of 'Liveability' (DCLG, 2006, p. 22; 2.2).

However, the degree to which civil society might be effectively engaged in shaping policies to do with open space is dubious. The collaborative planning model has shown itself to be very difficult for planners to use in practice. Problems include people's varying ability to use communication and language (Rydin, 2003, p. 338-339) as well as the ability to act collectively, linked to theories of social capital (Blomfield et al, 2001). The appraisal of Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger in the journal article 'Deconstructing communicative rationality: a critique of Habermasian collaborative planning', in 1998 heavily criticised the validity of collaborative planning as a practical planning tool. It stated, 'The assumption that all stakeholders within the communicative discourse arena are striving for enhanced democracy for communities is a value judgment and one that does not hold water (1998, p.1979). Unless a much more sophisticated approach to stakeholder involvement can be devised and maintained, the risk is that inequality, especially access to public infrastructure and services, will increase.

2.4 The Changes Government is Putting in Place

The government is unequivocal in its belief in public-private partnership and stakeholder involvement, derived from the neo-liberal agenda. To understand the many ways this belief is being manifested and the likelihood of Local Authorities to be able to ignore pressure for reform, it is helpful to look at the breadth of the government's agenda. In 1999 the Cabinet Office produced a report entitled 'Modernising Government' describing a 'mission' in which it would:

- Review all central and local government department services and activities...to identify the best supplier in each case

- Set new targets for all public bodies, focusing on real improvements in the quality and effectiveness of public services.
- Monitor performance closely [to] strike the right balance between intervening where services are failing and giving successful organisations the freedom to manage (p.1).

This began a series of government attempts to persuade, cajole and enforce Local Authorities into delivering its neo-liberal agenda. First was The Local Government Act 2000 giving new statutory powers for Local Authorities to 'Promote the economic, social and environmental well-being' of their areas (p.1; 2.1). It extended the legal remit for local government to pursue policies and initiatives, but at the same time, delivered no extra funding. Local Authorities could create fund-raising partnerships but they were still unable to set their own levels of council tax. In 1999, as much as sixty-six percent of the income they received came directly from central government so they remained financially dependent (1999/2000 Local Government Financial Statistics, cited in Rydin, 2003, p. 103). A key requirement of The 2000 Act was for Local Authorities to share decision-making responsibilities with other stakeholders and jointly deliver a community strategy.

ODPM guidance stated that 'Individual councils will need to consider how best to involve the different communities that make up their area and devise techniques that are most appropriate to local circumstances' (2000, p52). In practice this meant setting up 'Local Strategic Partnerships' and as statutory co-ordinators, most of the responsibility for identifying sources of funding for the delivery of the community strategies fell on the Local Authorities. The government did not give mainstream funding; instead it required a, 'Proper assessment of needs and the availability of resources' (ODPM 2000, p. 12). It suggested that savings could be found by eliminating, 'Gaps, overlaps or contradictions in resource use' (p73).

Further reform was set out in 2001 with the White Paper 'Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services' (DTLR, 2001b). It built on the previous government's 'Best Value' initiative, surprisingly to those who had predicted a break with Conservative policies, and it adopted a similar stance on the need

for diversity in the methods used to deliver public services, including 'Public, private, voluntary or partnership' (p. 9). This set the tone for the de-regulation of assets, as well as offering Councils greater flexibility to devolve services but came hand in hand with greater accountability for service performance through central monitoring. The White Paper included a requirement for, 'Clearly defined priorities and exacting performance standards; regular performance assessments for all councils, public information about councils' performance, inspection programmes and tough action to tackle failing councils and services' (p.10). The requirements of Local Authorities were, therefore, becoming increasingly sophisticated.

From the evidence contained in the report by ODPM entitled 'The Relationship between Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks,' it appears a number of authorities failed to embrace the new policies (2003b, p 9). Government responded by strengthening the system with more performance monitoring. It stated its ongoing commitment to community strategies and asked the Audit Commission to devise new Local Authority performance indicators to measure community involvement. Some of the difficulties were recognised by the Audit Commission in its publication, 'People, places and prosperity: Delivering government programmes at the local level'. It suggested that in order to reduce the complexity of the current process Strategic Partnerships should be involved in separating mainstream services from 'special initiatives', such as physical regeneration (2004, p 7). It suggested 'new units' (ibid.) could be created to deliver these special initiatives, somewhat contradicting the government's other objective, of getting away from the silo mentality.

The government appears less willing than the Audit Commission to recognise the extent of Local Authority reluctance for de-centralisation and is unwilling to engage in a conflict. Its 'National Procurement Strategy' from 2004 said, 'Procurement is about making choices. The choice that members make about a particular contract or form of partnering is a very clear signal of what type of authority the council wants to be and how it wants to be seen now and in the future' (ODPM, 2006b, p. 17). The government may have found however,

through its use of performance indicators and comprehensive performance assessments, that Local Authorities are not devolving service responsibilities as quickly as it would like. The White paper from 2006 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (2001b) subsequently shifted the delivery of services even further away from Local Authority control. The opposition it had received to bureaucratic monitoring were used as part of the government's own justification:

The clear messages that local public service providers spend too much time meeting the demands of central government rather than those of their citizens and communities. This has sometimes held back innovation and prevented Local Authorities and their partners from responding to the different needs of different communities (p.16).

This White Paper resolutely asserted that a devolved approach to local government would bring better services, public satisfaction and stronger communities. It introduced a further new requirement for Local Authorities to share power with the Local Strategic Partnerships by developing new Local Area Agreements.

Increasingly sophisticated service delivery requirements alongside resolute controls on public expenditure has increased the financial pressure on Local Authorities. The hope from government was that this pressure would be commuted into service improvements but it also made it inevitable that some local authorities would consider other, last resorts. One of these was the option to liquidate assets to give them more financial freedom. Perhaps surprisingly, government did not stand in the way. In an interview with The BBC in January 2007, Chief secretary to the Treasury, Stephen Timms, said:

The 2007 [National Asset Review] will encourage departments to make the best possible use of their existing asset base by exploiting under-utilised assets and disposing of assets no longer required for service delivery...This improvement in asset management practices will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the UK public sector (BBC News, 2007, p.1).

New pressure to liquidate assets then cascaded down the government hierarchy. Regen.net the internet site of a national planning journal, published

a series of articles online, showing government had already recognised the potential of public property for releasing new resources. In September 2006, it covered the launch of 'The Community Ownership and Management Review', which Ruth Kelly said was needed to consider whether further powers were required to boost the transfer of public land and buildings to community organisations (Regen.net, 2006b, p1). The same article reported how, in a speech at the annual conference of Development Trusts Association, third sector minister Ed Miliband said, 'The government will act to give English community groups a better opportunity to acquire council assets when they come up for sale...There is a gap that needs to be filled'. In December of the same year, it was reported that 'Councils are reluctant to transfer public assets' (Regen.net, 2006a, p1) and in April 2007 it reported that 'There are no major barriers to community asset transfer' (Regen.net, 2007c, p1). In May 2007, Kelly allocated funding to twenty pilot projects to transfer forty under-used public buildings to community organisations within a year (Regen.net, 2007b, p1). The government simultaneously pursued a proposal by the Commission on Unclaimed Assets to use £80 million currently lying dormant in private bank accounts, to underwrite mortgages to pay for the transfer of assets from local public agencies to community organisations (Regen.net, 2007a, p1).

By encouraging the sale of assets the government was adhering to its own neo-liberal agenda. It didn't support the Local Authority's desire to stay with centrally managed systems of service delivery. This may have been the real reason they wanted financial manoeuvrability, but it did support the progress towards 'limited State intervention' that selling State property represented. Decentralisation was, therefore, happening, arguably by the back door. One of the early observations by Burns et al in 1994 offered a warning that, 'Local government in the UK is being transformed, not just by central government interventions but also by a strong movement towards the decentralisation of services to neighbourhood level' (p. 27). It gradually became an important issue for the research community, particularly how the balance of power is ultimately being re-distributed.

2.5 The Political Debate on Rolling Back State Services

The market is generally accepted in mainstream economics as the best means of distributing resources. The collapse of eastern European communist states at the end of the twentieth century gave new energy to post-Fordist styles of government, moving them further away from managerial styles of re-distribution. Some of the political legacies were deeply entrenched in the UK, especially in nationalised industries like coal production and car manufacturing. It took a relentless political campaign in the UK to dismantle the Fordist economy, devastating many communities in the process, especially those that had come to depend on state subsidies to support local industries. The bitterness with which this campaign was fought also caused deep political resentment, and had a very divisive effect on British society that has never been fully left behind. The Thatcher government that carried out most of the reforms has since been credited with successfully re-structuring the British economy. It is thought to have particularly benefited the service sector by boosting industries like banking, insurance and retail, just at the right time as fierce international competition caused British manufacturing industries to slump. London in particular has seen an economic boom giving it 'global city' status (Sassen, 1991). The UK is thought to have gained an important competitive advantage over other countries that are still trying to overcome the political challenges of re-structuring their own economies.

The Labour Party was not a very effective force throughout the Thatcher period. It remained out of office for 18 years and was forced to re-invent itself in order to regain mainstream acceptability. It had to let go of its political commitment to the 'nationalisation of the means of production' and reluctantly removed the reference to this in 'Clause IV' of its constitution (Labour, 2008, p.1). It was a major concession to those on the Right of the Labour party and they subsequently gained the upper hand in shaping the way forward. 'New Labour' as it became known, devised an approach based on three key elements:

- The rights and responsibilities of the community

- Social integration, and
- The openness and transparency of government.

It closely resembled the theories produced by Anthony Giddens, in 'Beyond Left and Right' (1994). It was along these lines that Tony Blair carefully stewarded the Labour Party's renewal process, careful to work in common with market actors, not in conflict with them. It was a strategy that helped win the '97 election, then party activists set to work in the community. They wanted to develop participatory democracy to the point where it would be strong enough to outlive future changes in government. Critics may argue that this also freed party leaders from the problems of working with the far Left and enabled them to adopt a much more neo-liberal approach.

Blair's political approach was similar to his predecessors, especially his commitment to devolve responsibility for running state services. This became apparent with the continued transfer of Local Authority housing, as well as the then Chancellor, Gordon Brown's budgetary commitments to 'Private Finance Initiative' (PFI) Almost half a million dwellings were transferred to registered social landlords, mainly housing associations, between 1993/4 and 2000/1 (Wilson & Game, 2002, p 145-7 cited in Rydin, 2003, p. 77). The National Audit Office statistics show that in excess of £100 billion has been committed by the UK government towards 400 PFI projects (cited in Hodge 2005, p.3) and Gordon Brown announced an expansion of the PFI programme in his 2006 March Budget, bringing the total number of projects up to 900. The National Health Service, education, transport and defence are all government services due to benefit (Wintour, 2006, p.1).

Other service sectors have made pleas on government to allow more central revenue. In an article in the journal Planning Resource from March 2007, MP's were reported to have, 'Told the government to cut the bureaucracy stifling transport schemes and allow councils to raise funding for projects locally' (Callaghan, 2007, p.1). This indicates that other services are struggling with central government funding systems but they are prepared to be vocal in their opposition to the government system. In the transport sector there seems to be

MP support for greater de-centralisation of responsibility from central to local government control, based on a demand for local fund-raising powers. It reflects the strong lobbying power within the transport sector that doesn't seem to be present within open spaces.

One of the principle reasons behind Labour MP's unease with current funding policy may be because it is now widely recognised as being very similar to Conservatism. Criticism has grown because of various statistics showing social deprivation remains high and in some cases is growing. For example, the annual Local Authority returns to the DCLG for the supplementary report on Statutory Homelessness reveal that the number of families in temporary accommodation for more than two years has increased, up 26% since 2002 (DCLG, 2007, p.7). The trade unions have also been highly critical of PFI. According to Hodge, Unison called on Scottish councils to boycott these projects because they were a way of making 'cash strapped councils open up to public services for exploitation and commercial gain' (2005, p. 215). The bridge to Skye was a PFI project that reached farcical proportions according to the account given in Monbiot's book, *The corporate Takeover of Britain* (2001) It describes how the government ended up effectively buying out the contractors at a huge expense, because of the backlash by protestors unwilling to pay the toll charges. Direct action taken by local people, including driving continuously round the adjoining roundabout 'looking' for the alternative means of crossing to the mainland, was highly successful. Politicians had tried to assure the public that the toll charges were appropriate because of the transport choices being made available to them. They were ignorant, unlike the islanders, of the fact that in the meantime, the only practical alternative of historic ferry services, had been closed down.

Government is trying to broaden the use of the Private Finance Initiative and it has indicated that this should incorporate open space services. The Urban Green Spaces Task Force refers to it in 'Green Spaces, Better Places', as a way to inject money into open space infrastructure, embodied in Recommendation 24 (DTLR, 2002, p, 40; 114). There is little guidance on how

this can be achieved, other than from information such as The Centre for Property and Planning at Ulster University's publication from 1998 entitled, 'Attracting Private Finance into Urban Regeneration' (Ulster University, 1998, p.1). The study related primarily to the built environment. It found evidence of the increasing acceptability of partnership arrangements by the private sector and a need for the public sector to be able to offset risk and ensure confidence. It said that partnership arrangements needed to be flexible to achieve 'Cross-fertilisation between business and community goals' (p.1). Open space creation is not an investment opportunity that immediately attracts private investment but existing areas are recognised as a valuable in terms of their land value. If PFI is to be successfully expanded, open space needs to be levered in to regeneration projects, not traded off, to overcome the kind of market failures that traditionally put open space at risk.

Regardless of the possible perception of open space as unsuitable for private investment, some innovative business models have been emerging recently, albeit on a small scale. The development process has supported the creation of management companies set up to manage open space. 'Greenbelt Ltd', for example, was formed about 15 years ago and its marketing leaflets claim it to be 'One of the leading national private companies dedicated to owning and managing all forms of open space within the built environment'. It is a company that seeks a lump sum to take over public open spaces and become responsible for them in perpetuity. Gated communities are a similar example of this type of management arrangement, where private open space is created for the exclusive use of residents, and this also seem to be sustainable on an economic basis. These kind of changes represent the gradually increasing influence of the market on services like open space, recognised in the literature as the privatisation of the public realm (Williams & Green, 2001). It has political opposition.

Whitfield (2006) writes very passionately against what he calls 'New Labour's Attack on Public Services' he says:

Marketisation results in more services being delivered by the private sector, arms length companies and trusts, which erodes democratic

accountability. Private companies are responsible for the performance of contracts according to the terms of their contract with public bodies, but this is only one element of accountability. Private firms are accountable to shareholders...for market activities and prices. Elected members on the boards of arms length companies and trusts have a legal responsibility to the company which takes precedent over their public responsibilities (p. 131).

He believes that marketisation has actually cost the state £8,355.7 million (p.125) and that the government has gone against deep-rooted support for public services, particularly education and the national health service. He believes it is only proceeding by 'cynically trying to reduce expectations of public provision' (p.8). These somewhat biased views are given greater credibility by other research that has been carried out. Kayden et al (2001) showed, as part of a broader review, that privatisation of the public realm undermined patronage of open spaces in the US. Shonfield (1998) also described the social injustice that can arise when citizens who are excluded from work and housing are also excluded from open spaces.

2.6 Shrinking public budgets

There is still a shroud of mystery placed over the link between social equity and State involvement in services like open space provision. Official information does little to clarify this situation. Material written by Williams & Green (2001) to support a government cross-cutting review suggested that:

The precise nature of the relationships between income, deprivation and poor environmental conditions is difficult to ascertain. Does the poor public realm contribute to the degradations and increased poverty in the areas causing social and economic blight? Or are areas degraded because they are a low public priority and privately people cannot afford maintenance? (p. 12).

They acknowledge however, that 'Empirical research consistently shows that public space in deprived areas is poorer than in more affluent areas' (2001, p.11). The fact that political reform is happening so quickly has not helped to pinpoint the causes of this problem. Valid research seems very much needed to help understand where UK policy is now leading. Much of what has recently been completed has been done so under the umbrella of neo-liberal politics

and this seems to have influenced it to become more reflective, by looking for solutions through monitoring and evaluation. 'Partnership working' has been a very prominent feature of the recent academic literature on open spaces, supporting the de-centralisation of services. To uncover the basis for this trend, it is helpful to look at what was happening to parks and open spaces when neo-liberal politics came into the ascendancy.

'Park Life' a report by Comedia-Demos (1995) is regarded as seminal because it was one of the first to confirm how the drop in state funding led to a decline in standards, rather than an improvement in efficiency. It was based on interviews with thousands of park users. By the turn of the Millennium, other data was becoming available. This was based on factual and unambiguous evidence. The Urban Parks Forum, a group of organisations including two government departments, English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and Heritage Lottery Fund, produced a 'Public Park Assessment' showing how spending had declined in relative terms to the extent that there had been an average reduction of £265,000 a year from the open space budget of every Local Authority in the country, over the previous twenty-two years (Urban Parks Forum, 2001, p,6). This equated to an annual national reduction of £126 million a year on parks and open spaces (ibid.).

The cuts in spending revealed by the Urban Parks Forum in 2001 reflected the political priorities of the previous two decades. National government had embarked on a programme of reducing public expenditure and, as a result, most Local Authorities had been caught between trying to maintain previous levels of service and trying to operate with fewer resources. These problems were never really resolved by the push towards greater efficiency through compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) which was eventually abolished. Local government underwent a turbulent time with rate capping and the transfer of many jobs to private companies but The Public Park Assessment is evidence that open spaces did not improve as a result. It shows that by 2001, 13% of parks were in a poor condition and 39% were declining (Urban Parks Forum, 2001, p.1). The Executive Summary of the Urban Park Forum's report also confirmed the link between this decline and the use of private sector

outsourcing but it also showed a polarisation of parks was occurring, with good parks getting better and bad ones getting worse. Some of the most worrying statistics relate to the impact this decline had on deprived areas:

The data suggests that in all aspects of condition and trend in condition, those historic parks that are provided by authorities that are included in the DETR index of top 100 deprived authorities are faring worse than the main body of historic parks.

- 20.6% are improving compared to a norm of 26.78%;
- 40.34% are declining compared to a norm of 31.73%;
- 12.54% are good and improving compared to a norm of 17.64%;
- 23.65% are fair and declining compared to a norm of 18.75%;
- 15.24% are poor and declining compared to a norm of 11.72%;
- The percentage of poor parks that are reported as declining exceeds 88% (Urban Parks Forum, 2001, p.78).

Additional evidence became available the following year in 2002, when the DTLR published 'Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces'. It used fifteen Local Authorities as case studies and confirmed that core budgets for parks and green spaces had been in decline for 10-15 years. There had been budget cuts across the board, with all departments 'expected to bear the brunt' (DTLR, 2002, p. 155). This was a frank confession by government that there were significant problems in the open space sector. It laid the blame with the previous government's political legacy of under-investment, stating, 'Reduced budgets force hard choices which have manifested themselves in lower maintenance standards and failing infrastructure' (p.175) but it stopped short however, of recommending any increase in central funding. It set the stage for a new political solution instead, a fairly predictable one given the political circumstances. The way Local Authorities should start to reconcile fewer resources with the need to increase the quality of the service was set out as follows:

It is clear that parks service budget cuts in the 1990's, combined with lack of capital spending, and the legacy of CCT have meant that in many instances these basic standards have become less than acceptable. What is apparent is that in most cases, partnership working to achieve additional funding, expertise and community involvement is becoming the only way to lift standards above this minimum and to provide facilities that may be desperately needed by local communities (p. 157).

This is clarification that the pursuit of neo-liberalism was starting to impact on open space provision. The use of the phrase 'the only way' highlights the government's intention to use a policy framework instead of financial resources to improve the service. It also shows the careful use of language to gain consensus for its new approach, which can clearly be seen as politically engineered. There is usually more than one way to lift standards but government spending was not going to be increased and the battle lines had been drawn. As the conclusion of the report stated, 'Local authorities may have to change radically' (p. 175).

The Egan Review in 2004 sheds light on the way the relationship between central and local government continued to develop after this time. 'Skills for Sustainable Communities' candidly describes 'the gaps' (p.3). It underlined what government sees as a sustainable community, 'Places that are safe, clean, friendly and prosperous, with good amenities such as education, health services, shopping and green spaces' and it asserts that, 'In too many places our current approach and systems are failing to deliver' (ibid.). It refers to the balance of power by saying, 'Successive governments have vied with each other to emasculate the authority of local government, often resulting in poor leadership and vision for the local area (p.4).' It also advocates partnership working but goes on to say that, 'Central departments will need to demonstrate risk taking and delegation skills to free up local agencies to deliver on the ground' (ibid.). The Nolan Committee of 1997 had flagged up a similar problem with its review of Standards in Public Life, when it noted a particular problem with the lack of ownership of local government standards, these being mainly set outside the Local Authorities. The longevity of these kinds of issues seems to hint at some of the internal conflicts that were hindering partnership working.

Other evidence shows that New Labour maintained strong central control over Local Authorities, whilst simultaneously advocating the need for devolved local services. Rydin sets out how, 'Central government [is] clearly in a position of greater power through various financial and administrative controls, power which increased considerably during the Thatcher years and has, to a large

extent, been maintained by New Labour' (Rydin, 2003, p.102). This strong central control demonstrates why recommendations such as that of the DETR report from 2002, for local government 'to change radically' (p.175) are so powerful. The government is also acting within an international context, alongside other post-industrial nation states aiming to encourage greater social and environmental responsibility by civil society. Its policies compliment neo-liberal objectives that are surprisingly well advanced in the environmental field, especially across the rest of Europe.

There has been a new European programme since February 2006 when the UK government agreed to implement four new measures at the Council of Europe's Landscape Convention, as follows:

1. To recognise landscapes in law, as an essential component of people's heritage, identity and surroundings.
2. To establish and implement landscape policies aimed at protection, management and planning.
3. To establish procedures for public participation in the definition and implementation of landscape policies.
4. To integrate landscape into its regional and town planning policies and in its cultural, environmental, social and economic policies as well as in any other policies with possible direct or indirect impact on landscape (Council of Europe, 2007, p.1).

The UK government is already committed to protecting landscapes, through its system of land designation. There are National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves, amongst other designations. It is enthusiastically taking public participation forward and new requirements for 'spatial planning' set out in the government's planning reforms address the need for integrating landscape policies and those affecting open spaces with other policies.

In fact the UK government is going much further than the measures set out by the European council, by reforming it's rural policies to expand provision in the countryside. It wants to encourage the perception of rural areas as a

playground for the urban population. The amount of open land in England and Wales was believed to have increased by 20% in the ten years up to 2000 (Curry, 2000, p.281). After the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) legislation was enacted it doubled to 3.6 million hectares (ibid.). 'Post-productionist' rural communities are also being encouraged to cater for the urban consumer, whilst urban communities are being steered towards greater engagement with the natural environment, for health and quality of life reasons (Ellison, 2001, p.20). The White Paper 'Rural Strategy 2004' gives an insight into how government wants this situation to unfold. It places significant emphasis on the importance of regional organisations, like the new regional governments, for 'Promoting the enjoyment of our countryside's natural beauty' (DEFRA, 2004, p.44). The aim is for more people from a wider range of backgrounds to be able to enjoy its benefits because currently, '97% of visitors to National Parks are white and 70% are over 35' (ibid.). What this also represents is a physical shift in the provision of recreational opportunities that could be hastened if there is a contraction in urban areas.

The comprehensiveness of the government's strategy seems to indicate that a future shift is deliberate and well planned. A complimentary relationship between town and country seems to have been designed to help both communities to thrive and contribute to their sustainability. One of the key risks is that a physical shift could lead to a natural decline and eventual disappearance of some of the existing areas, potentially urban areas. In fact, The State of the English Cities Report suggests that under the government's 'liveability agenda', resources have started to flow back into urban open spaces, with new resources apparently being found at the local level (DCLG, 2006a, p.1). The Department of Communities and Local Government is now responsible for delivering the government's target on liveability 'PSA8', which is to:

Lead the delivery of cleaner, safer, greener public spaces and improvement of the quality of the built environment in deprived areas and across the country, with measurable improvement by 2008 (ODPM, 2006b, p.22; 2.2).

The DCLG website (2006a, p.1) points to the following achievements:

Liveability is improving overall and policies are contributing to measurable improvement in the quality of urban spaces. PSA8 is helping focus attention and investment in public spaces, as well as emphasizing LAs' responsibility for improvements. The deterioration of urban public spaces is beginning to reverse.

- Improved research and dissemination of good practice, such as work produced by CABE Space and Encams, is helping to reverse decline in parks and open spaces.
- Neighbourhood Wardens Programme (launched in 2000) improved residents' perceptions of their neighbourhood because of reductions in fly tipping, graffiti, litter and dog fouling. 6% more residents thought their areas were getting better in 2003 than in 2001.
- Residents' satisfaction with local parks has risen from 63% in 1999/2000 to 72% in 2003/04 (Best Value User Satisfaction Survey).
- The proportion of sites rated by Encams as being good or satisfactory has risen by 4% to 40% between 2002/03 and 2003/04 (Local Environmental Quality Survey).

These findings are a positive endorsement of the government's decentralisation programme and could show that the combination of policies for rolling back state provision alongside more partnership and stakeholder involvement with open spaces is beginning to be effective.

Resources seem to be available to Local Authorities in England, enabling them to pursue open space improvements but this isn't coming from central government. Local Authority grant applications have halved since 1996 (Appleby, 2006, p. 15). There is also confusing evidence regarding how resources are being used because, in the same year The Department of Communities and Local Government claimed liveability was improving, Horticulture magazine reported 'Urban areas face greenspace cuts' (Unknown author, 2006, p.8). The government planning guidance emphasises how Local Authorities should use planning obligations and the 'Section 106' monies

(S106) they release to address 'quality' issues, as well as 'quantity' issues, but this does not address existing socio-spatial inequalities of the kind highlighted by The Urban Parks Forum in 2001 (op. cit.). The only new funding streams that are available for improving open space provision to make it more accessible for deprived people are those promoted through the neo-liberal mantle of 'partnership' or the disposal of assets. With disposal of assets the number of open spaces in public ownership would decline and the effect would be that open space provision would 'change radically' rather than the Local Authorities themselves.

Calls have been made on central government to improve the security of funding for open space services by making it a statutory service. This seems very unlikely given the neo-liberal policy direction. In an interview in 2006 Baroness Andrews, Parks Minister, spelt out the government's position on parks as:

- No plans to introduce legislation to force Local Authorities to make funding for parks statutory.
- No single budget for green spaces but a range of general support for Local Authorities.
- The Green Flag award scheme is a driver for Local Authorities to spend more on parks.
- Communities should help drive parks up the Local Authority funding agenda.
- The profession should attract the right people with the right skills.
- Support for voluntary schemes and partnerships are the way forward, for example partnerships between Primary Care Trusts and local leisure facilities.
- Local Authorities should to continue making savings.
- People should be enabled with the confidence to deliver improvements themselves (Appleby, 2006, p.15).

Government seems barely concerned with calls for more resources, and expects Local Authorities to find local solutions from the options for de-centralisation that it has put forward. Transferring responsibilities to the private

sector is a configuration of this and the government appears to be giving The Market gentle encouragement, as indicated by the reference to 'leisure facilities' above. It is adding to the pressure on Local Authorities to devolve their interests and push responsibility on to others, but the Government's approach is not without risk. In the summer of 2005, one case attracted national news coverage and demonstrated how things can go wrong when Local Authorities roll back their services too quickly. The BBC reported that:

North Devon Council said it was unfair for council tax-payers to pay for lifeguards on beaches at Saunton, Croyde and Woolacombe, which are privately owned. The announcement provoked criticism from surfers, watersports enthusiasts and other beach users, many of whom said lifeguards should be regarded as a public service. But the council said it would save £15,000 a year and people using the beach should shoulder the responsibility for their own safety. Robert Grose, the head of service regeneration for Kerrier, told BBC News ... the council is considering asking for contributions from private beach owners for the lifeguard service it provides and if the request is refused, the council may have to consider withdrawing or reducing cover (BBC News, 2005, p.1).

This case highlights specific risks involved in shifting the responsibility for provision, from the public to the private sector. In Devon it affected public safety and the local tourism industry, an important source of employment in Devon. Local Authorities under financial pressure to devolve open space services could respond in a similar way by simply cutting services and frittering away valuable assets.

The low availability of central funding and the difficulty in obtaining capital resources for parks appears to have caused some turmoil in the open spaces sector. For example, The Greater London Authority was reported to have dramatically scaled back its 100 Public Spaces Programme'. Peter Bishop, Head of 'Design for London', was reported as saying, 'The mayor's 100 Public Spaces Programme is very ambitious but we need to ask what we can deliver... Fifty permanent schemes are better than 100 schemes that don't

work' (Cityscape, 2007, p.1). The report said that he was reflecting a, 'Common concern across authorities about the cost of revitalising the public realm and its ongoing maintenance' (ibid.). This type of evidence indicates that a low level of success securing partnership funding has started to impact on the ability of local government to deliver strategic aims. It may also suggest that central government has been a little too confident about the speed with which its programme of reform would start to benefit local people.

At the same time it has to be recognised that reform will not occur without effective pressure. This is a difficult process for government to manage but any success will encourage it to pursue its neo-liberal reforms, like that described by the Audit Commission report from 2006. It showed 84% of green space managers believe the quality of areas within their Local Authority is improving or stable, up from 44% in 2000 (Cited in Regeneration News, 2006, p.1). The broader evidence is, however, far from consistent. Resources are flowing in, but its not clear where from. Government reports show satisfaction levels are improving alongside liveability although independent reports show greenspace is facing cuts (op cit.) It is linked to further evidence such as that contained in the footnote to the Audit Commission's report, which explains that 16% of green spaces are continuing to deteriorate (Audit Commission, 2006, p.1.). This inconsistency seems to reflect complex patterns of change and this could be linked to Local Governments ability to deliver the neo-liberal agenda.

2.7 A Brief Historical Review of Open Spaces

This research project recognises a conflict in which Local Authorities are seeking to resolve funding issues without devolving their powers. It explores the effect that government policy is having on open spaces, especially in the way de-centralisation is being manifested amid the difficult challenges of partnership and achieving effective public participation. The geographical location of open spaces in particular, seems likely to be influenced as Local Authorities could start to make financially based rather than socially based decisions about provision. There seems to be a risk of losing open space in those areas where the local community is least involved in the decision making

process. To gain more insight into the way open space provision could change as a whole, a brief historical review has been carried out. This should help to explain the way provision has evolved and place access to recreational facilities in a social context.

Many people perceive Local Authorities to be the main provider of open space, linked to the traditional image of a town park or village green. The idea is likely to stem from the Victorian era, and the image portrayed by archivists such as Geoffrey Jellicoe who said, 'Development everywhere was left to individuals, the industrial cities with their satanic mills and slum dwellings being allowed to run rampant except for the newly conceived public park' (1996, p.261). Before this the countryside offered the majority of recreational opportunities but access was by privilege and not by right. Most people's connection with the land, if they had one, was through their labour, mainly by working in agriculture. Local Authorities became much more involved in open space provision after the Second World War when large areas of open space were built in 'Le Corbusier' style layouts around blocks of flats and low-rise municipal housing. Low-density development was normal because Local Authorities had dominion over layout and government set, what now seem to be, very generous size standards. The Fordist style of government of the past, therefore influenced open space design, providing a rich inheritance for people living in the same areas today. This is highlighted by the fact that development pressure is now much more intense and such expansive areas of open space would be prohibitively expensive. It helps explain how Local Authorities came to be a significant provider, owning slightly more than 300 hectares (ha) of open space each according to the Urban Parks Forum data (2001, p. 6) provided by 405 Local Authorities throughout the UK. Public recreation has nevertheless remained a non-statutory service.

Local Authority powers for the creation of new areas stem from The Open Spaces Act 1906, which is still in use today but statistics relating to changes in land ownership since that time are rare. This makes it difficult to identify trends in public open space provision. Cahill uncovered a great deal of valuable information showing that Local Authority land ownership in the UK has

declined from 402,130 hectares in 1962, to 26,305 hectares in 2001 (2001, p. 147). He believes this is attributable to the privatisation of public industries in the 1980's and the dispersal of public assets to the private sector but it would put Local Authority ownership of open space much lower than the Urban Parks Forum identified, at less than 64ha each. Cahill's footnote qualifies his statistics though, reading, 'Local Authorities are excused land registration at the Land Registry and there are no accurate centralised figures available (ibid.).

The UK is unusual because land ownership still reflects such a strong legacy of class control. 31% of the land in Britain is still owned by the titled aristocracy (Shoard, 1997, p.97). For example, Hugh Algernon Percy, the 10th Duke of Northumberland, currently owns 75,434 hectares, estimated to be worth £308 million (Cahill, 2001, p. 359). This land was inherited through an ancestral line that can be traced back to William de Percy of Alnwick, one the King's Barons who fought in The Battle of Hastings in 1066. It shows how the privileges of birth can still influence access to open space today. We can only place a certain level of confidence in our understanding of the amount of land owned by the State, but the fact that 33% of the UK population owns 94.2% of the land indicates how important the remnant areas of Local Authority controlled open space could be (Cahill, 2001, p. 14).

Throughout history there has been a pattern in which people have taken land from others who are less powerful. A particularly oppressive period was 'The Enclosures' around the time of the industrial revolution. Commoners were forcibly evicted from the 'common lands', over which they had historic grazing rights. Those without any other means of subsistence could only go into the workhouse to survive. It wasn't until 1865 that any real voice was given in opposition to the loss of those areas when 'The Open Spaces Society' was founded. It still campaigns today for 'The protection and increase of public enjoyment of commons, town and village greens and other open spaces and public rights of way' (The UK Houses of Parliament, 2006, p.1). It has helped to safeguard 607,050 hectares of common land, but four-fifths of this is still inaccessible to the public (Shoard, 1997, p.93). Patsy Healey, commented on

'The Tragedy of the Commons' in an article in 1996 entitled 'Consensus-building across Difficult Divisions: New approaches to collaborative strategy making'. She used it as a metaphor for market failure and said, 'Conditions of survival [are destroyed] as a result of the failure of to design institutions to manage common resources' (Healey, 1996, p.211).

When The Welfare State was created, the government supported the use of strong institutional frameworks. Amenity areas were provided in housing areas but a very different type of open space provision was also created in the countryside. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 led to 1,314,678.9 hectares of National Parks being created (National Parks, 2007, p.1) enabling working class men and women to have access to land in the countryside after years of exclusion. It seems testament to the institutional system but by chance more than design, it is also testament to public-private partnership. This is because National Parks adhere to the 'Steering not rowing' philosophy. They are privately owned, even though the public have legal rights over them. These public rights are threatened if the historical behaviour of powerful landowners is repeated; therefore the State is needed to uphold access rights. The longevity of National Parks appears to be good evidence that partnership provision requires a strong statutory framework to enable it to flourish.

The imposing prospect of reduced public sector funding for open spaces has brought these issues to the fore. The need for the State to provide infrastructure is weighed against the need for it to reduce its interventionist role. By 1999, views within parts of the open spaces sector had become heavily divided with some believing the answer lay in resolute protection of all open spaces, whilst others suggested that less valuable areas could be disposed of. The London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) commissioned an investigation into the 'Effectiveness of Policy in Protecting Open Space in London' by Arup Associates and it took a strong stance towards blanket protection, leading the London Boroughs against any compromise that would result in the loss of any open space.

This investigation highlighted how declining public sector budgets over the last twenty years had already forced many Boroughs to dispose of their land assets in order to raise supplementary finance. It showed how, within the planning sector, 48% of applications for development on open space between 1991 and 1998 had been approved; around half of those, for new housing development. In total 542 hectares of open space had been lost in London between 1989 and 1993. Privately owned open space it showed, was most at risk (Arup, 1999, p.59). It re-stated a view that there 'could not be too much open space' and advised the London Boroughs not to try to balance the need for protecting open space with other planning priorities because it only increased its vulnerability (p. 47). It recommended three 'Principles for the Future Protection of Open Space in London:

1. Open space fulfils an important and integral role in good urban form;
2. If open space is viewed as fulfilling a wider role than its use value alone, the loss of quantity cannot be justified by improved quality or greater use of remaining open space;
3. There should be a general presumption against the development of any open space in London' (p.96).

Over the course of 1999, the tide of political thinking turned against LPAC. The Environment, transport and Regions Committee of the House of Commons produced a report entitled 'Towns and Country Parks, the Best and ...' in which is said 'We are shocked at the weight of evidence, far beyond our expectations, about the extent of the problems parks have faced in the last 30 years. It is clear that if nothing is done many of them will become albatrosses around the necks of local authorities...Un-used, derelict havens for crime and vandalism, it would be better to close them and re-use the land than to leave them to decay further' (DETR, 1999, p.181).

In response to this situation The Centre for Leisure Research at the University of Edinburgh produced a report in 2001 entitled 'Realising the Potential of Cultural Services: The Case for Urban Parks, Spaces and the Countryside'. It was funded by twelve organisations including The Local Government Association, The Countryside Agency, The Environment Agency and The

Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM). The report tried, rather unconvincingly, to outline the potential for parks to raise revenue through means such as pitch and putt, bouncy castle, car parking and franchises but it was eclipsed by another report in the same year from Kit Campbell Associates for the Scottish Executive entitled, 'Rethinking Open Space'. This set out the 'Challenges to the Future of High Quality Open Spaces' and suggested three possible solutions:

- The disposal of some open spaces to generate a capital receipt which in theory at least can then be invested to generate annual revenue funding,
- Public-private partnerships, involving the transfer of areas of open space to the voluntary sector and/or local businesses,
- Greater recognition by the Scottish Executive of the importance of open space and therefore changes to the funding arrangements of local authorities (Kit Campbell Associates, 2001, p. 37 ;4.11).

Recommendation 4.3 of the report is:

If planning consent is given for the development of publicly-owned open spaces, any proceeds accruing to councils should be ring-fenced and used only for replacement open space, the enhancement of more important open spaces in the same area or invested to create an additional revenue stream for the maintenance of other areas of open space. Where this latter approach is adopted, councils should not take the opportunity to reduce funding from their existing revenue budget (ibid.).

Kit Campbell gave voice to the government's own emerging view that many open space assets could be disposed of. The Edinburgh based consultancy was duly appointed by government to produce the companion guide to the new planning policy guidance, PPG 17 'Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation', published in 2002. It gave *step-by-step* guidance to Local Authorities on how they should carry out open space assessments. It dismissed the idea of blanket protection and created a need to measure open space provision against locally derived standards, thus requiring objective reasons for planning refusal. It also described the circumstances under which open space could be said to be 'surplus to requirements', and propped the door open for radical change.

2.8 New Policies Influencing the Provision of Open Space

The planning policy framework for evaluating open spaces came alongside a simultaneous push for more neo-liberal reform of open space services. This seemed to arise because of the many parks and open spaces issues that became prominent in 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' the Urban White Paper, produced by the Urban Task Force. The Local Government Association circulated information to Local Authorities about the way the situation was developing after a new sub-group The Urban Green Spaces Task Force was created by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions to:

- Review the current state of parks, play areas and open spaces and consider how the different types of open space can best meet changing needs.
- Explore innovative approaches to design, creation and maintenance of open spaces.
- Identify opportunities for building local partnerships, involving residents and business communities in caring for green spaces and play areas (LGA, 2001, p.1).

The Urban Green Spaces Task Force produced a report for the government entitled, 'Green Spaces, Better Places' and it paid substantial attention to building partnerships. Part 79 describes how this could be applied to open spaces by saying:

Partnership has become a familiar concept in national policy, with increasing Government encouragement for partnership working in a variety of areas such as housing, crime, health and local communities' (DTLR, 2002, p. 31:79).

It made a total of fifty-two recommendations for the improvement of green space, a number of the recommendations specifically related to improving working with the private sector. It heavily encouraged community involvement and Recommendation 24 is particularly noteworthy for its reference to the private finance initiative.

<p>Recommendation 18</p> <p>The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should promote and support partnership working for improving local parks and green spaces, through its strategies and programmes which impact on such spaces.</p>
<p>Recommendation 19</p> <p>The Government and local authorities working through Local Strategic Partnership where appropriate should promote and support voluntary and community sector organisations as catalysts for working with communities, local businesses and other agencies, and for supporting community capacity building in brokering schemes for creating and managing urban green spaces</p>
<p>Recommendation 20</p> <p>Local authorities should promote and support partnership work for improving local green spaces. This should be reflected in other local strategies which impact on green spaces (including community, regeneration, planning and housing development strategies), Best Value reviews and performance indicators. Local authorities should also provide appropriate training for members and officers.</p>
<p>Recommendation 21</p> <p>Local authorities should explore the potential for making greater use of local 'open space trusts' as an effective option for delivering improvements to green spaces and their management and maintenance.</p>
<p>Recommendation 22</p> <p>The Government and local authorities working through local strategic partnerships where appropriate should ensure that community involvement is at the heart of programmes and projects which create and improve local parks and green spaces, including those in regeneration areas. This should be complimented and supported by providing advice and funding to enable local community groups, 'friends' and user groups, volunteers and local people to actively engage in practical work in these spaces.</p>
<p>Recommendation 23</p> <p>Local Authorities should involve and support communities in green space service planning and delivery. This should be underpinned by local Community Strategies, Best Value reviews and performance indicators, and improved information about local parks and green spaces for users.</p>
<p>Recommendation 24</p> <p>The government should promote greater private sector involvement in partnerships for improving urban parks and green spaces, by providing guidance on ways in which businesses can engage and benefit from working with local communities, voluntary organisations and local authorities to create green spaces as part of new development, as well as improving existing local spaces. Guidance should be provided on the role of Private Finance Initiatives, town centre management and proposals for Business Improvement Districts, and support given to local initiatives and volunteering.</p>
<p>Recommendation 25</p> <p>Further research should be undertaken to assess the transferability of overseas good practice in partnership working in parks and green spaces management, especially experience from the USA.</p>
<p>Recommendation 26</p> <p>The Government should establish dialogue with existing and potential funding providers to promote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Strategic objectives for urban parks and green spaces, and the role of local projects, delivered through partnership, in achieving them. (ii) Sustainable funding arrangements that recognise the need for longer term funding beyond three years to ensure that the spaces created and improved will be maintained, and for greater local flexibility in their use by simplifying applications and terms of conditions attached to funding. (iii) The importance of providing adequate complementary revenue funding, for consultation and training as well as project management, and for maximising the benefits of capital funding in improving the quality of projects.

Recommendation 27

Local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships should provide information and advice on available funding streams and opportunities for supporting local partnerships involving local resident, voluntary and business groups for improving urban green spaces.

Recommendation 34

The government should provide clear leadership and a national policy framework for supporting improvements to urban parks and green space by:

- (i) Promoting and co-ordinating the inclusion of parks and green space provision across its public policy priorities, strategies and programmes, in particular, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, regional development, planning and housing development, and culture, play and sport and;
- (ii) Providing guidance for national and regional programme providers, local authorities and other local providers, including partnerships involving the voluntary and private sectors on creating, improving and maintaining urban parks and green spaces.

Table 2. Final Recommendations of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force (DTLR, 2002, p. 78-84)

Five years have now passed since the Urban Green Spaces Task Force made its recommendations. This enables a critique of some of the recommendations given above, linked to their ambitiousness and above all their deliverability. There appears to have been a tide of optimism that carried the recommendations forward. Researchers were swept along by the enthusiasm of the ideas, creating what may have been a false sense of collective agreement. Recommendation 25, referring to good practice in the U.S in particular, tends to show how the substance of the reforms might not have been completely worthy of the very high platform they were given. It had previously been said that, 'The experience of American intermediary organizations...to channel private funding into regeneration areas, provides a point of inspiration for British Practice' (Carley, 2000 p.288). But the more recent evidence by Alexander Garvin in his book, 'Parks, Recreation and Open Space – A Twenty-First Century Agenda', provides a new insight into the way open spaces have been affected by neo-liberalism in the US:

In 2001, any American who wants to go to a public park has a vast array of choices...Because of this remarkable achievement public officials assume erroneously that we can divert resources to other 'more pressing' needs. Yet demand for open spaces has not abated. The need to satisfy this demand has led public officials to shift some of the burden of supplying open space to the private sector. The results of this shift have not been uniformly successful. It is time to alter the regulatory environment in a manner that will encourage property owners to create better, more usable open space.

Despite the vast inventory of public open space, government is no longer the primary supplier of recreational resources. Too much of its

inventory is in the wrong place, or does not include attractive facilities, or has slid into a shameful state of repair, or is not available for public use. More and more frequently, America's increasingly diverse, mobile, and affluent population chooses to spend its leisure time and money on an extraordinary array of alternatives.

The success stories... are important exceptions that demonstrate the important role that government should play in stewardship of the public realm. Taken together, these successes constitute an agenda for the twenty-first century that calls on public agencies to:

- update public facilities in response to continually changing public demand;
- manage the public realm efficiently and economically;
- renovate and reposition publicly owned property for public use;
- reclaim abandoned property for public use;
- combine recreation with other functions; and
- make more effective use of open space in public projects (Garvin, 2000, p. 5).

Garvin's outlook on the US situation contradicts the idea that private sector involvement is the panacea to problems of under-investment and decline, shedding doubt on the direction of the UK government. It comes from a different perspective, in which the private sector is already heavily involved in open spaces but it calls for more public involvement. It is not clear how much widespread support Garvin's view has attracted but the American Planning Association endorses it as official US policy guidance.

Upon this background, UK academia has still responded fairly uniformly in favour of the Task Force's position supporting the greater de-centralisation of open space. Bartlett School of Planning produced a report for in 2004 ODPM called 'Living Places: Caring for Quality', stressing the importance of sharing responsibility for the quality of open spaces. It uses case studies and discusses encouraging business involvement to lever in private investment. It also gives practical advice for changing Local Authority models of management. CABI has led research in the field producing guidance including; 'Start with the park: creating sustainable urban green space in areas

of housing growth and urban renewal' and, 'Is the Grass Greener...? Learning from international innovations in urban green space management.' All show absolute support for partnership working. However, CABE's support for policies upholding neo-liberalism could be influenced by its relationship with the government. It was recommendations in the Urban White paper, 'Towards an Urban Renaissance', that brought about the commissions' creation by the State.

The closest many of these documents seem to come to acknowledging the risk of losing significant areas of open space by devolving responsibility for them to non-government sectors, is by encouraging a strategic approach. CABE produced, 'Green Space Strategies – a good practice guide' and this straddles various sides of the debate about how best to safeguard the future of green spaces. Comprehensive strategies would help Local Authorities to manage their portfolio of assets, but there is no evidence that they could prevent the disposal of open space, should financial pressures continue to build on Local Authorities. The level of economic inducement for them to liquidate assets could conceivably make strategies a tool to hasten the de-centralisation process.

Disposal seems an increasingly likely scenario given the growing sums of money involved. According to Inland Revenue figures, the average value of development land across the UK in the autumn 1999 was £998,270 per hectare. In inner London it was £3,779,871 per hectare (cited in Cahill, 2001, p.14) and current evidence shows that values have probably more than doubled since then (Cambridgeshire County Council Strategic Asset Development Manager, 2007, unpublished communication). Huge pressures have been added along the lines previously described by Kit Campbell in their report 'Rethinking Open Space', which promoted the argument for disposing of less valuable areas to help meet the costs of managing others.

Finally, other independent interpretations are helpful in distinguishing how the rest of the open space community has responded to the government's call for 'radical change'. The Institute of Landscape and Amenity Management (ILAM)

produced a publication in 2001 entitled 'Recognising Innovation and Imagination in open Space Management' in which it endorses the partnership approach and makes the link to funding by saying:

Funding is a major issue in operating and developing open spaces effectively in today's financial climate. Despite declining budgets... there are opportunities to draw on diverse funding sources to supplement annual capital and revenue costs. Award winners have often looked positively at financial partnerships, targeting specialised grant sources, running fund-raising events, forming trust/management bodies or a combination of all these approaches to deliver their objectives. It is often this invention that permeates the whole project and shows the underlying strength of the management partnership which underpins a longer-term, more sustainable management solution (p.17).

Both CABE and ILAM are willing to encourage partnership and participation, encouraging other stakeholders to help with service delivery, even fund-raising events. They promote the public shaping of 'inputs' as well as 'outputs', complimenting both branches of government's neo-liberal approach. Services delivered in this way would be relatively high on the 'ladder of participation' that Sherry Arnstein's identified in 1969 (op. cit.). Her work identified that community involvement can take place at different levels but she warned that:

'There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process. [Arnstein, Online, 6/8/07]

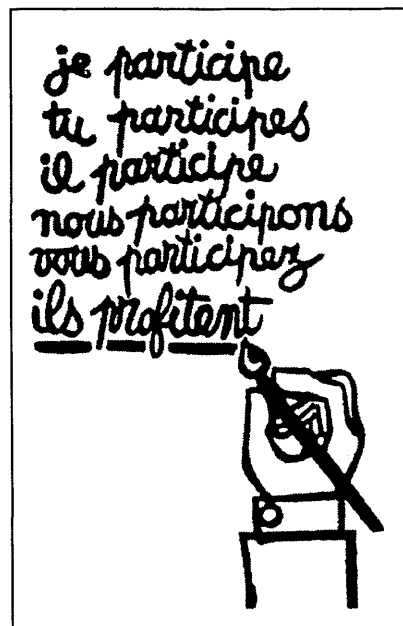


Fig. 3. Student Protest Poster (Arnstein, 1969, p.1)

Little attention is paid to this ethical issue in the open spaces sector. Support is almost unconditional across the group of professionals involved with open space delivery, within government, non-government, independent and community organisations. It is in contrast with the planning sector where, due to the influence of healthily independent research that is going on, there seems to be a more cautious approach to the central edict for participation. It may be because of the different choices available, which seem fairly stark for open

spaces, between neo-liberal resources or no resources at all. The sector has effectively been given 'an offer it couldn't refuse'. Open space professionals may be willing to outwardly endorse the neo-liberal approach, but their private reluctance may also help explain the apparent conflict, taking place between local and central government.

Despite the public commitment to the neo-liberal agenda within the discipline of open spaces, it remains unclear from the evidence whether rolling back state involvement is in society's best interests. It is still not obvious whether public policy reform including public participation can be delivered, or whether 'lip service' has been paid without the necessary skills and capacity to back it up. PPG 17 is the latest planning guidance on open space provision, and its emphasis on planning obligations, as a major new source of private investment, seems to offer an olive branch to those Local Authorities dissatisfied with the new funding arrangements. S106 may represent institutional delivery of infrastructure through the planning system or equally, private sector partnership but whichever side of the neo-liberal line it falls, it brings much needed financial resources. Only the artificiality of this olive branch is highlighted by the ODPM Circular 05/2005, which clearly shows that S106 monies should not be used to lever in resources. It states that:

The effect of the infrastructure investment may be to confer some wider benefit on the community but payments should be directly related in scale to the impact which the proposed development will make. Planning obligations should not be used solely to resolve existing deficiencies in infrastructure provision or to secure contributions to the achievement of wider planning objectives that are not necessary to allow consent to be given for a particular development (ODPM, 2005, p.10).

The Planning Policy Guidance also recommends the use of formulae to calculate standard charges, or, as the guidance describes it, 'normalised costs'. The Law Counsel rejects this approach believing that the formulae are not supported by the Town and Country Planning Act (Law Counsel, 2007, private correspondence) because they would constitute the buying and selling of planning permission. Additionally, in those areas that are not likely to attract new development; rural areas as well as protected areas like National Parks

and The Green Belt, funding could be a particular problem. A useful source of secondary data to establish how reliable S106 agreements are for funding open space improvements is The Department for Communities and Local Government Final Report into 'Valuing Planning Obligations in England'.

The report showed that between 1999 and 2004 there were 1,100 planning obligations involving open space, an average of eleven per authority in the sample group it studied. The average payment was £25,000 (DCLG, 2006d, p.22). The total mean value of S106 agreements to each Local Authority over this period was, therefore, £275,000. In addition the report describes how authorities that use standard charging gain on average £17,156 more per agreement. It represents a major capital investment in local services but the report also highlights other issues:

The total value of planning obligations agreed by Local Authorities in the South East is over eight times higher than values in the North and North West. This is due to the number of obligations negotiated and the higher values per obligation (DCLG, 2006d, p. 25).

It appears that local policy can significantly influence the amount received in S106 contributions but even in the successful growth areas, these amounts are much less than the shortfalls in State revenue funding identified by the Urban Parks Forum (op. cit.). The S106 funding stream advocated by PPG 17, therefore, seems to be disingenuous, unpredictable and open to challenge by the private sector.

This highlights the important issue about how the spatial distribution of open spaces will be affected in the future. The government's combination of policies for more stakeholder involvement, partnership delivery and reduced state funding could lead to a significant shift in provision. Understanding how fully Local Authorities are delivering the neo-liberal agenda, which embodies de-centralisation, will help determine whether the government has the right antidote to the negative effects of Post-industrial economic re-structuring, which could include the loss of public open space.

2.9 Summary of the Secondary Evidence and Research Questions

This literature review has found that pressures abound on open spaces. Some of them seem inescapable, like the ones linked to globalisation and international economic policy. Others seem more pliable, such as the ones linked to national policy, but the ones coming from within the sector seem almost contrived. All this pressure is shaping the future for open spaces in compliance with neo-liberalism, without really weighing up what the risks could be. Access to open spaces by disadvantaged groups of people in society could be negatively affected. The secondary evidence seems to have uncovered uncomfortable facts, for example, that wide scale community involvement is needed to enable neo-liberal reform to reach disadvantaged people, on a level that seems to be unachievable. Also, that seemingly self-edifying researchers in the field, are willing to see the loss of large areas of open space to be able to secure small numbers of high quality urban parks and green spaces. It is a confusing picture. The literature review has been aimed at mapping out the issues so that similar pressures on open spaces can be grouped together. These are summarised in the four key areas that follow to help develop a clearer picture of what is happening.

The first major area of pressure is in relation to neo-liberal reform and funding. A review of the literature found that the neo-liberal policies of 'fiscal rectitude' and 'privatisation' had placed considerable burdens on the open space sector. Cuts in public spending amounted to £126 million a year over the last 22 years (Urban Parks Forum, 2001, p.1) and the desirability of lottery funding is fading away with the suggestion that one-off sources are poor substitutes for public revenue funding. Local Authorities have been faced with the charge that municipal forms of collectivism are no longer tenable but the open space sector has been unable to respond strongly because of its small size and lack of political lobbying power. The decision of government is that there will be no increase in public spending on parks and Local Authorities should expect to have to 'change radically' to meet the new challenges this presents (DTLR, 2002, p.175).

Further financial pressure has been placed on Local Authorities because of The 2000 Act requiring savings to be found by 'eliminating gaps and overlaps.' This is coupled with the guidance contained in publications like the DCLG's; 'Strong and prosperous communities' and 'National Procurement Strategy', requiring a 'shift' in economic priorities. This pressure is deliberate and aimed at bringing in neo-liberal reform. Local Authorities will be accountable for the outcomes and monitoring is taking place in the form of Best Value performance returns and Comprehensive Performance Assessment to enable government to identify which Local Authorities are meeting its agenda and which are not. How local authorities are reacting, therefore, seems to be a crucial part of understanding how the distribution of open spaces will be affected by the current neo-liberal climate.

The second major area of pressure is in relation to neo-liberal reform and partnership working. The literature review has indicated that Tony Blair's government, supported by Gordon Brown was about devolving responsibility. A primary concept is still for Local Authorities to enter into partnership agreements with others, and for these 'partnerships' to deliver the services instead of the Local Authorities alone. The market has been given gentle encouragement to get involved with service delivery, partly by the huge sums that government is making available through PFI. This approach, however, still receives a lot of criticism especially because of the ubiquitous way government uses the phrase partnership. Left wing politicians see it as a back door to privatisation. Partnerships are encouraged between all the sectors, but public-private partnerships seem to offer the greatest potential to deliver large infrastructure in transport, health and education, previously delivered by the Welfare State. Government hopes that the de-centralisation of State services to the private sector will help Local Authorities become more entrepreneurial and discard their managerial systems of government, considered within the neo-liberal school of thought to be outmoded and inefficient.

Critics of the current movement often say that private sector investment in public services is most likely to flow to the places where most profits can be made. If public-private partnerships are applied to all government services this

could worsen the polarisation of parks, whereby good parks are getting better and poorer parks are getting worse, a situation highlighted in the Executive Summary of the Urban Parks Forum report (2001, p.78). It could lead to different groups in society having access to different types of facilities and enhance social divide. It makes it all the more controversial that partnership has been politically engineered as 'the only way' to improve open space services (DTLR, 2002, p.157). Internal conflicts over the balance of power within the hierarchy of government continue to hinder this reform, making the outcomes for partnership development even more unpredictable. It is a problem that is not likely to be resolved easily. There is evidence, however, to show that in special circumstances, public-private partnerships can offer a sustainable alternative to State provision with National Parks being a good example.

The third major area of pressure is in relation to neo-liberal reform and public participation in service delivery. The role of public participation in open space provision has been formalised by The Council of Europe's Landscape Convention in 2006 and advocated by the Parks Minister, Baroness Andrews. This is an area for open spaces, where constraints are significant. People are unlikely to provide practical support for open spaces on the scale that is needed to maintain the current service, including civic green space and parks near housing estates. Historically, this is a role that has been best undertaken by the State. Our understanding of the way the free-market operates and the concept of 'public goods' providing 'positive externalities' which cannot be reflected in monetary values, supports this stance. The wider debate has been touched on in the literature review. It runs much deeper into whether people have the capacity or interest to take advantage of power sharing structures afforded to them by government, regardless of whether these powers really exist.

The open spaces sector is expected to immerse itself in participatory democracy even though there is no successful archetype in western democracies but like the Lords Mayors clothes, no one seems willing to speak out. This may be because, as this review indicates, the public sector has little

choice in agreeing to policy reform, the burden of performance indicators threatens to sink it otherwise. Central government has manoeuvred to create a situation whereby open spaces can now be disposed of if there is no funding for maintenance and they are poor quality. They can also be disposed of if they are 'surplus' to requirements, in other words if the Local Authority spends too much on them. Only 'the local community' can intervene to save them by demonstrating that such open spaces are 'valued'. Local Government can be pro-active in securing public opinion but it will need to do this on regular basis, with all the cost implications, if it is to fend off the pressures highlighted in the literature review, not least of all, the pressure to develop open space land. Failure to take account of all the nuances known to prejudice high-level participation could also result in charges of tokenism, or worse, as Perrons put it, 'The new tyranny' of government (Perrons, c2004, p.301).

The fourth major area of pressure is in relation to internal resistance to neo-liberal reform and what it can deliver. The literature review indicated a conflict with central government whereby local government was protracted in devolving its powers. This has resulted in a deadlock, demonstrated by a direction in the government literature for Local Authorities to examine the 'types of choices it makes about service delivery'. It is insistent that they let go of old managerial styles of delivery and has cut off most alternative courses of action by controlling funding very tightly. As far as this impacts on open spaces, there was a small revolt by the London Planning Advisory Committee, which urged the London Boroughs to give open spaces blanket protection. It was aimed at trying to stem the loss that had been occurring because of financial pressure on Local Authorities and prevent any further disposal to raise revenue. It was a stance of 'no compromise' that was quickly quashed by the government with the advent of PPG17.

Local government reluctance is not the only issue that could prevent reform. The US Planning Body does not recommend de-centralisation. Instead it recommends the opposite, greater state intervention to ensure good quality open space services. There has been some attention drawn to negative outcomes from privatisation of the public realm in the U.S. The study by

Kayden et al (2001) although it was very specialised, showed privatisation of the public realm has undermined the patronage of open spaces. But the evidence produced by Williams & Green (2001) shows privatisation of the public realm is also happening in the UK. Shonfield (1998) suggested that citizens who are excluded from work and housing should not be excluded from open spaces. The small size of the open spaces sector has not helped in respect of drawing attention to this potentially fundamental flaw in the government's agenda.

Many people say that the government should be rolling out services, not rolling them back to try to address inequality although the government feels it has the right formula to satisfy both sides of the argument. It has adopted a new approach that it believes has the potential to avoid the pitfalls of state run monopolies as well as the private splintering of services. It hasn't been able to deliver this nirvana yet, but if it does, it will command worldwide respect as most countries are struggling with the same issues about how to balance the needs of poverty and free markets, upon which its vision is based. In the meantime, open space guidance promotes a 'strategic approach' to help reform work at the local level. What kind of effect this is having on the distribution of open spaces is still unclear.

3.0 Research Questions

The main sources of pressure on open spaces have been isolated and the evidence will be used to inform the research hypothesis; that a shift is occurring in urban parks and green space provision, which is not only a political shift from the State to lower levels of administration but also a physical shift away from central areas. The open space assessments required by PPG 17 provide a useful barometer for measuring this change. The audits they contain are a useful resource for ascertaining what levels of open space currently exist. Local Government has never before set this out so comprehensively. They also contain evidence about the future of open space provision, embodied in policy recommendations and proposals. The three main research questions have been devised around obtaining information about what is happening at this level to build a picture of the current and future situation. The first of which is:

How much does Local Authority delivery of open spaces reflect the Neo-liberal agenda?

The need to obtain a greater understanding about how far neo-liberalism has penetrated local government requires an in-depth analysis of local policy. By analysing published policy recommendations and cross-referencing it with the evidence from local government officers about how they perceive open space reforms, it should be possible to start to build a clearer picture of the pervasiveness of these reforms. Once this has been determined it will be possible to understand how the pressures, discussed in the literature review, are shaping the delivery of open spaces. This will be more specifically addressed by the second research question, which is:

What are the Effects of Neo-liberal Reform on Open Space in England?

The hypothesis contends that open spaces are being disposed of in urban locations because of financial pressures, and new strategies for distribution

are not socially just. It will only be possible to establish whether this is correct by answering a third and very ambitious question for this research. It is to do with understanding whether the loss of open space in certain areas has increased social polarisation potentially contributing to the negative effects of globalisation. It can only realistically, be answered in part, because the research does not include any investigation into socio-spatial patterns of deprivation. It does however give an insight into the mechanisms of local government and the likely pattern of future events, based on the effectiveness of reform. The third research question is therefore;

What are the characteristics of De-centralised Open Space Services in England and are there any spatial themes?

These questions have set out the direction of this research and will help to structure the methodology, data collection, analysis and presentation of the evidence, informing a series of recommendations at the conclusion.

4.0 The Data Collection Methodology

Primary data collection was fundamental to supporting the research hypothesis, relating to the way de-centralisation is taking place in the UK today. The initial evidence on changes in policy was obtained from Local Authority Open Space Assessments. Other evidence was obtained from Local Government Officers about how they interpreted new policy, during a series of interviews. The two sets of evidence were used to cross reference one another but the interviews were also used to fill gaps in the findings from the assessments. The combination of data was used to ascertain the extent of recent policy changes and help towards describing the effect on open spaces. Below is a description of the data sources, an evaluation of their usefulness and the methodology used for extracting the relevant evidence. Ethical research methods were used throughout.

4.1 The Open Space Assessments

The Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, published in 2002 (PPG 17), made a new requirement for Local Authorities to produce Open Space Assessments. The government's 'step by step' Companion Guide also set out precisely how the assessments should be carried out and referred to the need for detailed public consultation with all the 'stakeholders' (ODPM, 2002, p.52, 8.20). This involved setting appropriate provision standards within each local government area, by consulting communities about quality and quantity. Local Authorities were asked to audit all the open space in their area, regardless of whether it was privately and publicly owned, and compare it with the 'locally derived standard' or ideal provision. They were then asked to calculate whether there were shortfalls or surpluses according to this standard. The companion guide encouraged Local Authorities to make policy recommendations, especially in relation to improving the way open space is delivered through the planning process.

The objective of PPG 17 is to deliver local policies aimed at matching open space provision with community aspirations. Inherent in this, is the requirement for Local Authorities to give over their decision-making powers to lower levels

of administration, itself a form of de-centralisation. The data contained in the assessments is not completely in alignment with the research hypothesis, which is instead related to understanding more about the effects of de-centralisation. However, it is broadly enough attached to the government's neo-liberal agenda to obtain relevant evidence in the following areas:

- Patterns of ownership and partnership involvement
- Community participation and Local Authority co-ordination
- The quality and quantity of open spaces
- Existing funding
- Funding options
- Strategic vision
- Local Authority priorities
- Justifications for disposal of open space
- Patterns of possible disposal

This information will be used to start the process of determining how open space provision throughout England is becoming de-centralised, at both an administrative and a spatial level.

4.2 Methodology

The collection of open space assessments took place in October 2006. It was a process involving a 'hat' containing the names of all the Local Authorities in England. The first 25 Local Authorities drawn from this hat, and subsequently confirmed as having completed and published their assessment, were included in the sample. It was thought obtaining data in this way would be relatively easy because the assessments were supposed to be in the public domain, to support the production of Local Development Frameworks. It took several months however, to identify 25 Local Authority teams that had completed the work. In all, 140 Local Authorities were drawn and contacted before a sufficiently large sample was obtained.

The poor response rate of 18% made it difficult to consider using a stratified sample of Local Authorities, for example, to ascertain any differences based on size or wealth. Local Authorities were targeted in a random way and this was a high priority for the research, but it also made the process of identifying

Local Authorities that had completed their assessments, much more time consuming. Whilst the response rate itself is valuable evidence it is necessary to note that the eventual sample group was influenced by the availability of completed assessments. This probably introduced some bias. It means the evidence is restricted to showing how those local authorities which have *completed* the assessments have responded to the national policy framework and it is referred to in this context. A small margin of error will be attached to the results because of the difficulty experienced obtaining the data. It mitigates against the possibility that the minority of Local Authorities that were advanced enough in their LDF process to have published their assessment, may exhibit different tendencies to the rest.

Throughout this process the temptation to download any assessments from the internet was avoided meaning the sample of assessments remained varied and interesting. The shortest assessment is 9 pages long, the longest in excess of 300 pages. Inevitably, the quality of some assessments is better than others; the analysis revealed quite striking differences in some cases. To sustain a critical observation of these and other issues, and be fair to the partaking authorities, the results are presented anonymously. The Local Authorities are referred to numerically throughout the research. Fig. 4 below identifies the distribution of all 25 Local Authorities included in the sample and also gives an indication of their size and geographical characteristics. The random selection method ensured that they were well distributed throughout England, with the exception of a low number of cases obtained from the south west, as shown in fig 4. They are under varying political control and they are also comparable based on population sizes, providing a good baseline for analysis. A full list is given in Appendix 1.



Fig. 4. Distribution of Local Authorities in the Sample Group

Part of the methodology for this research was deciding the scope of the analysis. Local Authority Assessments audited a very wide, but inconsistent group of open spaces. The complete range would have been too difficult to analyse. As previously referred to, open space definitions were looked at to see whether any of them could be adopted to narrow the scope of the research. Apart from the legal definition set out in the Open Spaces Act 1906, open space is defined in the planning guidance as:

All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can also act as a visual amenity' (Annex 1).

There is a more restrictive definition in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which is:

Land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground (Section 20).

A decision was made that only the information from the assessments that related to informal open space of the type defined by the Planning Act would be analysed during this research. The more expansive list of open space given in the guidance which included sports provision, green corridors, cemeteries and allotments was not used.

Appendix 2 illustrates the final pro-forma for data collection from the assessments but it was only finalised during the research, as relevant issues started to become apparent. For example, the concept of localised surpluses and deficits within an administrative area was not anticipated until data collection started to take place. Different Local Authorities also focussed on different issues such as community involvement or funding, offering a very wide distribution of information. The additional influence of those carrying out the assessments was sometimes evident. This could have been a steering group representing a range of departments, a lone local government officer, or a private consultancy employed to carry out the work but each added a different emphasis to the style and content of the assessment. Using the 'step by step' companion guide to PPG 17 as a reference point was helpful. This ensured that, whilst no two assessments were the same, they were evaluated according to the same key issues. The overarching influence of the companion guide also appeared to make the set of case studies remarkably suitable for qualitative evaluation.

Weaknesses within this methodology relate to the breadth of the research. For example, the coding frame remained relatively unsophisticated, to establish positive or negative responses. Coding was based on scoring a simple '1' for yes and '0' for no. This was deliberate, to enable a wide range of issues to be examined but in some cases, such as when analysing the development of open space policy, a third category had to be added, such as 'weak'. Other data required a more detailed coding frame, such as when trying to ascertain the total amount of open space in an area. Different assessments were not always easily comparable. For example, quantity of provision was sometimes found to be expressed as a factor per 1000 population and sometimes through accessibility standards, like in Local Authority 21 which made a recommendation for all neighbourhoods to have access to one 'quiet space'. In these instances analysis was undertaken by establishing, as far as possible, a common denominator. Incomplete assessments, anomalies in the presentation of the data, and a small amount of human error probably all contributed to analytical errors. The broad brush approach, with the use of simple categories

for data collection over a broad range of issues (see Appendix 2) was however, felt to be most appropriate method of obtaining evidence on de-centralisation.

4.3 The Interviews

The next stage of data collection took the form of a series of interviews, aimed at cross-referencing the first set of data and filling some of the gaps identified during the analysis of the assessments. Detailed interview questions are shown in Appendix 4 and subjects they relate to are listed below:

- The general outlook on open space services
- Financial pressures
- The influence of central government funding
- Scrutiny of open spaces
- Proposals to dispose of open space
- Options for disposal that currently exist
- Use and value as tools for measuring open space
- Open spaces most at risk and the spatial locations likely to be most effected by the loss of open space
- The powerful stakeholders
- Strategic potential to address socio-spatial differences
- Strategic potential to reduce the Local Authority's role in direct service delivery

4.4 Methodology

Initial contact was made with the personnel from 25 authorities that had each been kind enough to forward a copy of the open space assessments for analysis. They were contacted by telephone during the week 9-15th July 2007 and asked to take part in a further phase of the research, to enable the detailed exploration of some of the findings from the assessments. None of the officers declined to be interviewed, although a number were unavailable because of holidays. A total of 15 interviews took place, generally lasting about half an hour. The sample group comprised of planning officers (11) with some leisure services/parks officers (4) this mixture of personnel it was thought, would help obtain a broad set of qualitative data. Officer's names have been omitted to protect anonymity and the relevant Local Authorities have not been disclosed, instead they continue to be referred to by numerical code.

Where possible, an attempt was made to contact the officer with the best all round insight into the open space assessment. It was recognised that the most senior officers would probably have the best over-view, although they would not necessarily have the most detailed information. The selection of interviewees required a balance to be struck in this respect. Most of them had been directly involved in collating the assessments although their role had frequently been to oversee consultants who had carried out the work on behalf of the Local Authorities. All of them had been involved in delivering the government guidance and were particularly familiar with PPG 17, the document that required Local Authorities to, 'Assess local needs and opportunities' and 'Maintain an adequate supply' of recreational facilities as well as 'Plan for future provision'. They were also aware of the 'Companion Guide', which gave advice on devising policies and strategic options. During the course of the interviews the interviewees often referred to other officers within their organisation who they felt may have been well placed to answer specific questions. An attempt was made to contact some of these other officers for interview if this was thought to be important.

The same questions were used in all the interviews (see Appendix 4) and whilst these were clearly linked to the research hypothesis and designed to illicit information on particular subjects, they were framed in a way to enable interviewees to answer freely. Open questions were intended to draw out as much information as possible. Some prompting was required to gain supplementary information, for example when interviewees answered very briefly, although care was taken not to influence the results. The interviews were conducted using the 'loudspeak' facility of a telephone and recorded using a dictaphone, then transcribed afterwards, before coding up and analysis. The coding up process involved a simple framework to identify positive and negative references contained within the responses. These were then counted and presented as data, with the most frequently given type of responses given as findings. This modal response was frequently presented in comparison with other statistically relevant responses. Where responses were diverse a list was reproduced in the body of the text. This was designed to

assist the reader with the interpretation of the evidence. The full transcripts were reproduced in Appendix 6 to ensure they could be independently analysed and reduce any potential weaknesses in the subjectivity of the coding process.

It is assumed that the assessments produced by Local Authorities 1-25 fairly represents their policy approach, despite changes in personnel and the availability of particular officers. It became apparent however, that interviewees were guarded in their response to questions about sensitive issues like the disposal of land, despite the written evidence from the assessments often being quite a lot more explicit. As will be shown in more detail, both planning officers and leisure officers fell back on standard responses, sometimes giving very clichéd answers based on general policy. It probably became a significant limitation of the research. However, the majority of interviewees seemed willing to impart information if it was in the public domain and this produced a wide and interesting range of evidence. When taken together the evidence from the interviews revealed a great deal about the approach being taken within local government and the use being made of new policy opportunities.



5.0 Data Contained in the Open Space Assessments

This section describes the first set of results from the data collection. A great deal of valid information was yielded, which as it transpired, needed to be looked at in two stages. Firstly, there was the factual evidence relating to the profile of open space services, incorporating evidence such as current levels of provision and shortfalls in funding. Secondly, there was the more general evidence about ways in which Local Authorities are responding to the political framework. The results are presented alongside parts of the government guidance to allow the reader to see the basis upon which the Local Authorities produced their assessments. It is intended as a reminder of the way PPG 17 guided the assessments from which data is extracted, but the guidance is still separate to this research. Relevant evidence is pinpointed wherever possible to allow cross cutting analysis later on and to enable the main characteristics of de-centralisation to be identified.

5.1 Open Space Provision

The companion guide is, on the whole a technical document, giving practical advice about how to measure open space. However, it frequently crosses over into areas of policy:

In planning for new open spaces and in assessing planning applications for development, local authorities should seek opportunities to improve the local open space network, to create public open space from vacant land, and to incorporate open space within new development on previously-used land. They should also consider whether use can be made of land which is otherwise unsuitable for development, or procure public use of privately owned areas of land or sports facilities (ODPM, 2002b, p.11; 24).

The above quotation can be seen to reflect the Government wishes to involve other sectors in the provision of local services. Its wider vision is for devolved management, with the Local Authority co-ordinating a range of other service providers including the private sector, charitable organisations, community groups and land owning Trusts. It sees a greater degree of joined-up working as necessary to deliver its vision and gives examples in the guidance such as; the use of green belt for recreation, national parks for formal games and

geological sites for tourism (ODPM, 2002b, p.12; 27). The term 'partnership working' however, is not explicitly used in the planning guidance or the companion guide. In its purist sense this would mean private sector provision (rowing) with public sector planning (steering) but perhaps it is politically too early for this detailed guidance. Instead PPG 17 seems to gently encourage the first steps towards partnership working, by requiring all open space, whether in private or public ownership, to be assessed and asks Local Authorities to develop a strategic vision for open spaces based on these findings.

Given that audits should include a record of all the open space available, it seems logical to expect that most of the assessments will begin with a statement about the amount of open space in their area. Out of 25 Local Authorities, 7 provided no summary of this kind. Making some assumptions based on the information that was provided, the Local Authorities in the study have an average informal open space provision of 855 hectares (ha). Other evidence from The Urban Parks Forum in 2001 showed that local authorities in the UK control just over 300 ha of open space each (2001, p.6) so it appears that Local Authorities control more than a third of what is being audited. It needs to be noted, however that other research (Cahill, 2001, p.147) has put Local Authority ownership much lower, at less than 64 ha each although this evidence is probably less reliable given the qualifications Cahill makes in his footnotes (c.f.). The Authority with the most informal open space in its area has 3,500 ha and the authority with the least has 28 ha. Taking account of the data that was omitted, the research sample is calculated to cover informal open space amounting to approximately 21,375 hectares. This gives a good basis for drawing wider conclusions relating to informal open space in the rest of England.

5.2 Patterns of Ownership

It has been shown that Local Authorities in the sample group probably own slightly more than one third of the open space they audited. There are a wide range of other organisations including The RSPB, The National Trust, non-

government bodies like Natural England and The Forestry Authority, as well as Common Land vested in the 'Lord of the Manor', all providing publicly accessible open space. Most of this land should be incorporated within the assessments but Local Authorities on the whole, failed to measure the contribution made by these other sectors. Most of the assessments only contained incidental references, or none at all. For example; only three of the Local Authorities identified the open space owned by other branches of government like Parish Councils, five only make incidental references without describing it in detail and seventeen make no reference at all. The following table shows which land owners are most frequently identified within the assessments.

Type of Land Owner	Ownership Fully Recorded	Reference to Ownership is Incidental	No Reference to Ownership
Other branches of Government	3	5	17
Charity	2	0	23
Private	6	3	16
Local Authority	3	3	19
Community	5	3	17
NGO	5	1	19
Trust	4	1	20
Common Land	2	0	23

Table 3. The Number of Open Space Assessments identifying Specific Land Owners

The private and community sector seems to be the most widely identified sectors even though the majority of Local Authorities did not refer to them. Common land is only fully recorded in two of the assessments. There is so much information on ownership omitted from the assessments that the Local Authorities do not appear to be in a good position to move towards partnership working. In addition, the types of references that have been made don't seem to correlate with the other third party records that are available. It is unlikely for example, that the community sector is a major provider of open space. The data recorded by Local Authorities could therefore reflect local political aspirations rather than actual ownership. Examples of private sector partnership, like private management companies associated with new

development including 'gated communities', and other types of privately covenanted open space apparently have no role to play.

In addition to the high proportion of Local Authorities that made no reference to other providers of open space in their area, surprisingly few Local Authorities looked at the value of de-centralised service provision. Only three discussed the contribution made by other sectors. This included two that went as far as discussing the public value of private gardens for breaking up the urban street scene. These two Local Authorities have 468 ha and 2005 ha of publicly accessible open space respectively, which on the basis of availability rather than head of population, compared favourably with other Authorities in the sample. Four discussed mixed ownership briefly, for example by referring to the value of a particular area, like an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty but overall a very high proportion, eighteen out of twenty-five gave no interpretation of the value of any kind of 'partnership' provision.

5.3 Stakeholder Involvement

The next section of the data collection from the assessments related to the range and extent of participation by other 'Stakeholders'. This would be a means for Local Authorities to devolve their administrative responsibilities as encouraged by the Neo-liberal agenda, without necessarily giving up ownership. It would be part of the 'steering not rowing' ethos. The sample of assessments was scrutinised to identify any examples of service devolution to other branches of government, the private sector, and the community sector, as well as the extent to which Local Authorities proposed to co-ordinate further devolution in the future. The results show a marked difference between existing and proposed levels of co-ordination, with aspirations greatest towards community groups once again.

Local Authority Co-ordination of:	No Current Co-ordination	Current Co-ordination	No Proposed Increase in Co-ordination	Proposed Increase in Co-ordination
Other branches of Government	17	8	11	14

Private Sector	23	2	16	9
Community Sector	14	11	8	17

Table 4. Partnership Co-ordination

Local Authority 22 was one of eight that are seen to currently co-ordinate the work of other branches of government, like Parish Councils and Non Government Organisations (NGO's). It identified significant problems with the funding of open space maintenance but it had taken the opportunity to work with the MOD to allow dog-walking on a local Airfield. Local Authority 5 on the other hand, had a poor record of co-ordination. 33 Parish Councils failed to take part in its assessment, despite being contacted on more than one occasion. Fourteen of the Local Authorities recommended increasing co-ordination in the future, and Local Authority 5 recommended that formal arrangements should be entered into with the Parish Councils in respect of land management and maintenance.

Twenty-three of the Local Authorities do not currently play a role in co-ordination of the private sector. The most positive example was Local Authority 3, which succeeded in bringing private toilets into public use at strategic tourist locations. It was the only case demonstrating anything as significant as the planning guidance suggests, which is for Local Authorities to, 'Procure the public use of privately owned areas.' Nine seek to expand their private sector co-ordination but the proposals do not seem very specific. They include working with the private sector to obtain grant funding and private sponsorship of events. The superficiality of these proposals seems emphasised by the fact they are repeated in a very similar format in a number of assessments. PMP consultants, who carried out five of the assessments in the sample group re-used the same information every time and this may have created a false statistic. Overall, the private sector appears to be seen by Local Authorities as a potential source of revenue for Local Authorities, but not as having any significant role to play in the governance of open space.

The community sector receives the greatest attention from Local Authorities. Eleven claim they currently undertake co-ordinating activities and seventeen

recommend more in the future. A Local Authority exhibiting high levels of community co-ordination is Local Authority 7 where there are 1600 registered volunteers for one particular site. Local Authority 5 is another example, it currently co-ordinates 10 community transport operators which provide access to recreational facilities, and concessionary fares to those on low incomes. The majority of authorities involved in community co-ordination give 'Friends of Parks' groups as examples, referring to the enhanced 'sense of ownership' they bring. One 'community woodland' was referred to and one pocket park initiative, in which the community 'played a key role'.

A large number of Local Authorities seventeen, recommend greater community co-ordination in the future. Examples ranged from the very general, like, 'Council to foster community discussions of the range of possibilities'; to the more specific. For example, Local Authority 7 recommended a, 'Presumption in favour of devolved management and self management with consultative/friends groups being seen as the interim phase'. Local Authority 5 recommended a new model of community management based on The National Association of Community Associations 'Visible Model'. Local Authority 21 recommended, 'Negotiating for the community use of non-public open spaces'. Local Authority 2 recommended, 'Suggestions for the Council to foster community discussion including a toolkit of themes for open space use' and Local Authority 16 recommended 'Community trusts'.

5.4 The Quality and Quantity of Open Spaces

The literature review referred to the type of at mis-trust that may arise if the government is overly critical of the performance of Local Authorities giving a false impression of the need for radical change. This research aims to independently assess how well open spaces are being managed by summarising the findings of the Local Authorities themselves. They have been asked to measure quantity and quality against 'locally derived standards' (ODPM, 2002b, p. 6:7) instead of national benchmarks like the National Playing Field Associations, 'Six Acre Standard' (1992) or English Nature's, 'Access to Natural Greenspace Standards' (1996) The figures that are shown

below reflect performance against the locally derived standards as it is reported in the assessments.

	Quality		Quantity	
	Deficit	Surplus	Deficit	Surplus
Yes	76	32	68	52
No	4	20	12	8
No info	20	48	20	40

Table 5. The Number of Local Authorities with Localised Deficits or Surpluses

It became apparent whilst analysing the assessments that none of the Local Authorities were uniformly influenced across the whole of their administrative area. Instead there were *localised* deficiencies and surpluses, often defined by 'catchment area' or neighbourhood. Only one Local Authority had no localised quality deficits at all. The data shows that much of the necessary information was missing, up to twelve gave no information on quality surpluses. Given that eight *were* able to confirm a localised quality surplus, it seems feasible that a significant number of areas are being over-managed, according to the 'locally derived standard'. The sample group included several coastal authorities one of which described the importance to the local tourism industry of keeping parks and open spaces highly maintained. There was a notable degree of difficulty of measuring against any kind of benchmark because open space management appeared to have a tradition of being unevenly resourced, even within administrative areas. However, whilst the majority of Local Authorities may have some areas of surplus, their assessments more frequently referred to localised deficits in quality suggesting that these outnumber surpluses.

Seven out of twenty-five of the Local Authorities stated that they have simultaneous deficits *and* surpluses in quality. This clearly indicates a polarisation of quality within the same administrative areas. It could be reflective of the composition of service provision within each area; possibly linked to better performance by some site owners than others but the case of Local Authority 12 does not corroborate this. In its assessment there is a table showing the ranking of open spaces assessed against a locally derived quality standard. The range within this table is extensive, showing high quality areas at the top, mainly tourist areas, and low quality areas with problems of anti-social behaviour and mis-use at the bottom. The majority of the areas at the

bottom of its table are associated with areas of social housing owned by the Local Authority. This polarisation could be to do with the pressure for resource allocation within the Local Authority, or the power of lobbying groups, like 'The Friends of Jubilee Gardens'. The publicly owned site they represent is ranked first out of 107 sites in the Authority's area.

The data sample showed a similar situation in the quantity of open spaces. Thirteen exceeded the 'locally derived standard' in localised areas. A significant number of parks and open spaces may therefore be 'surplus to requirements', based on local need. It seems feasible that some neighbourhoods are over-provided for but the Local Authorities may not wish to emphasise this because ten in the sample group gave no information about this subject. Seventeen of the Local Authorities have deficiencies in some areas. Ten Local Authorities showed simultaneous deficits and surpluses in quantity. Local Authority 2 is a good case in point, part of its area is adjacent to a large Regional Park giving good access to the communities immediately adjacent whilst other parts are devoid of open space. The evidence is therefore one of Local Authorities with significant problems meeting local people's aspirations in some areas, but exceeding them in others. At the same time they are reluctant to discuss the extent of this problem.

5.5 Funding of Open Space Provision

The government guidance on completing an open space assessment requires searching questions to be answered about open spaces, as follows:

Have existing policies and provision standards delivered the full range of high quality, accessible open spaces and sport and recreation facilities in the right places to meet local needs? Are they valued by local communities? If not, why not? (ODPM, 2002, p. 16; 4.10).

The guidance is silent however, as to the need for reviewing core budgets. It describes a requirement for planning authorities to consider costs issues, as set out in Paragraph 7 of PPG 17 but this mainly relates to meeting local needs. PPG17 states that:

Where recreational land and facilities are of poor quality or under-used, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating an absence of need in the area. Local authorities should seek opportunities to improve the value of existing facilities. Usage might be improved by better management or by capital investment to secure improvements. Planning obligations may be used where improvements are required to meet identified needs (ODPM, 2002b, p. 9; 18).

Evidence was collected from the sample group and it showed that Local Authorities had not all been able to divorce the assessment of open spaces from revenue issues quite so easily. Just less than half set out to explore the financial options available to them. Only one Local Authority indicated that it had adequate revenue funding, 11 indicated that they had inadequate revenue and 13 gave no information. This data was cross-tabulated with recommendations within the assessments for increasing that funding and it found that whilst Local Authorities were prepared in just less than half the cases, to explore funding issues, not many were prepared to be forthright by recommending funding increases.

The table below represents this finding showing strong and weak recommendations separately. A strong recommendation is one that is encapsulated in a formal policy recommendation. A weak recommendation is one that is passive, only being described informally along with other general information in the assessment.

	Adequate Current Revenue Funding	Inadequate Current Revenue Funding	No Current Revenue Information
Strong Recommendation to Increase Revenue Funding	0	1	0
Weak Recommendation to Increase Revenue Funding	0	8	4
No Recommendation to Increase Revenue Funding	1	2	9

Table 6. Recommendations to Increase Revenue Funding for Open Space

It shows that even within the group that described inadequate revenue funding, very few were prepared to make strong recommendations for increasing that funding. The majority of Local Authorities are unwilling to discuss the relationship between revenue funding and open space provision, even though

they have identified shortfalls in quality that are likely to need addressing by better day to day maintenance. The reasons for this seem to be varied. In some cases it is because the Local Authorities seem to agree with the general tone of the guidance, dumbing down the need for any investigation into local resources. In other cases they seem to perceive that the national or local political climate warrants sensitive handling of resource issues. In a significant proportion of cases there also seems to be a 'silo' effect, whereby those who are carrying out the assessments do not feel revenue issues are part of their remit and this merited further investigation in the interviews.

According to the evidence so far, most of the Local Authorities need additional open space provision because seventeen identified a localised deficit in quantity. Apart from advice about the best means of securing new capital provision from developers, in the form of S106 agreements, there is little else in the companion guide on capital funding. Part of it paradoxically relates to using the planning system to control new capital projects by the private sector:

The acceptable cost of using a facility can vary and depends on factors such as the nature of the facility, individuals' personal circumstances and how much they have to pay to travel to it. It is therefore very difficult to come to a general view of when a cost is acceptable and when it is not. However, Paragraph 7 of PPG17 makes clear that planning authorities should consider cost issues. For some commercial developments, this may make it possible for authorities to secure access for a broad cross-section of the community (ODPM, 2002, p. 34; 6.14).

This would encourage the control of new leisure development based on what charges the developer wanted to make to its customers. It would arguably amount to State intervention in the market and could impact on the ability to co-ordinate a broad range of service providers, which is supposed to be the government's ultimate goal.

Funding issues are skirted over in the guidance with very little information about how this could be increased. Only one authority indicated that it had adequate capital funding and of the 7 that indicated they did not, only 2 were prepared to make strong recommendations to increase that funding.

	Adequate Current Capital Funding	Inadequate Current Capital Funding	No Current Capital Information
Strong Recommendation to Increase Capital Funding	0	2	1
Weak Recommendation to Increase Capital Funding	0	5	7
No Recommendation to Increase Capital Funding	1	0	9

Table 7. The Adequacy of Local Authority Funding

The absence of information in the assessments on potential sources of capital funding goes against a very broad policy agenda relating to the need for innovation in the procurement and delivery of services. Instead of recommending new resource streams the companion guide to PPG 17 suggests a strategy as the best way forward. It states:

It will be possible to identify a strategy which balances economic, social and environmental objectives in order to achieve the best possible long term use of land. This strategy is likely to have four basic components:

- Existing provision to be protected
- Existing provision to be enhanced
- Existing provision to be relocated in order to meet local needs more effectively or make better overall use of land
- Proposals for new provision

Some strategies may also have a fifth component - land or facilities which are surplus to requirements and therefore no longer needed (ODPM, 2002, p.46; 8.1).

This strongly hints at the option of disposing of assets to raise funds. It also places extra pressure on Local Authorities to resolve funding constraints at the local level. It has already been established that Local Authorities do not want to make active recommendations for increasing revenue or capital funding, but they continue to explore the financial options available to them. The following information shows the frequent suggestions they made, without being prompted by the guidance.

	Improve the Availability of Resources	Make Efficiency Savings	Review Open Space Management	Make Personnel Changes
Strong Recommendation	32	20	0	0

Weak Recommendation	28	36	24	24
No Recommendation	40	44	76	76

Table 8. Local Authority Recommendations for Obtaining Resources

Most of the strong recommendations are related to 'Improving the Availability of Resources'. This was a broad category encompassing proposals including; Local Authority 11's recommendation to carry out a, 'Review of Pricing', Local Authority 3's to, 'Re-negotiate Service Level Agreements' and Local Authority 12's to 'Pool Funds'. There was another common type of category in the analysis, 'Efficiency Savings' or as the ODPM's 2000 guidance on Community Strategies described it, savings that can be found by eliminating, 'Gaps, overlaps or contradictions in resource use' (p. 23; 73). Local Authority 21's recommendation was to, 'Prioritise future investment', Local Authority 12's to, 'Target deficiency areas', Local Authority 2 to, 'Diversify the use of existing spaces' and Local Authority 7's to, 'Remove some [landscape] features'. Given that there was no clear requirement to address the better use of funding or efficiency savings in the PPG, it shows these issues have become highly relevant to Local Authorities. A much lower percentage suggested reviewing the management of open space, for example, by devolving open space management to the community or private sector. They were equally reluctant to address personnel issues, which might be needed if 'radical change' is on the agenda.

5.6 The Strategic Vision

Local Authorities were required to produce a strategic 'vision' for open spaces. The following table shows the recommendations that would be embodied in that vision across the data sample.

	Improve Quality of Open Space	Improve Quantity of Open Space
Strong Recommendation	44	48
Weak Recommendation	44	28
No Recommendation	12	24

Table 9. Total Number of Local Authority Recommendations for Increasing Provision

The majority of Local Authorities made either weak or strong recommendations to increase the quality and quantity of open space. This correlates with the

earlier results that showed the majority of Local Authorities have deficiencies in both. At least two could be unwilling to address the shortfalls they have identified. This has been identified by cross-tabulating the three that make no recommendations for improving quality with the one Local Authority shown to have no deficits of this type. A small number of Local Authorities may alternatively, be unwilling to record that quality improvements are needed, perhaps for legal reasons, in the eventuality of a claim against them. A high number of assessments; ten out of twenty-five omitted key information on quality, meaning they would not consequently be robust in terms of meeting the planning policy guidance. It means that a high number of local planning authorities would not be able to rely on the evidence contained within them at planning appeal.

The kind of qualitative improvements that Local Authorities recommended were frequently linked to a proposed action plan or open space strategy, including Local Authority 18 and Local Authority 1. A number of others were linked to improving under-used sites including Local Authority 5, Local Authority 2 and Local Authority 20. Other recommendations reflected intense pressure on resources. Local Authority 22 recommended that, 'The Council's priority should be to enhance quality rather than quantity. If it boosts quantity, its extremely limited revenue funding will be spread even more thinly and quality will suffer further'. Local Authority 4 recommended that, 'It should decide whether to reduce the maintenance standard or have different maintenance regimes to balance the budget'. Local Authority 17 suggested that qualitative improvements could be addressed by raising revenue from land sales. 'There is a high risk of services becoming dependent on external funds that cannot be guaranteed in the future.' In one section of its assessment it asks:

Should the general standard of maintenance be reduced? Can the Council sell open space land to improve maintenance budgets whilst still meeting any recommended standards. What is the scope to respond to changing needs?

Twelve of the Local Authorities made strong recommendations to improve the quantity of open space. Four restricted the recommendations to planning

policy recommendations, such as setting quantitative standards in the LDF but a larger number, eleven, made only corporate policy recommendations, whilst four made both. This shows that not only is there a significant majority recommending improving the quantity of open space but also a majority centred on new provision being delivered ‘in-house’, by the Local Authorities.

The analysis showed that eighteen of the Local Authorities made either weak or strong recommendations to procure land. These recommendations were varied, including applying for grants, reclaiming brownfield land and buying up MOD land. It demonstrates a degree of optimism regarding the resources needed to allow the public sector to fulfil this objective. It also re-iterates the finding that the majority of the sample group believe the best opportunities for creating new open space lie with the organisation and not with the planning system, strongly challenging the presumption in the government guidance about the feasibility of addressing deficits using developer contributions. This evidence demonstrates that Local Authorities would like to increase their role in service provision, differing from the government’s concept of ‘steering not rowing’.

5.7 Strategic Funding Options

It has been shown that Local Authorities have low revenue and capital funding but conversely, they would like to address shortfalls in open space provision themselves. All the time that they have insufficient resources, a gap in provision may be opening up. To understand how widely Local Authorities had reflected on this funding issue, the research analysed their examination into the different types of resources available for procurement.

	S106 Funds	Central Govt	Own Resources	Private Funding
Examination in the Assessment	18	9	11	9
No Examination in the Assessment	7	16	17	16

Table 10. Number of Local Authorities Examining Various Sources of Funding for the Procurement of Open Space

This data shows that Local Authorities carried out an examination of S106 procurement in eighteen cases even though it wasn’t translated into formal

planning policy recommendations. It seems to confirm the idea that planning policies are not seen as the key to delivering adequate open space in many areas. Planning policies may be seen as warranting little revision, possibly because the system is already experiencing difficulty with integrating competing needs like housing and open space, that higher obligations for open space would do little to help. Another reason for the low number of planning policy recommendations could have been because corporate mechanisms were seen as needing more attention.

An issue that may have prejudiced the content of these assessments with regard to strategic funding issues may have been the high number of private consultants used to carry them out. The table below also shows that the range of consultants was fairly narrow, with one consultancy carrying out five of the assessments in the sample. This particular practice has wielded a significant amount of influence on the sample group. Local Authorities must lack the in-house expertise or resources to carry out the work themselves because they only completed 9 out of 25 of the assessments. The use of consultants could have prejudiced the recommendations of the assessments against the use of S106 agreements. This could be because the private sector is reluctant to have an input into planning policies that would place a high financial burden on their clients. Overall there seems to have been a missed opportunity to produce a new generation of S106 agreements designed to deliver open space in a more imaginative way.

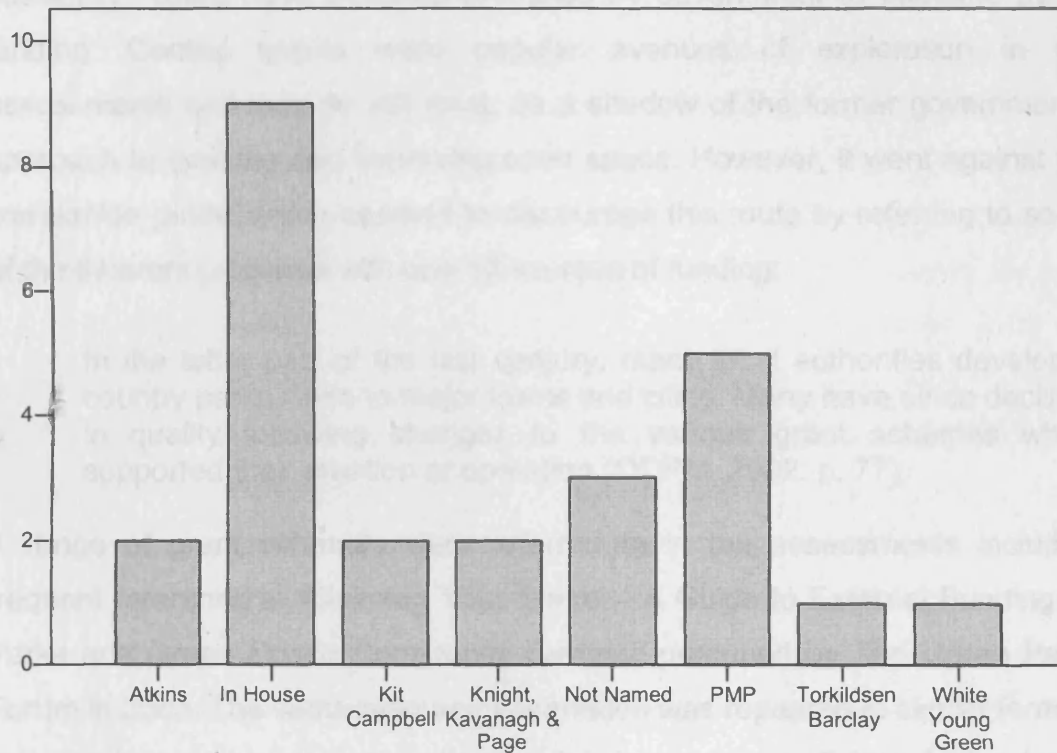


Fig. 5. Frequency of Different Consultants used to complete Assessments for Local Authorities

The rest of the data in table 11 shows the frequency with which Local Authorities examined other means of obtaining funding, from central government and from private partners as well as from their own budgets. Eleven of the Local Authorities were willing to examine funding from their own resources. Further analysis showed however, that ideas were limited. It seemed to come out of a presumption that Local Authorities would continue to fund open space management in the traditional way, through publicly raised revenue. Local Authority 8 is an example of this, it recommended that a number of new district parks be created and that, 'The Council should be responsible for managing and maintaining each of them.' It demonstrates the extent to which managerial systems of service delivery are entrenched in Local Government thinking. Some progressive Local Authorities recognised that resources needed to be created locally but their focus regularly turned to an examination of the feasibility of releasing resources from publicly held assets.

Central government was seen by nine of the Local Authorities as a potential source of funding to address the recommendations of the assessments but neither the planning guidance nor the companion guide suggested this was a

possibility. There have been no promises by government to increase public funding. Central grants were popular avenues of exploration in the assessments and they do still exist, as a shadow of the former government's approach to creating and improving open space. However, it went against the companion guide, which seemed to discourage this route by referring to some of the inherent problems with one-off sources of funding:

In the latter part of the last century, many local authorities developed country parks close to major towns and cities. Many have since declined in quality following changes to the various grant schemes which supported their creation or operation (ODPM, 2002, p. 77).

A range of grant schemes were referred to in the assessments including frequent reference to 'Claiming Your Share – A Guide to External Funding for Parks and Green Space Community Groups', produced by The Urban Parks Forum in 2003. The same resource information was repeated in similar formats in a number of assessments indicating that it was a superficial addition to the assessments rather than a realistic avenue for the future.

The private sector was the other main source of funding explored by nine of Local Authorities. The recommendations were small scale and seemed tokenistic, such as 'franchising of catering facilities' and 'sponsorship'. However, the majority of Local Authorities were reluctant to seek additional resources this way. It could be attributable to ingrained systems of working, repeating some of the earlier findings from this research on low levels of private sector co-ordination. In addition to a degree of mistrust between the private and public sectors there also seemed to be some bureaucratic barriers related again to the 'silo' mentality. Parks Departments seemed alone in financial terms and whilst they described very little support from other departments, the externalities they provide are known to benefit housing, social welfare, health, the environment, young people and increasingly the economy.

Overall, the sample group failed to recognise the financial value of 'partnership working'. They paid lip service by supporting the idea, but they essentially saw it as a means to sustain the state run service rather than a new method of

service delivery. The fact that nine explored private sector sources of funding but the recommendations were small scale and seemed tokenistic supports this interpretation. It is in contrast with earlier evidence from the assessments that eighteen made either strong or weak recommendations for more partnership working with private, community and government partners. Essentially Local Authorities seem to want to recommend partnership working but have few ideas to put in place. It also casts doubt on the partnership co-ordination role. None of the Local Authorities explored the possibility of private sector-led procurement along the lines of large infrastructure projects being delivered in other services. The feasibility of developing new open spaces as profit-making entities was completely overlooked, along with good practice examples like Kew Gardens and The Eden Centre. The opportunity to enhance the economic vitality of the local area through 'prestige projects' or use open space provision to assist with major regeneration projects was never considered.

5.8 Interim Summary of the Data contained in the Assessments

This research is helping to make clear what the priorities are for most of the Local Authorities throughout England. A number of very good assessments have been produced with comprehensive advice about what should be done to improve open spaces, based on local people's requirements. These assessments contain many examples from current practice and some good ideas about future provision. There are also a number of very weak assessments, which probably wouldn't pass the planning test. Some of them start from an incomplete database, which seems a fundamental flaw in assessing provision, and others make no recommendations for standards, despite containing some very carefully prepared evidence. These weaknesses may not however, prevent them from being translated into changes on the ground, linked to planning policy and corporate recommendations. Page 13 of the guidance reminds Local Authorities that, 'PPG17 suggests a logical methodology based on identifying needs, setting standards, identifying

deficiencies and developing a strategy and related policies' (ODPM, 2002, p.12; 3.3) The Local Authorities were willing to accept this recommendation because whilst only five had an existing open space strategy, thirteen recommended that one should be carried out. It represents a progressive state of mind within most Local Authorities.

The evidence so far has determined a lot about what a typical Local Authority Open Space Strategy would involve if the recommendations contained in the assessments were carried forward. This evidence is summarised below:

- Local Authorities have an average of 855ha of open space within their administrative area.
- 82% of Local Authorities do not know very much about this provision because they have yet to carry out an Open Space Assessment
- A significant number of the Local Authorities that have carried out assessments still do not have a definitive record of how much open space exists in their area.
- Local Authorities do not generally acknowledge the contribution of other sectors to the provision of open space or that only between 7% to 35% of it could be in their own ownership.
- There is an absence of high value 'partnership working' with the private sector.
- Local Authorities do not appear to be in a good position to move towards more partnership working.
- Local Authorities would be fairly willing to co-ordinate provision by the community sector but less willing to co-ordinate the private sector.
- Local Authorities have significant surpluses and significant deficits of open spaces within their areas, both in quantity and quality.
- Almost half of Local Authorities are unwilling to confirm the full extent of surpluses; they are more willing to confirm the extent of deficits.
- Open space deficits outweigh surpluses.
- There is a polarisation of service delivery, with some areas being over-provided for and others being under-provided for, which may be enhancing socio-spatial patterns of inequality.

- Almost all Local Authorities want to improve the quality and quantity of provision in their area.
- There are significant revenue and capital funding problems for Local Authorities, which they are not always willing to highlight.
- Local Authorities regard efficiency savings as one of the most relevant ways to address open space deficits.
- There is little entrepreneurial innovation within Local Authorities in relation to open spaces.
- Managerial systems of open space delivery are deeply entrenched in Local Government thinking.
- Radical change is not on the Local Government agenda.
- Almost half of Local Authorities have not produced a sufficiently robust assessment and consequently will not be able to rely on the planning system to deliver improvements.
- Local Authorities would like to take responsibility for funding improvements, and they look to central government for one-off grants.
- There is a funding gap between the resources that are available and the resources needed for improvements.
- Local Authorities would like to retain service delivery responsibilities.
- Local Authorities would like to implement an open space strategy.

This interim summary of the evidence shows the policy direction that many Local Authorities are heading in. Their traditional outlook has influenced the outcomes of the assessments and the way open space is likely to be managed. Government portrayed the production of open space assessments as a way to set local standards and move away from national benchmarks. However, twelve of the Local Authorities made no recommendations that were specific to local circumstances. Instead they are looking for short-term solutions to over-come financial pressures. In addition to these interim findings there were two more key findings that indicated how the Local Authorities might be able to achieve short-term solutions in the current climate of reform and these were:

- Many Local Authorities have turned their attention to the feasibility of releasing resources from the sale of publicly held assets.
- The resources that could be released by dissolving public assets are seen as possible means of sustaining the state-run service.

The evidence for these findings is outlined below and it is strongly linked to the influence of central government funding policy.

5.9 The Need for Open Space

Parks and amenity areas are under much closer scrutiny than they were before, not only in relation to whether they meet local people's needs, but also in relation to whether they are surplus to requirements. There is a reminder from the literature review below, about how PPG 17 went against the previous advice from The London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC), which was:

If open space is viewed as fulfilling a wider role than its use value alone, the loss of quantity cannot be justified by improved quality or greater use of remaining open space (Arup, 1999, p. 49).

PPG17 turned this advice on its head but used the same words, use and value, to describe how to measure the need for open space. LPAC's worst fears have consequently been realised because blanket protection has been lifted. The assessments contained striking evidence of the number of open spaces that are now at risk, shown in Appendix 3.

It shows a disregard for the detailed application of the guidance and a short cut to the option of disposal. Local Authority 10 stated that:

This assessment also sets out which are the most important sites we will protect from development, the sites which we will improve as a priority and those sites of low value which we may allow to be built on (p. 5). We make a lot of decisions about green space as a normal part of our day to day work. We decide whether individual green spaces should be built on or protected from development.

Local Authority 3 said:

[We will] provide advice for any rationalisation... Up to 14.1 ha of open space could be disposed of.... with capital receipts in the millions of pounds' ... Identify where others [sites] can be released...Only 4% of respondents felt there was more than enough [open space] ...Glasgow and Bromley sold through their strategy.

The only four Local Authorities that didn't refer in some way to the possibility of disposing of open space were Local Authority 20, Local Authority 22, Local Authority 25 and Local Authority 12. In the case of Local Authority 25, this may have been related to the fact that the open space assessment omitted large amounts of information. It took part in the government's pilot scheme for PPG 17, but the completion of its assessment was interrupted when Members rejected the draft recommendations and required the open space policies to be devised separately through the Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

Local Authority 21 and Local Authority 2, both suggested that a large number of open spaces were not meeting their potential, 122 sites at Local Authority 2 and 112 at Local Authority 21. This seems to indicate that despite generous open space provision and well-developed policies on community involvement, they are struggling to delivery good quality open spaces. However, they want to leave their options open and go as far as saying:

It is recommended that user surveys for each open space are undertaken to determine the level of use. This would further inform the value placed on each open space.

Most Local Authorities were open in their condemnation of open space. Local Authority 24, for example recommended that some of the existing open space could be used for low cost housing. Other notable cases were Local Authority 10, whose *only* tangible recommendation was for the disposal of assets. In Local Authority 13 none of the parks and gardens were rated as poor but a 'planning implementation strategy' was still recommended. Local Authority 15 made comments about the 'merit' of some areas of open space, which seemed very significant because the assessment was so short. It was only 9 pages long. Local Authority 4 wanted to investigate the release of funds despite having a large deficit of open space and Local Authority 18 wished to examine

the disposal of 11 sites even though it only has 28 ha of open space overall, the lowest in the sample group.

5.10 Justifications for Disposal of Open Space

The consultancy that wrote the companion guide for the government was Kit Campbell Associates. They were responsible for devising a methodology for determining whether open spaces are 'surplus to requirements' according to 'Use' and 'Value'. This was modified by a number of other consultants. W.S. Atkins for example, assessed Local Authority 2 and Local Authority 21 and instead of using use and value, used the following graph to plot scores against their own criteria which were; 'Value Assessment' on the 'Y' axis and 'Green Flag Score' on the 'X' axis.

Figure 7.9 – Combining Quality and Value Scores

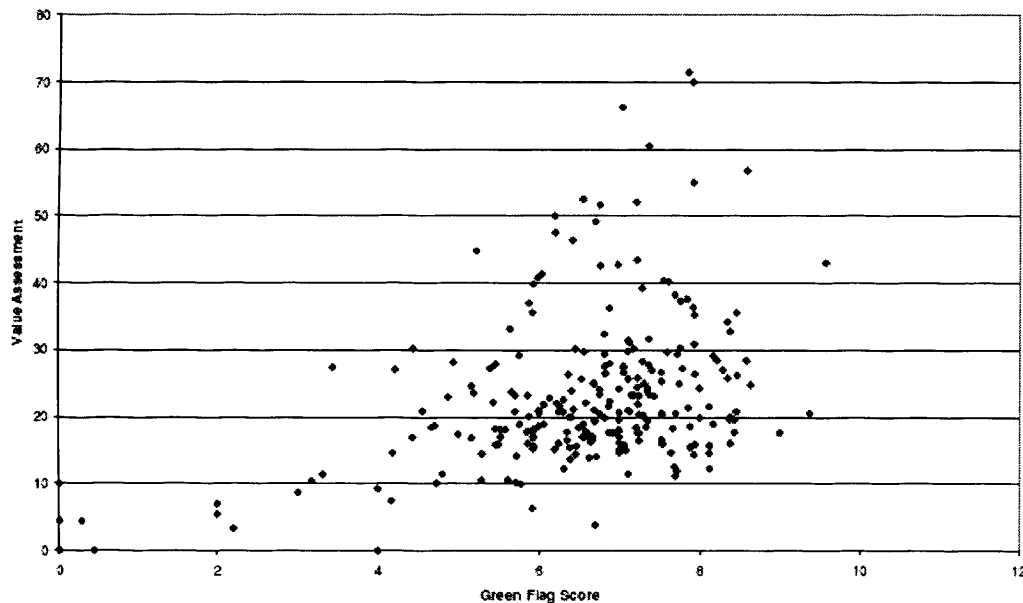


Fig. 6. Value Calculations expressed by W.S. Atkins

The difficulty with 'use' and 'value' seems to be that these are subjective issues. They can be locally determined, and this is what the guidance is suggesting with its recommendation for 'locally derived standards'. However, there are poor links shown in the assessments, between public consultation and the determination of use and value indicators. People were much more

frequently quoted as referring to objective issues such as the lack of doggy bins. The process of identifying sites for disposal therefore seems to have been open to interpretation by those carrying out the assessments. It makes the risk of unnecessarily losing open space due to the political and financial influences on this process more likely.

The inconsistency that assessments have been exposed to is well demonstrated by two assessments within the sample group that were both completed by Kit Campbell Associates. The first of these, Local Authority 22, was not even able to provide its consultants with a database to work from. Shortfalls in quantity were subsequently identified but the recommendations focussed on improving quality. The following quotation perhaps indicates why:

Council members and officials have both made clear that the potential for increasing its expenditure – capital or revenue – on open space, sport and recreation provision is, at best, very limited. It is also clear that some provision in the District is in decline and the local community would like to see a number of spaces enhanced. No-one visiting the **** Sports Ground, for example, would imagine for a moment that they were in a District which claims proudly to be the least deprived in England.

In the second assessment for Local Authority 8, Kit Campbell Associates identified local open space provision including areas of Ancient Woodland, AONB, National Park and SSSI's. Throughout the course of this assessment it never referred to a surplus of open space and it also stated that 'quality compares favourably with other districts' but still recommended a review of the need for 91 of the 275 sites. Sadly, both of the assessments in the sample group that this Consultancy was appointed on appear to have been influenced by resource factors, and not by the impartial application of 'use' and 'value' measurements.

The evidence seems to show that PPG 17 is slightly too sophisticated and Local Authorities are more influenced by other factors such as funding, than a desire to correctly apply the 'use and value' criteria. Open spaces are consequently at risk in a wide variety of cases. It could hide a low demand for open space, perhaps because of a gross surplus, hidden by the complexity of

the previous findings. Gross provision is hard to extrapolate. This is because, as previously discussed, deficiencies and surpluses were generally broken down by catchment area in most of the assessments. It is still possible however, to calculate the gross provision for some of the authorities by using the population statistics and the total amount of informal open space.

This calculation, although it is very broad brush, shows that thirteen of the Authorities had an overall deficit when compared to their own 'locally derived standard'. The statistics also show that mean provision is slightly surplus, about 8ha overall. This indicates that provision is polarised with some areas having very large amounts of gross provision but over half having too little. Additionally, shortfalls are very common within individual neighbourhoods, more common than surpluses. The average Local Authority currently has a planning policy requirement for 2.44 ha of informal open space per 1000 population. Recommendations to revise planning policy will secure a small increase to 2.46 ha per 1000 population in the future. It represents a total increase of just over two hectares in each Local Authority as a result of PPG17, not taking account of population growth. It is therefore contrary that despite a general deficit in provision, and the recommendation for planning policy designed to raise provision, twenty-one of the Local Authorities make strong or weak corporate recommendations for the disposal of open space assets.

5.11 Patterns of Possible Disposal

The following table shows the cross-tabulation of corporate policy recommendations, with levels of open space provision. It shows that in the 13 cases where overall provision is known, the disposal of open space assets will not be restricted to those Authorities with the highest surpluses. In fact three out of the five most deprived Authorities, in terms of open space provision, are considering the disposal of open spaces as an option.

Gross Open Space Provision (surpluses and deficits in ha)	Policy Recommendation for Disposal of assets			Total
	Strong	Weak	None	
+1505.71	1	0	0	1
+1340.25	0	1	0	1
+924.96	1	0	0	1
+122.10	1	0	0	1
+73.04	1	0	0	1
+8.04	1	0	0	1
-7.62	1	0	0	1
-10.33	0	1	0	1
-10.66	0	0	1	1
-31.12	0	1	0	1
-99.93	0	0	1	1
-362.97	0	1	0	1
-693.01	0	1	0	1
Total	6	5	2	13

Table 11. Local Authority provision cross-tabulated with policy recommendations for Disposal of Assets

The evidence given so far has shown that open spaces are at risk in the majority of Local Authorities, and there are no legislative measures to ensure resources are re-used for alternative provision, despite it being recommended as good practice. This is evidence that the spatial distribution of open spaces is vulnerable to change. Further investigation is merited in the interviews to determine whether the disposal of assets will be orientated towards balancing open space provision between areas of surplus and deficiency or simply used as a means of raising revenue.

5.12 Summary of the Findings from the Assessments

The extraction of data from the sample group of 25 open space assessments was restricted by the terms of reference for PPG17, yet it yielded valuable evidence on:

- Patterns of ownership
- Stakeholder involvement
- The quality and quantity of open spaces
- Existing funding
- Funding options
- Strategic vision
- Local Authority priorities
- The need for open space
- Justifications for disposal of open space
- Patterns of possible disposal

This wide range of evidence has been organised thematically, into four main areas, linked to the main pressures on open spaces that were originally identified in the literature review.

5.12.1 Neo-liberal Reform and Funding

Local Government Executive Directors and the Policy and Resources Committees of Local Authorities seem very likely to influence patterns of open space distribution in the future. The local government's asset base will be reduced unless these powerful groups of people, whose main interests lie with economic matters, live up to the highest expectations of PPG17. Yet they are seen to be in a financial dilemma. They would like to take responsibility for funding the open space improvements that are needed, but there is a gap in resources. Government requires Local Authorities to produce year on year savings even though there is already a serious financial shortfall in the open spaces budget.

Fear prevails about how to address the funding gap, perhaps related to the effects it would have on political power-brokering. This is known because Local Authorities made frequent suggestions about improving the availability of resources, and whilst they wished to find the resources themselves they were unwilling to actively recommend increases in local revenue or capital funding. They explored funding issues in a discrete way and showed they wanted to pursue their own agenda, at the same time they looked forlornly to central government for one-off grants. Efficiency savings were popular avenues of exploration but are unlikely to produce the savings needed to sustain the State run service. The evidence shows that this financial pressure has caused parks to be looked at in a new light. They are no longer places of recreation, to help stimulate mind, body and soul. They are land banks ready to help pay for services run by the public sector as well as safety cushions to help absorb financial pressure from the neo-liberal agenda.

5.12.2 Neo-liberal Reform and Partnership Working

The research gathered information on the profile of open space provision within 25 Local Authority areas to understand more about how the pressure for partnership working was manifesting itself. This is partnership working in the sense of the private sector carrying out service delivery. The most shocking statistic was perhaps that 82% of Local Authorities do not know very much about this provision because they have not carried out the Open Space Assessment. Even amongst those that have, a significant number did not progress sufficiently well with to obtain a definitive record of ownership in their area. It leads to a finding that Local Authorities are not able to 'row' very well, let alone 'steer' to meet Stakeholder expectations. Additionally, the lack of political interest in what is feasible, means Local Authorities do not appear to be in a good position to move towards more partnership working.

Other calculations showed that the average Local Authority probably has about 855ha of open space within their administrative area. The Urban Parks Forum estimated the Local Authorities average park stock to be just over 300ha (2001, p.6) meaning they are directly responsible for about 35% of local provision. Other estimates like that of Cahill put it at much less, around 7% (Cahill, 2001, p. 147). Despite these relatively large percentages, the area of State controlled land may still not be sufficient because there are deficits of open spaces within the majority of areas, both in quantity and quality. Other evidence showed that surpluses exist in a minority of areas and this points to a spatial distribution of open space that is unequal. Local Authorities would like to retain service delivery responsibilities but perhaps because of the limited role they are willing to undertake in relation to co-ordinating partnership provision, and letting go of their Fordist styles of service delivery, the majority of local people are now widely exposed to falling open space standards.

5.12.3 Neo-liberal Reform and Public Participation

The assessments provided straightforward evidence in relation to the third area of pressure on open spaces identified in the literature review, for neo-

liberal reform involving participation by local stakeholders. These are stakeholders in its broadest sense, including the local community, the business community, charities and other organisations. Local Authorities supported the principle, but they had no substantial ideas to take forward. They did not associate stakeholder involvement with any form of 'fiscal rectitude', giving the impression it was only a 'nice to do' option. There were some individual examples of stakeholders carrying out tasks such as volunteering, or forming 'Friends Groups' and some additional evidence that local government favoured the community sector when it came to participation but the majority said it was something to be looked at in the future. The furthest any Local Authority ventured down this path was to say there would be a 'Presumption in favour of devolved management and self management with consultative/friends groups being seen as the interim phase'. Recommendations were on the whole 'weak' and proposals were not comprehensive. The shared use of facilities, like toilets, appeared to sum up participation by the business community. Additionally, the assessments themselves contained little evidence of a local demand for more control over the management of open spaces.

This evidence led to the finding that managerial systems of open space delivery are deeply entrenched in Local Government thinking and people still seem to want 'The Council' to run them. Public participation in the delivery of services is, at best, in its very early stages. It is sufficient to say that Local Authorities may only be paying lip service to the concept of greater Stakeholder involvement. They are unwilling to encourage other sectors, especially the business community to become involved in the day-to-day delivery. They see very little opportunity for it to add to the depth and breadth of the service, other by 'sponsorship' events and other financial contributions. There was no evidence to show any type of radical change taking place. Local Authorities were keen to improve open spaces only within the framework that they themselves felt most comfortable and on the whole that didn't involve other people making decisions for them.

5.12.4 Local Constraints on Neo-liberal Reform

The results showed the kinds of local constraints there are on the Neo-liberal agenda. Firstly it has to be said, Local Authorities were keen to try and improve the service they offer. Almost all of them want to improve the quality and quantity of open space in their area. They were keen to recommend an open space strategy to help plan future provision but other findings showed they were unwilling to do this according to the government's vision. Local Authorities are not forthcoming about the situation in their area. The significant majority have not complied with PPG 17 and have not produced an audit or an assessment. Of those that have, almost half are unwilling to confirm the full extent of surpluses; they are more willing to confirm the extent of deficits and hope for central grants to become available. This indicates a reluctance to engage with the Neo-liberal agenda. The evidence showed however, that this reluctance didn't stop Local Authorities making proposals for the disposal of assets.

The interests of the local community were found to be of fairly low importance when it came to considering the sale of open spaces. Instead of using the government's requirements for applying the 'locally derived standard' to open spaces in their areas, most of the Local Authorities in the sample group used more convenient alternatives, like 'green flag score' and this manipulated the outcome. As a result of common shortcomings like these, almost half of Local Authorities complying with the new planning guidance have not produced a sufficiently robust assessment to be able to rely on the planning system to deliver any improvements. The State service cannot, therefore be rolled back very easily. Local Authorities are not in a position to devolve responsibility, they don't want to and they are deliberately sluggish in moving this agenda forward. Instead they speculate about expanding their portfolio of open spaces by capital investment, without the real ability. Entrepreneurial innovation could broaden the base of the service but this seems equally unrealistic and the large numbers of Officers inputting into decisions affecting open spaces does not help this situation.

Local Authorities have failed to embrace the neo-liberal agenda. They have done this for their own reasons, probably in the hope of retaining old styles of government and monopolistic methods of local service delivery. But the neo-liberal agenda should be applied in a holistic way. Government's aim is to use a blend of policies to reduce the negative impacts of globalisation, balancing competitiveness in the economy with thriftiness in the public sector. People are otherwise even more exposed to problems such as social polarisation. That policy approach is undermined when local communities are not sufficiently well prepared to help take over the State's role. De-centralisation means open spaces are being lost in urban areas where Local Authorities have a strong asset-base, but not being replaced by them elsewhere and service responsibilities are not being shared. This evidence has shown the beginnings of a process whereby open spaces are being physically 'marginalised'. The fact several of the Local Authorities with significant shortfalls in provision are still proposing to dispose of open space is a key piece of evidence. There is separate evidence for the polarisation of service delivery, with the average Authority having significant over-provision in some areas alongside under-provision in others, which now stands to be enhanced.

6.0 Analysis of the Results from the Open Space Assessments

The first research question set out to establish how much the Local Authority delivery of open spaces reflects the Neo-liberal agenda. The evidence has shown that the recommendations they contain are dominated by the incentive to retain financial control. It can fairly be said therefore, that open space will continue to be at the centre of a funding struggle. This exposes the promises made in the Planning Policy Guidance. The following reference shows how cash-strapped Local Authorities were encouraged to carry out an assessment at the beginning of this process:

The need to undertake comprehensive local assessments has obvious resource implications for authorities. However, it is in their own long-term interest that they should do so. They will result in better planning policies, facilitate better evidence-based decision-making as part of the development control process, make it easier to negotiate planning

obligations and provide essential evidence for use at appeals. They may also identify areas of land which can be sold for development' (ODPM, 2002, p. 6;1.9).

It contains five positive reasons for carrying out an assessment, of which only the last is now defensible. Government has overestimated the Local Authorities capacity to create better planning policies, facilitate better evidence-based decision-making as part of the development control process, make it easier to negotiate planning obligations and provide essential evidence for use at appeals. It hasn't however, overestimated its inclination to identify land that can be sold for development. This situation strongly reflects the other pressures open spaces are under, like funding pressures, heightened by what now seems an apparent lack of partnership and stakeholder involvement. The open space assessments do not compliment the neo-liberal agenda and a significant possible outcome has therefore emerged in the form of spatial restructuring.

The evidence has also cast light on the research hypothesis. It has disproved the first part of the theory that; there is a shift occurring in urban parks and green space provision, which is not only a political shift from the State to lower levels of administration, but a physical shift away from central areas. It is now evident that the transfer of responsibility to lower levels of administration can effectively be ruled out. It reflects on the nature of de-centralisation in the UK, into which this research is investigating. According to what has been established so far, de-centralisation is not well controlled, with the State 'rolling back' its services. It is taking place in a very haphazard way, whereby open spaces are becoming physically marginalised, irrespective of the needs of people who use them.

Local Authorities have, on the whole failed to look for examples of private sector partnership that could be used in ways to release revenue to Local Authorities. These could tap into market forces, encourage the private sector to create its own facilities and some groups could benefit from better quality provision than the State can provide. Private sector involvement would not be traditional service delivery but it would be a way of securing additional

resources and a useful way of enabling the Local Authorities to discretely pursue their own agenda. An apparent reluctance towards changing traditional methods of service delivery means Local Authorities are instead on course to fail deprived people even more than unadulterated market forces would.

More inquiry is needed in relation to spatial patterns of change and how extensive the disposal of open space will be. Without any evidence on where deprived communities are located and the difficulty of obtaining specific information about the location of open spaces most at risk, it is only feasible to look for evidence about the characteristics of change alongside characteristics of the decision making process. This will shed more light on the way decentralisation is taking place, which could yet be in two very different ways. Local Authorities could become pre-occupied with maintaining high levels of funding to sustain a state run service, selling valuable open space in the process, and gradually reducing their asset base. This would still support the main research hypothesis. Or they could use the resources from selling land for development to make better strategic provision and successfully address socio-spatial differences within their areas. These are the lines of investigation along which the next set of data collection takes place.

7.0 Data Obtained during the Interviews

The analysis of the open space assessments revealed that de-centralisation is likely to occur but this is more likely to revolve around the disposal of open spaces than by dispersing power through broader structures of local governance. The research questions require that these results be explored in more detail with the particular aim of gaining a greater insight into the way open space disposal will be manifested. The interpretation of the Local Government Officers is important to establishing how the current policy agenda is being delivered.

7.1 The General Outlook on Open Spaces

An initial, very general question was asked about the Local Authority's outlook on open spaces and whether the interviewee felt the service was given a high or a low priority. This was designed primarily to enable the interviewees to feel relaxed at the outset of the interview, but also to obtain evidence on local priorities. The interviewees hold positions of employment that should enable them to understand the way high profile policy changes and new government initiatives are being implemented at the local level and whilst they could not be expected to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of all the reforms at their fingertips, some of the key policy themes could be expected to affect their answers. The range of current reforms, including environmental awareness and liveability suggest that open spaces should be given a high priority.

Most of the interviewees confirmed open spaces are being given a high priority in their area. Local Authority 2a's Leisure Services Officer perhaps gave the most positive response:

Its, its, its towards the top of the political agenda at the moment, in so much as erm, its being supported by Council. There's been a recognition that there's been a lack of investment so, erm for the next three years it's been given er, just over three million pounds to start putting into the infrastructure, upgrading toilets, playgrounds, etc. Erm towards the top of the, top of the pile now. And there is a suggestion that, when we get to the end of three years there will be further support of money as well. [prompt] Well, it's just money that is probably in

reserve and everyone pitches in for capital on a yearly basis and that gets prioritised and erm, parks is, as I say, since parks is come to the top of the pile. We've been given some priority by securing that funding.

This is positive news for the service at Local Authority 2. Its open space assessment had previously showed that there were a high number of open spaces in a poor condition, despite a forward looking approach to community involvement and that the Council wanted to re-evaluate 122 areas. From the scale of the problems identified however, it is probably too soon to say whether three million pounds will be enough to sustain good quality local provision. Another positive response came from Local Authority 9's parks manager who said:

Erm, what type of open spaces? [prompt] Right, yeah, I think that we view them as an important part of people's lives and if there are areas that you want to develop.

The evidence seems to lean towards a general understanding of the importance of open space provision, the ability to relate to local projects, particularly flagship projects, but a slight uncertainty about discussing local policies. It could represent a level of uncertainty about whether national guidelines are being followed, confusion about the speed with which reform is taking place or a simple case of the interviewees gathering their thoughts. Never-the-less interviewees welcomed the clarification local assessments had given their understanding of local provision. Local Authority 8's planning officer responded by saying:

Yeah it's very highly regarded. We've got the, the three leisure centres that are owned by the Council, so obviously, they, leisure is important to the Council. And we did various surveys before this one, a Play Space Survey and a Playing Pitch Surveys as well. This is the first sort of comprehensive one that took them all into account.

The interviewees showed quite a high level of support for the assessments, especially as a resource for reference but the responses also suggested that policy for open space provision was not a major consideration in their day-to-day work. It became clear that the responsibility for open spaces was dissipated throughout local government with no single person having all the

available knowledge. De-centralisation was a concept that none of the local government officers seemed very consciously aware.

7.2 Financial Pressures

The interviews were designed to explore the financial pressures on Local Authorities, especially to help uncover more about whether open spaces are likely to be sold for their monetary value rather than strategic purposes. Previous evidence showed that Local Authorities are under increasing financial pressure from the government's drive for greater efficiency, especially under its neo-liberal agenda, but it's also interesting to understand how keenly this pressure is felt by the officers directly involved with shaping future provision.

The evidence from the assessments showed that recommendations to dispose of open space were not restricted to authorities with surpluses. For example, Local Authority 11 and Local Authority 18 had gross deficits of 693 ha and 362 ha respectively, yet both made weak recommendations to dispose of assets. This could mean they were trying to release resources to help with other services. Unfortunately the planning officer for Local Authority 18 was unavailable, being on holiday, but the planning officer for Local Authority 11 agreed to be interviewed and when asked whether there were any financial pressures on their open space service, gave the following response:

I'm not aware of any, no.

Overall there was little information available on the causes and effects of under-funding. The planning officer for Local Authority 5 also said there were no pressures but almost half of the planning officers that were interviewed, 6 out of 15 said that they did not have enough knowledge to comment on financial issues relating to the open space service.

Planning officers operate in an environment where budgets are not widely discussed. The resources needed for personnel, office facilities and so on are prone to little fluctuation and are mainly within the remit of the head of service. In addition to this, financial matters are rarely considered as part of the development control process. Until the changes introduced by the Planning

and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, material considerations were traditionally matters restricted to the use and development of land. The response from Local Authority 7 planning officer; when asked whether he was aware of any financial pressures on the open space service was:

I don't I'm afraid. You'd have to ask XXX about that.

The following response from the same authority's leisure officer can be compared to demonstrate the difference in their awareness:

Very much so, yes. [prompt] They are, the Council as a whole, are in, having difficulties, at the moment, the medium term at the moment, the short/medium term, I think next year, for instance, one point, over one and a half million pounds. Er, in cuts. And with leisure being a non-statutory service, they look towards, and, and of course a large spender in the Borough, they look to us to try to find efficiencies. And so how that manifests itself, is not only saying right, here you are, make those cuts and try and make do with less, and they have efficiencies, they also ask, they are looking at whether we go into Leisure Trusts or whatever. Or the other procurement options.

It shows poor levels of liaison between officers within the same authority. Three of the four leisure services officers made similar confirmations that there were financial pressures on the provision of open spaces. The fourth interviewee, from Local Authority 5 confirmed that they were, 'Doing OK', but at the same time, they said 95% of the open spaces within their district, were not in their ownership. Local Authority 5 only owns one park, one cemetery and 'a few civic spaces'.

Four of planning interviewees related financial pressures to planning issues and the pressure on development land, seeing it as a financial consideration influencing the strategic delivery of open spaces. Local Authority 3's planning officer gave the following response:

'Its difficult obviously because the Council is always under pressure to find land for housing, and because we are quite constrained by, we are either basically built up area, or green belt so any open spaces within the built up area, there's quite considerable pressure on them. Which was part of, what the open space study was, set out to see, what our provision is like. Erm I'm not aware of anything that's not public knowledge anyway, as far as particular open space pressures go.'

The assessment from the same Local Authority, which has previously been analysed, showed it has a small gross surplus of open space provision, around 8ha, and a strong recommendation for the disposal of assets, which outlines how, 'Up to 14.1 ha of open space could be disposed of [to obtain] capital receipts in the millions of pounds'.

The evidence from this exploration into local finance seems to suggest that pressure is part and parcel of the government's approach to improving local services but it is not positively influencing planning decisions. This is a significant constraint to the neo-liberal agenda, something on which the government placed great hopes. Most planning officers aren't aware of the financial constraints that open spaces services are under. They are therefore unlikely to be able to protect them against loss or protect the local communities that rely on them. The position of Leisure services is additionally quite insecure. Pressure is being heightened as a result of the lack of joined up thinking, as well as budgetary cuts and it is not being directed into equitable service improvements. Instead they are prioritising by focussing on flagship projects. This evidence suggests Local Authorities could do more to assist local communities and problem areas. They have it within their power to improve joined up thinking, improve efficiency and seek new partners but they are not acting upon it. At the same time they are powerless against increasing market pressures, which may be driving up land values and placing open spaces at risk.

7.3 Central Funding

This area of exploration will add further evidence about local government officer's interpretation of the way central government funding policies influence open spaces. It is an important area because it helps with an understanding of how the relationship between local and central government is evolving. It provides more evidence related to whether local government is responding positively to the neo-liberal push for a more de-centralised open space service instead of monopolistic styles of state infrastructure. The literature review

revealed how local government is financially dependent on government for around 66% of its funding (1999/2000 Local Government Financial Statistics, cited in Rydin, 2003, p. 103). A high degree of control has been maintained over local services in this way. Although legislation such as The Local Government Act 2000 has given wider powers to obtain partnership funding, Local Authorities have never been given independent tax raising powers. The position means Local Authorities cannot obtain further resources from central government for non-statutory services like open spaces, it can only divert existing Council tax receipts, the ceiling on which is centrally controlled. Local Authorities are however, expected to make year on year improvements through Best Value (ODPM, 2006a).

Mild dissatisfaction with central government's funding approach was referred to by two of the leisure service interviewees one from Local Authority 9, who said:

Er yes. [prompt] Erm budget being squeezed by central government, which means that services are having to make efficiencies.

And one from Local Authority 2a who said:

There is an acknowledgement if you like, that a lot more needs to be spent on parks. But it's how you achieve that, you know, do you put up Council tax even more, or is education more important.

The majority of planning officers declined to comment on this issue, once again believing it was something that they knew little about. Two of the interviewees referred to central government grants such as the Lottery Fund. This could reflect some resignation to the fact that additional central funds are only currently available through one off sources of funding even though these are declining. The neo-liberal policy direction described by Baroness Andrews, Parks Minister, referred to in the literature review, is that the government has no plans to increase central funding. Instead it wants to promote partnerships and utilise schemes such as the Green Flag Award to drive up local standards (Appleby, 2006, p. 15).

It is a policy stance that seems to have been accepted by the interviewees in this research. The planning officer for Local Authority 2 had a sufficiently broad enough awareness to be able to make the comment:

Again, I'm not involved in the funding side but I should imagine green flag award, things like that erm influence the quality of our open space in the end and erm any funding that's associated with aspects, again that's off the top of my head.

Leisure services officers showed an even greater level of awareness about central funding issues. They appeared to be willing to express their fears for open spaces but both their lobbying power for new resources and their ability to co-ordinate future provision is much weakened by their generally under-informed planning colleagues.

Another interviewee from Local Authority 10 described the way central government has promoted the use of S106 agreements:

Erm, I can't really comment on broad stuff, on green space I think the government is trying to look at planning obligations to fund virtually everything going. Circular 5/05 seems to give us some leeway to try and provide, if you like, a roof tax on a variety of community infrastructure. Including green space. [Questionable robustness of the assessment] We might drop into some of those categories. [Identification of surplus areas] We've sort of avoided that. We are trying to get a discussion going about what we want. Which ones we want. Erm, that's proving to be little bit hard.

It reflects a certain level of exasperation with government's high expectations for S106 agreements. PPG17 used it as a key justification for Local Authorities to carry out open space assessments. The above comment indicates however, that this, as a funding approach, it could be rather uneven. The data collected from the previous stage of the research showed assessments were rarely robust and further to this only eight out of twenty-five made planning policy recommendations necessary to improve the S106 framework. Instead the majority of Local Authorities made corporate recommendations for more Local Authority funding and the above comment helps show why.

A 'hands on' approach to delivering parks and gardens was also evident in the comments of some of the interviewees and there is nostalgia for large, well-resourced services. It supports the positive endorsement in National Audit report from 2006, showing 84% of green space managers believe the quality in their Local Authority is improving or stable (Regeneration News, 2006, p.1) but it is not the prospect of more central resources or the prospect of S106 receipts that is causing this optimism. The next stage of this research will examine whether it could be the prospect of *disposing* of open space that is encouraging officers in the public sector to display such optimism.

7.4 The Scrutiny of Open Spaces

PPG17 has set out the way officers should evaluate open space provision in their area. Part 4.7 of the companion guide set out below, is a reminder of the way in which the evidence from the assessments should be incorporated into the planning process:

The Planning Green Paper (see endnote 4) and the Government's follow-up policy statement *Sustainable Communities - Delivering Through Planning* (see endnote 5) make clear that one role of the planning system is to deliver the land use elements of other local strategies. Where suitable local strategies exist, therefore, it will be important to identify what these elements are. This should lead to a published corporate view on those facilities which should be protected or enhanced, where new facilities may be required, and those which it may be acceptable to use for some other purpose. This will provide a clear, open and transparent rationale for any redevelopment proposals (ODPM, 2002, p.15; 4.7).

To understand more about the extent to which officers would be able to implement such a comprehensive process, they were asked whether they thought the assessments had increased the level of scrutiny of open spaces. The overwhelming majority of interviewees 10 out of 15, thought it had. One said no and two didn't know. Two also gave ambiguous answer, partially saying yes and partially saying no. Examples of those that thought it had increased the level of scrutiny were Local Authority 10 and Local Authority 1 whose officers gave the following comments:

Yes, definitely. By highlighting open space, by identifying functional open space its much harder for asset management, development

control to develop open space, no matter how small or how poor in quality or how, sort of unloved it is in terms of value. So, in a way the onus is on those people to prove that it is surplus. Erm, so we've, we've in a way plugged the leak and now we've got to figure out, what are we going to do with this leak? That's where our area forums and our members might help us, but members are very protective of every blade of grass that's in the Borough. They see it as erm, something, they, they feel that they've lost a lot of open space over the years. Blame the planners!

Erm, I think it possibly has. I haven't really thought about it too much, probably think its, it's probably helped inform erm, where we are looking around the Borough er, increasing green and open spaces, where we've identified deficiencies so. It's certainly homed in on that area.

All of the interviewees who thought the assessments would lead to increasing scrutiny of open spaces saw it in a similarly positive light. This evidence shows that far from the assessments being regarded as a tool for disposing of open spaces, they are being viewed as an aid to their protection. The critical issue in this respect, is the policy debate that preceded PPG17 related to whether the process of scrutiny will inevitably lead to an increase in the probably of disposal for development, which will require analysis.

The only interviewee from Mid-Sussex who believed the assessment had not increased the level of scrutiny on open spaces had the following comment:

Sorry, beg your pardon? [prompt] In terms of what the Council's done or for the general public? [prompt] For the wider public, I imagine its not made too much. But certainly our leisure colleagues are impressed with it. They use it a lot and obviously it's come in handy in our planning work. [prompt] Erm, it's all to do with housing sites as always in this area of the world. The impact of, areas, which erm people put up, want development in certain areas. So what we'd need them to provide with that housing. The requirements in terms of that.

There were numerous other positive comments in the interviews to show how helpful officers have found the assessments. This list is summarised below;

- Used to resist the loss of open space
- Develop supplementary planning document
- Drill down into the issues it highlighted
- Safeguard the areas that are important
- Make a link between leisure and planning
- Build on the results especially the quality audit

- Lead to a green space strategy
- Make it harder for asset management and D.C to develop open space
- Put the onus on people to prove there is a surplus
- Identify deficiencies
- Look at it more strategically, through management
- Set local standards

It appears from the evidence in this part of the research that local government officers have welcomed the evidence produced by PPG17. The audit stage was helpful in creating a reference document for policy and development control work. It may also have been helpful in identifying the number of open spaces coming under development. Officers certainly reacted to the question, about whether the assessments had increased the level of scrutiny of open spaces' in a way which suggests that 'scrutiny' is seen a positive force for protection, rather than a negative one. The response of the interviewee from Local Authority 9 was perhaps the most comprehensive, it showed the authority has used its assessment to improve their approach through the Unitary Development Plan, a subsequent Open Space Strategy, as well as grant applications.

It is refreshing evidence to see that officers have taken PPG17 to be a positive intervention and also that they have a certain amount of ownership of the results. Officers are keen to enforce greater protection of open spaces. Unfortunately, from the previous evidence identified in this research, a strong contradiction exists. 21 out of 25 Local Authorities made weak or strong recommendations for the disposal of assets, published in their assessments. Its not yet apparent how these recommendations will be reconciled with the positive outlook described here by the officers.

7.5 Options that Exist for the Disposal of Open Spaces

There is a contradiction between the way officers perceive the results of the assessments, and the recommendations they contain. Officers hold a favourable opinion because of the potential they have to help protect open spaces. They do not however, appear to be concerned about the threat to open spaces identified with low values, or the fact that the majority of Local Authorities have localised surpluses within their areas. In order to try to

uncover the real extent of this contradiction they were asked about the options that exist for disposal in their authority. It was considered important to help interviewees feel confident about expressing their views even though some of the toughest issues had already been laid out in the public domain. They were therefore referred to the relevant recommendations from their assessments and interviewees subsequently gave surprisingly different responses to the ones they had given when asked whether open spaces were under greater scrutiny. Appendix 5 shows the responses of the interviewees beside the corresponding recommendations in the Local Authority assessments.

After the interviewees were informed about detailed recommendations in the public domain, a much closer correlation between the evidence contained in the assessments and the responses in the interviews was arrived at. 11 out of 15 of the responses by the interviewees came into conformity with the possible disposal of open space. This means the significant majority of interviewees were willing to amend their original interpretation of the assessments, which they had previously described as a tool for protection. Two of the interviewee's responses did not change, especially at Local Authority 21 where the Leisure services interviewee said they were going in the 'opposite direction' and they intended to provide more open space. Two said that they didn't know. This evidence leads to some doubt over the extent to which officers are informed about the disposal of open spaces, due to the following possibilities:

- The recommendations in the assessments are not clear.
- Local government officers are not fully conversant with the evidence that has been produced in the assessments.
- Local government officers perceive the results of the assessments as having low relevance to their day-to-day work.
- Local government officers are not giving consistent advice.
- The processes involved in disposing of assets are not within the remit of planning or leisure facilities officers.
- The frequent use of specialist consultants, rather than government officers to carry out the assessments has resulted in a lack of ownership of the results.

Two of interviewees subsequently indicated that recommendations for disposal would be translated into policy, whilst six indicated that they would be used as a material consideration. It means they are prepared to support the options for

disposal of areas of open space, even though they initially had a low awareness of these recommendations. What seems unequivocal is that options for disposal have deliberately been incorporated into the assessments. The high incidence combined with the flexible responses of the officers, shows that Local Authorities want to keep their options open. It could be because they wish to protect development opportunities that surround one or two key site but it could simply be evidence of officers being put 'on the spot'. The knowledge that such a high number of authorities; 21 out of 25 in the wider sample group, have referred to the need for further site evaluation, or disposal of sites, whilst officers at the front line have little knowledge of the options, adds weight to the assumption that decisions about open space disposal are taking place higher up the organisation.

In order to demonstrate this point the following newspaper article has been extracted from the Ely Weekly News (Morgan, J. 2007, p.5). It portrays one Local Authority in the sample group's approach to the disposal of open space.



Fig. 7. Ely Weekly News (Morgan, J. 2007, p.5)

The newspaper article was the first public acknowledgement of a proposal that was only known about by a few officers and kept confidential for over a year. It shows The Council is proposing to dispose of a public asset, a swimming pool, to be able to fund the £10m cost of a new, bigger facility. To do this it would also have to release associated playing fields and cricket pitches valued

around £11,860,637 (personal com, Cambridgeshire County Council Strategic Asset Development Manager, 2007). It would result in the loss of a town centre facility within easy access of a large number of people, and the creation of an alternative out of town facility, shown on the plan below. The land transaction could feasibly release an additional £1,860, 637 for other purposes, presuming the project is completed within the budget.

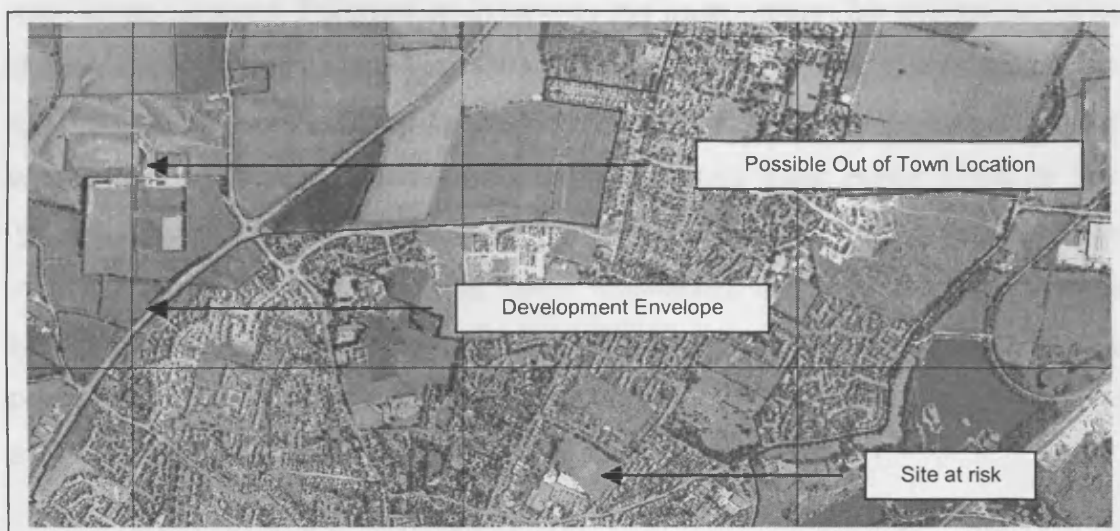


Fig. 8. Leisure Proposals for the Northern Perimeter of Ely, East Cambridgeshire reproduced from ESRI (UK)'s MapExplorer 2.0

The case study relates to a sports field, which is outside the remit of this research but the process for exchanging recreation land is perhaps one that other Local Authorities would follow.

This Local Authority was one of four in the sample group that made no recommendations for the disposal of assets, demonstrating the opaque nature of the decision making process. It helps with an understanding about why very few interviewees might have been willing to confirm specific options for disposal within their Local Authority. It also indicates that an even greater number of Local Authorities could be examining the possibility of disposing of open spaces, than the analysis of the assessments revealed. The only interviewee that was prepared to discuss options for disposal in detail, asked for the information to remain 'off the record'. It related to another town centre site, about 3.5ha in size, similarly due to be relocated on the outskirts of the town. In the circumstances where recommendations are contained in formal

policy guidance, the probability of disposal of open spaces is assumed to be the greatest.

The evidence from the interviews is that little insight is being used to develop disposal options in a holistic way. The danger for the service is that open space provision will be re-structured according to market pressures, rather than strategic need. The trading of land in the town centre, for cheaper land on the outskirts demonstrates this point. The range of options discussed by the interviewees was extremely narrow. None said the Private Finance Initiative was an option, although The Urban Green Spaces Task Force refers to it in 'Green Spaces, Better Places', as a way to inject money into open space infrastructure (DTLR, 2002, p.40). Local Authorities are regarding open space too simplistically, as a financial tool that can be used to offset costs but in the process they are delivering physically de-centralised services rather than politically de-centralised ones.

7.6 Use and Value

The examination of 'Use' and 'value' has been identified as a key issue for this research. Firstly because of the historical prominence in the debate into how to protect open spaces, and secondly because of the inclusion of these two words in current policy. As the literature review indicated, there may be no single authentic mode of assigning meaning to some words, their meaning can be constructed (i.e. produced and reproduced) in the context of power and domination, which can privilege official discourses over others (Atkinson, 1999, p. 59). The aim therefore is to try to understand more about what meaning the Local Authorities have assigned to these words and how this might be affecting the open space service. A brief reminder of the correct protocol for determining use and value, and the policy debate behind it is useful here.

In 1999 The London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) tried to draw a line in the sand by stating:

If open space is viewed as fulfilling a wider role than its use value alone, the loss of quantity cannot be justified by improved quality or greater use of remaining open space' (Arup, 1999, p.49).

The government's Companion Guide to PPG 17 drawn up by Kit Campbell Associates responded in 2002 by stating:

Value is an entirely different and separate concept from quality. It relates mainly to three things;

- Context
- Level and type of use
- Wider benefits' (ODPM, 2002, p. 67;10.3).

Crucially, LPAC asserted that 'value' was not a means by which open space should be measured, whereas the government asserted that it was. Both incorporated the term 'use' to support their interpretation.

The latter definition fits neatly with terminology in PPG 17, which explains how open space needs to be measured in order to establish whether it is 'surplus to requirements'. As follows:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space or the buildings and land to be surplus to requirements. For open space, 'surplus to requirements' should include consideration of all the functions that open space can perform. Not all open space, sport and recreational land and buildings are of equal merit and some may be available for alternative uses (ODPM, 2002, p.6;10).

In order to determine whether spaces are 'surplus to requirements', Local Authorities should consider each open space against the specific criteria Kit Campbell Associates set out, 'Context', 'levels of use' and 'wider benefits'. These in turn, were to be evaluated using a list of relevant issues; structural and landscape benefits, ecological benefits, education benefits, social inclusion and health benefits, cultural and heritage benefits, amenity benefits, a 'sense of place' and economic benefits (p. 68, 10.25). Once this had been carried out and a quantifiable form of 'value' had been arrived at, Local Authorities were expected to cross reference it with 'Quality' measured according to a 'locally derived benchmark', as the table below shows.

<p>High quality/low value</p> <p>Wherever possible, the preferred policy approach to a space or facility in this category should be to enhance its value in terms of its present primary purpose. If this is not possible, the next best policy approach is to consider whether it might be of high value if converted to some other primary purpose. Only if this is also impossible will it be acceptable to consider a change of use.</p>	<p>High quality/high value</p> <p>Ideally all spaces and facilities should come into this category and the planning system should then seek to protect them.</p>
<p>Low quality/low value</p> <p>Wherever possible, the policy approach to these spaces or facilities should be to enhance their quality <i>provided</i> it is possible also to enhance their value. If this is not possible, for whatever reason, the space or facility may be 'surplus to requirements' in terms of its present primary purpose.</p>	<p>Low quality/high value</p> <p>The policy approach to these spaces or facilities should be always to enhance their quality and therefore the planning system should seek to protect them.</p>

Table 12. Evaluation Matrix from the Companion Guide to PPG17 (ODPM, 2002, p.69; 10.27)

When the interviewees were asked how they thought 'use' and 'value' could be determined, unsurprisingly none were able to refer to the method outlined above. They gave a variety of responses, summarised as follows;

- Snapshot surveys
- [No specific suggestion]
- Local opinion would be an important factor
- The survey work that was carried out... various policies that people value over others
- Don't know
- Specified in the audit
- We looked at quantity and quality
- We haven't worked out how to approach it yet
- That's our next step really
- At tick chart was used for the assessment
- Quality and what sort of functions areas can fulfill
- Our parks people made a subjective view... if I get told to get rid of it I get rid of it
- That's something else that needs to be done as well
- We've not gone down that particular road
- That might be something that the leisure department would advise us on

These responses reflect poorly on the rigor with which open space assessments appear to have been carried out. It also reflects poorly on the workability of the system because only four of the interviewees appeared to believe the assessments had addressed this area. It should have been one of the primary objectives. The evidence that 'value' does not have a locally understood definition highlights additional problems with the implementation of the guidance, particularly in relation to those sites with low value and low

quality that would be vulnerable to disposal. Local Authorities are supposed to enhance the quality of these areas, '*provided* it is possible also to enhance their value'. This would seem very difficult when government officers don't have the relevant information. Six interviewees believed that more evaluation still needed to be carried out. There can therefore be little confidence in the way open spaces have been defined as having low use and low value.

7.7 Type and Location of Open Spaces Most at Risk

This part of the research aims to uncover which areas are most at risk, to try to establish whether any patterns exist in the types of open spaces that have been identified as surplus to requirement and whether this particularly affects deprived areas. The aim is to develop the evidence needed to support the research hypothesis. It drew out some surprisingly detailed comments from the interviewees who clearly felt much more comfortable at this stage in the interview, about discussing issues around the loss of open space. It could have been because the question was a general question about 'the type' of open spaces most of risk. The responses verified earlier findings from the research, and one in particular was very detailed:

Erm you mean the ones that have come out scoring low value low quality uh? [prompt] Well a couple of them have been put forward in a housing document that's at examination at the moment. [prompt] Erm one of them is, the one I'm thinking of 'XXX' is a erm, is unusual in a way. Is open space, it's actually sealed off from the public. Erm, at least its got fencing all around it. None-the-less local people were saying it formed a valuable, they claimed it had a lot of value in terms of open space. So that was audited and it came out low quality, low value, potentially because there is no public access. People, there are no facilities on site and things like that. Erm, so that's been put forward for housing. But we'll wait and see... the inspector's report is due later in the year.

This response from Local Authority 8 shows a resolve to see a particular open space developed, but a restricted approach to determining whether the quality of this area could be improved to enhance its value. Other Local Authorities had similar practices. The following is a summary of their responses when asked what type of open space was most at risk;

- The mindset is that small areas of open space are not much use, I personally disagree

- I would say that a lot of them will be the recreation grounds that don't provide us with the range of facilities
- Anything that doesn't have a formal planning designation would be more at risk
- A real mixture
- We will identify them in a site allocations development plan document
- There is a problem with losing sites in the Greenbelt
- Sites identified through the asset management strategy
- I couldn't say at the moment I'm afraid
- Big tracts of land that are fairly basic
- We have identified them in the housing document
- The poorest quality ones and the incidental open space in housing estates
- They are all over the place
- Probably the areas where there's intense pressure
- They would be identified in the Unitary Development Plan
- The ones that had been put on the asset list

Many of the interviewees could identify the types of open space most at risk but there was a wide distribution. Six of the interviewees fell back on traditional planning methodologies, like those spaces without formal designation of protection in the Unitary Development Plan. Two referred to the asset management process, which falls outside the remit of planning but the majority of them avoided linking this issue to socio-spatial patterns of distribution. One interviewee from Local Authority 1, employed in the leisure department, said 'Friends' groups make it hard to dispose of open spaces. He did, however believe that development pressure plays a part in the decision making process.

These responses underline the variety of open spaces at risk. Prominent in the mind of town planning professionals seems to be the privately owned land but the sale of Council owned land is known to be an important issue. Advice was given to several authorities by their consultants' as this excerpt from Local Authority 17 shows:

Sale of Council land

Generating and reinvesting resources obtained from land, which is surplus to requirements is a principle that has been successfully adopted in the London Borough of Bromley, and by Glasgow City Council (through its Parks and Opens Spaces Strategy).

This is, however, likely to be a long process, and ultimately may prove difficult to achieve. If considered feasible at some future stage, reinvestment would:

- secure political credibility for the sale of land,
- provide sufficient funding to carry out significant rather than purely minor open space improvements. It should, however, be realised that the process may take two/three years to introduce, owing to planning, legal and other restrictions which could delay its introduction,
- also, this mechanism is likely to be create some public controversy and its potential success depends on how the process and sale of land is sold to the public in terms of benefits and outcomes.

Given this kind of information, and the evidence showing 21 out of 25 Local Authorities are identifying areas for further evaluation or disposal, public areas must be at risk. Local Authorities should be taking much more account of 'quality' and 'value' than the responses of the interviewees seemed to indicate. Planners are aware of development pressures but the evidence did not conclusively show that any particular type of open space was more at risk than any other.

To probe this issue further the interviewees were also asked whether any particular spatial locations were more likely to lose open space than others. It was aimed at answering the third research question, related to the characteristics of change in the open space service. The secondary evidence from the literature review showed that open spaces in deprived areas are thought generally, to be worse than open spaces in affluent areas. Those deprived communities who may have unequal power within the governance structure can be soft targets for cuts and consequently have their quality of life more detrimentally affected. Concerns have been expressed in other research, like the study of Local Authorities Green Space Strategies by the Committee of Public Accounts, which found that green space is in decline in one sixth of urban Local Authorities, predominantly in deprived areas (Unknown Author, 2006, p.8).

When they were asked about whether particular spatial locations were more at risk of losing open space than others, the officers responded in the following way;

- We still own the land and the 'Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) manage the housing, so we are looking at ways of using their land like that
- Fairly well scattered throughout the Borough
- Those areas where they have got an over-supply
- They are more vulnerable if they are not managed by the Council, we are a historic seaside town
- There hasn't really been much pressure to develop any of them
- The best and worst areas are next to each other
- A broad sweep across the district
- The areas of post-war expansion is where we've got much greater provision, which ones of those are likely to lead to surpluses isn't entirely clear
- We've not got to necessarily go down that route
- There's no real pattern, they are all over the place
- The deficient areas are scattered across the borough
- No they are all over the place
- No I don't think so
- I think it's a bit of a mixed bag
- I don't know again I'm afraid

Overall the responses showed a tendency by planning officers to fall back, once again on traditional planning techniques, like land-based issues, to determine questions of distribution. Interviewees found this easier to interpret than the subjective issues about use and value. Three of the interviewees converted their thinking to surpluses and deficits in answering this question but it doesn't generally tie in with the findings from the assessments that Local Authorities proposing to dispose of open space often have gross deficits. Two interviewees confirmed that disposal of public open space associated with municipal housing would be likely, whilst six of interviewees said the areas affected by potential loss would be evenly distributed. By looking across the sample group it can be determined that disposal would not be restricted to the southeast of England, where development pressure is thought to be greatest. Only one interviewee referred to the accessibility criteria put forward by PPG 17 as important in monitoring distribution.

7.8 Powerful Stakeholders

PPG 17 directly draws on the stakeholder theme by promoting a community-led approach for setting new, locally derived benchmarks for open space provision. It talks about promoting 'Friends of Parks' groups to engender a sense of ownership. It sees this as an aid to community regeneration and a means to tackle anti-social behaviour. This concept had been recognised by several of the Local Authorities in the sample group. For example when Atkins Consultants were appointed to carry out the open space assessments for the London Boroughs of Local Authority 21 and Local Authority 1, they concentrated on safe outdoor areas, social cohesion, opportunities for community events and educational activities. The earlier evidence from the assessments showed that eleven out of twenty-five of the Local Authorities in the sample group already carried out community co-ordination and seventeen intended to increase it in the future but their initiatives were small scale. By cross referencing these findings with other findings from the assessments on funding options it was also possible to show there was little substance to their intentions. The community is also the most popular group for Local Authorities to work with, more popular than the business sector other government partners combined, but the rhetoric about stakeholder working was not met by practical achievements.

To try to understand more about this the interviewees were asked whom they thought the most important stakeholders would be in the process of determining whether to dispose of open spaces. The majority gave responses that indicated they thought it was the Local Authority. Despite the raft of government guidance and greater community involvement being a key theme of the planning reforms, six out of fifteen indicated they thought the Local Authority was the *only* relevant stakeholder. Local Authority 6 referred to the landowner, itself, the Strategic Partnership and the Leisure and Recreation Board, but no other stakeholders, effectively excluding the local community. The interviewee for Local Authority 3 gave a fairly typical response:

I would think the politicians would have a big influence on that erm, I think also quite a few sort of local groups, environment forum and things, they'd be very interested, well they'd want to put forward their

views. But I think that the politicians would probably have the greatest influence.

It confirms the earlier finding from this research that stakeholder involvement is only a 'nice to do' option. Local people can 'put forward their views' but not they are necessarily able to influence the decision-making process. It also confirms that the assessments were generally only paying 'lip service' to government policy on devolved services. The interpretations of Local government officers show they do not actively support reforms to the planning process, relying instead on traditional techniques and this could be leading to open spaces at even greater risk, epitomised by the interviewee from Local Authority 1:

Well I mean that's obviously the Council's asset management structure that manage that really at XXX.

7.9 Strategic Approach

The evidence from the assessments showed that 21 out of 25 authorities made recommendations for the further analysis or disposal of open space, presenting a high probability of structural change in the service. The interviews have already confirmed that policies are flexible in relation to open space disposal and they have also confirmed that decisions about disposal are being made within the Local Authority, without proper, if any, community consultation. This is informed by what is accepted in mainstream economic theory as the 'bid-rent' curve. It describes how, in a normal mono-centred urban area, under free market conditions, property furthest from the central business district is generally less valuable. This model is designed to enable value to be theoretically accurate, by combining non-market as well as market values. It is helpful in drawing broad conclusions about the characteristics of de-centralisation that might be occurring to open spaces although it has to be remembered that this model will not fit all situations.

It demonstrates why development land at the centre of a typical urban area is usually more valuable than land on the periphery. It also explains why open space at the centre will typically be under the greatest pressure for disposal.

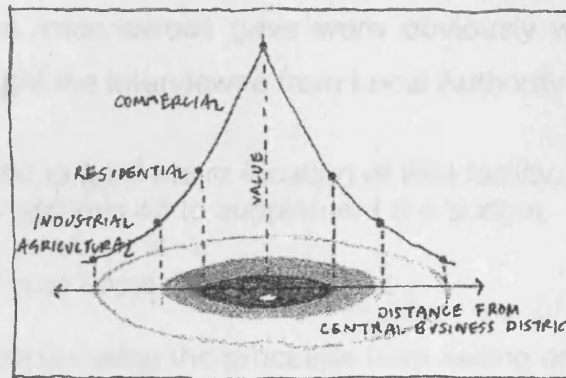


Fig. 9. Bid Rent Curve (Heikkila, 2000, p.82)

A very basic open space strategy might lead Local Authority decision makers to identify opportunities to trade land in central locations, for land in peripheral locations because they may be able to collect windfall payments at the same time. What such a strategy wouldn't take account of are accessibility, sustainability and equality issues and it would also be impossible to re-create the original open space if the relocation scheme was a failure.

Interviewees were asked about strategic options for the provision of open space in two parts, to enable the responses to be weighed up together. It started with a description of the evidence from the assessments as follows:

Well this is the last question now. The research that has been undertaken has showed that 21 out of 25 Local Authorities have recommended the further analysis or disposal of open spaces. It could result in either of two possible outcomes; the first is that open space could be sold to generate resources to enable new open space to be provided in areas of deficiency. Providing a more equitable distribution of open space throughout the area. Do you think that's a possibility in [name of authority]?

The other outcome is that open spaces could be sold to reduce the authorities asset base, and bring about a greater reliance on partners to provide open spaces, which is also in line with government policy on rolling back state services. Do you think *that's* a possibility in [name of authority]?

A negative response to both questions would lead to the finding that open space is being disposed of at the Local Authority's discretion, for purposes other than improving the overall provision of open spaces.

The answers the interviewees gave were obviously well considered. Whilst pausing for thought the interviewee from Local Authority 6 said:

Might be used to fund the re-location of that facility. Can't see it happening though. Sell sections off to supplement the budget.

The interviewee from Local Authority 9 said:

Erm, if you mean using the proceeds from selling one piece of open space to provide another piece in a, in an area that's been deficient, no. Well I can't say it would never happen, but I haven't seen it happen so far.

The interviewee from Local Authority 2a said:

What, get rid of all the crown jewels like they did years ago? (laughs) [prompt] I think the other thing is, some of the Boroughs, what they've tended to do which, maybe crosses over with some of your answers is, they've tended to identify what they term as 'Premier parks'. So they might direct additional resources to, if you like, the main parks, and then spend less money on some of their green spaces. [prompt] Premier parks, it's, it's something that's cropped up in the last few years, and if you look at some of the websites, for London, Waltham Forest has got premier parks, Barnet has. So, and what it is is where you've only got a limited resource, going back to your other question, across a few of them, where you've only got a limited resource, you can only keep up, say nine to a dozen of your main parks, to a particular standard. Then you direct the majority of your finances to or resource into those areas and let the others, sort of, you don't keep them to as high standard.

Across the sample group 4 out of 15 said it was possible the resources would be re-used within the service, 5 said it wasn't and 6 said they didn't know. It shows Local Authorities probably would not address strategic open space options such as ensuring disadvantaged communities have proper access to open space. Some interviewees referred to the need to improve quality, some referred to the lack of available land to create new open spaces and some indicated there was an insufficient demand for redevelopment of open space but the evidence is that the majority of Local Authorities have not developed strategies based around creating a 'network of open spaces' as the guidance suggests. Instead the resources obtained from the disposal of assets, which is known to be likely in 21 out of 25 cases, would be re-allocated to other services or used elsewhere.

The next part of the question was intended to extrapolate any information about alternative means of re-structuring the service. Out of fourteen responses that were successfully recorded, seven said there would be a greater reliance on partners, 4 said there wouldn't and 3 said they didn't know. In other words, the Local Authority would look to other sectors to deliver open spaces in the long term. Local Authorities are already known, however, not to have concerned themselves with identifying private partners, and stakeholder involvement is still in its infancy. The officers clearly had greater expectations from their 'partners' than were realistic, creating a dangerous position for open space provision.

7.10 Summary of the Findings from the Interviews

The interviews with 15 local government officers provided a means of finding out what is happening at the forefront of open space provision. They were able to shed light on the issues surrounding open spaces, providing a much clearer picture of the effectiveness of new government policy. They were able to verify some of the earlier findings and expose weaknesses in the government's neo-liberal approach. They also helped fill gaps to address the main research hypothesis. The results have been grouped thematically, in the same way as the results from the assessments, according to the key pressures on open spaces identified during the literature review.

7.10.1 Neo-liberal reform and Funding

Half of planning officers that were interviewed during this research felt they did not have enough knowledge to comment on the financial issues having an effect on open space services. Many could only relate financial pressure to land use issues. Much of the pressure they are aware of is as a result of housing growth. New development and growth areas attract investment and deliver new open spaces through S106 agreements but this doesn't address spatial inequalities. There is a lack of joined up thinking. There are poor levels of liaison between various officers involved in the delivery of open spaces and a lack of shared knowledge. Planning officers can't respond positively to the

government pressure for reform because they aren't aware of the heavy financial constraints that their colleagues in the open space sector are under. Budgetary cuts and land constraints are pressures that are not producing equitable service improvements and planners are not generally helping to strengthen the lobbying power of the open spaces sector.

Evidence from the interviews showed the new policy framework is not well understood by those involved in managing public open spaces services. They feel they have few options for improving services so they superficially apply policy procedure to engineer the disposal of open spaces and release resources. The interviewees frequently referred to grants but this resource stream is known to be drying up and the low levels of resources could be adding pressure to take a 'flagship' approach, or 'premier parks' as one interview described it. Maintaining quality can be a key justification for disposing of parks that do not fall into the premier category. Local Authorities are consistently affected by high demands on the service. Leisure services struggle to make the year on year improvements required by government and they are unable to consider local community requirements as a major factor in determining spending or strategic priorities. Financial pressure is part and parcel of the government's approach but the interpretation of officers at the front line is that Local Authorities are not converting this into reforming the service.

7.10.2 Neo-liberal reform and Partnership Working

During the interviews very little evidence came to light about partnership working, reflecting the findings on local ownership from the assessments that Local Authorities are not particularly interested. Partnerships were not referred to in the sense of funding, or in the sense of risks to open space. The question on the options for disposing of open space set out specifically to identify evidence on innovative new practices like partnerships, but revealed nothing on this issue. However, the evidence showed that when faced with the bleakest scenario, of the loss of large areas of open space; local government officers would identify 'other sectors' as a method of delivery. The latter stages

of the interviews showed that this scenario was not unfeasible as a result of Local Authority asset management policies but even so, they had done very little to support partnership working. Interviewees showed exacerbation with the government's high expectations for S106 agreements, which could be construed as a form of partnership with private developers for providing infrastructure. They find themselves in a position to influence S106 receipts through policy and negotiation but the evidence shows that central government has been too optimistic. They have also been too confident about the speed with which different kinds of initiatives would lead to partnership. Private Finance Initiative, despite the best efforts of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force, has not made it onto the local agenda. Other pressures mean public open space is being put at risk before partnerships can be established.

7.10.3 Neo-liberal reform and Public Participation

Evidence was identified in the interviews to show that pressure for more stakeholder involvement is not having the desired effect. It is failing to help result in devolved decision-making or more accountability for open space services. This is because Local Authorities thought *they* were the most important stakeholders. They still have nostalgia for large, well-resourced services with a hands-on approach to delivery. Despite the gradual withdrawal of state funding there is very low use of stakeholder involvement to ease financial pressure. At the same time officers indicated there has been very little public reaction to the assessments, raising doubt over how realistic the government's proposals for stakeholder involvement in delivering open space services is likely to be.

There are sensitive issues related to the disposal of land but the decision-making process is unnecessarily opaque. Despite the raft of government guidance on stakeholder involvement, many Local Authorities give little consideration to the local community in deciding which assets to sell. In this respect the assessments have been paying lip service to community involvement, and community consultation has been carried out in a tokenistic way. Decisions to dispose of open space are not based on sound evaluation

techniques and this is known because none of the interviewees were able to refer to the 'use and value' criteria set out in the guidance. Asset managers with no knowledge of the relevant environmental or social issues are apparently leading the process.

7.10.4 Local Constraints on Neo-liberal Reform

The findings from the interviews showed that Local government officers, when questioned about the open space service, adopt a flexible approach and amend their interpretations to fit with disposal options before them. Superficial evaluations and tokenistic attempts at determining 'locally derived standards' dominate the way many open spaces have been earmarked for disposal. It shows that Local Authorities are keeping their options open regarding the disposal of assets and they are probably doing this to be able to pursue their own agenda. They are secretly developing options surrounding key sites, and use the resources from the liquidation of assets to sustain monopolistic, hands-on methods of service delivery. They are helped by the opaque nature of the decision making process. The evidence has shown that reluctance to engage with the government's agenda is significantly affecting open space provision by causing pressures to be channeled in this particularly short-term way.

Local Authorities have been exposed, on the whole, as unwilling to observe national policy and this is a major constraint on the devolution agenda. 'Fiscal rectitude' is being enforced by central government but there is little to compliment the rolling back of the State service embodied in open space disposal. There is very little evidence of spatial planning. Officers prefer to fall back on land-based planning techniques. Limited State intervention is evident in the earlier finding that seventeen of the Local Authorities in the sample group have a localised deficit in quantity and this deficit is likely to increase with the trends identified in the interviews. The market could help offset the shortfall by offering private open space on new developments but there is little consideration of this issue by local government officers. Local Authorities have

not developed strategies based around a 'network of open spaces'. Their decisions so far, have been extremely ad hoc. All types of open space seem to be at risk but patterns of disposal will probably be linked to market factors, aligned to the theory of the 'bid-rent' curve, as this is what is driving the changes.

8.0 Analysis of the Findings from the Interviews

The first research question set out to establish how much the Local Authority delivery of open spaces reflects the Neo-liberal agenda. Below is a reminder about the way government officers could have interpreted the current reforms, especially if they were being fully delivered at the local level. Perrons' perspective is:

The role of the state should be confined to providing a stable framework within which free markets and private capital can flourish; it should not therefore regulate prices or wages...and neither should it be involved in productive activities, which should be privatised if not already in the private sector (Perrons, c2004, p. 56).

It correlates with national guidance on open space provision in the UK, showing a trickle down effect from the national to the local level. For example, the Urban Green Spaces Task Force advises that:

The government should promote greater private sector involvement in partnerships for improving urban parks and green spaces, by providing guidance on ways in which businesses can engage and benefit from working with local communities, voluntary organisations and local authorities to create green spaces as part of new development, as well as improving existing local spaces. (DTLR, 2002, p.40)

Dissenting views, regardless of how eminent their source, were not incorporated into the national guidance. The London Planning Advisory Group was unsuccessful in persuading government that any attempt to evaluate open space would inevitably lead to greater loss. There was no history of political management in this sector and not even an audit of open spaces existed but Local Authorities were directed towards reform. Evidence of the neo-liberal nature of this process came with the requirement for all local authorities to measure what was available including public and privately owned land. According to Perrons' description above, open space provision should contribute towards meeting the neo-liberal objectives of:

- A stable framework provided by the State
- Flourishing free markets and private capital

- No regulation of prices or wages
- No productive activities
- Privatisation

These principles were translated into the planning guidance on open spaces in the following way:

- An open space strategy devised by the Local Authority
- The evaluation of open space according to need
- The freedom for Local Authorities to dispose of assets at market value
- Devolve service provision responsibilities to Stakeholders
- Audit on private sector provision

Determining how fully local government officers have adopted the neo-liberal agenda can therefore be said to revolve around identifying their responses to these key policy requirements.

The interviews provided evidence on how officers foresaw the open space strategy unfolding. This revealed that it probably would not have the effect of providing a stable framework. The flexibility of their responses, depending on what information was in front of them, indicated that decisions about disposal are being made in an ad hoc way, driven by the internal decision making process rather than a transparent system. Officers confirmed that Local Authorities probably would not address strategic open space options such as ensuring disadvantaged communities have proper access to open space. Some referred to the need to improve quality, some referred to the lack of available land to create new open spaces and some indicated there was an insufficient demand for redevelopment of open space but the evidence is that the majority of Local Authorities have not developed strategies based around creating a 'network of open spaces' as the guidance suggested.

The second strand of the neo-liberal agenda, the evaluation of open space according to need, was even less evident. The evidence from the interviews highlighted how officers failed in their task of understanding value. It reflects a significant weakness in the planning policy guidance, which could undermine the government's whole approach to the provision of recreational facilities because the reliance on 'use' and 'value' as key measures to decide whether open space should be retained or not, is at best, impractical. The inability of

Local Authorities to be able to follow the complex advice in the guidance should have been foreseeable to Kit Campbell Associates when they devised it. Especially given the widely known resource constraints within Local Authorities and the capacity issues highlighted through various government reports, including the Egan Review. It suggests the possible disposal of open spaces as a retrospective means for obtaining the resources to pay for assessments, but this compromises the impartiality needed to undertake value measurements. The evidence has shown that in determining whether open spaces are surplus to requirements or not, Local Authorities have been encouraged to make tokenistic attempts.

Thirdly, Local Authorities have been given the freedom to dispose of assets at market value, contributing to free market principles in the wider economy. This they appear to have taken forward with some enthusiasm. The evidence should not be surprising given the financial background discussed in the literature review. The overall costs of open space provision are enormous. The February edition of Horticulture Week in 2006 described research by Cabe Space entitled 'Urban Parks – Do You Know What You're Getting For Your Money?' It showed that national spending on parks is about £800 million. At the same time many Local Authorities are unable to say how this is split or what they are trying to achieve (Appleby, 2006, p. 15). The literature review also showed that the average budget of every parks department in England has been cut by £265,000 a year between 1981 and 2001 (Urban Parks Forum, 2001, p.6) but local government officers, especially planning officers, felt they did not have enough knowledge to comment on these financial issues. The disposal of assets seems to be the only neo-liberal policy that is accepted by Local Authorities, possibly because of the local desire to sustain monopolistic methods of service delivery.

The State would like to Local Authorities reduce their productive activities and this has resulted in a push towards more 'stakeholder involvement'. It is an important feature of the government guidance on open spaces with the aim of devolving administrative powers to allow the Local Authorities to 'steer' instead of 'row'. Despite the background showing that disadvantaged communities

need more 'stakeholder' involvement, to address inequalities in provision that already exist, there is little evidence from the interviews that Local Authorities see it as important. To try to address inequality in the built environment, central government has introduced new benchmarks to measure local government performance for biodiversity and quality of life. This is part of its 'liveability agenda' in which outdoor leisure is seen as part of the solution to social problems like exclusion and poverty.

Unfortunately the research found that officers interpreted the Local Authority as the most important Stakeholder and six out of fifteen indicated they thought the Local Authority was the *only* relevant stakeholder. It confirmed the earlier finding that stakeholder involvement is perceived as a 'nice to do' option with local people being able to 'put forward their views' but not necessarily being able to influence the decision-making process. This validated earlier findings that the assessments were generally only paying 'lip service' to government policy on devolved services. The concept of involving Stakeholders seems particularly unpopular with officers, perhaps because of the lack of resources at their disposal. This seemingly intangible problem adds weight to another body of academic work, related to the many unavoidable constraints to comprehensive planning, including the human cognitive limitations. Rittel & Webber identified 'wicked issues' in their research, 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning'. These are problems apparently so complex, that resolving them causes other even more complex problems to emerge (1973).

Finally, as part of the new neo-liberal reforms, local government officers should be embracing partnership. This is happening elsewhere, according to the background information, but not within the sample group. Authorities in Cambridgeshire set up Cambridgeshire Horizons, a non-profit making company, and it has led to a 'Green Infrastructure Strategy', as well as a 'Green Infrastructure Forum' to help tap into new resources. It has recently held a workshop to examine the partnership options for the long-term management of strategic open spaces. This organisation lists its objectives on the home page of its website as:

- To co-ordinate development and infrastructure implementation
- To overcome barriers to development projects
- To secure funding commitments for infrastructure
- To ensure developments employ high quality sustainable design (Cambridgeshire Horizons, 2007, p.1).

It highlights how partners can aim to deliver open space outside the state system, to compliment the government's growth agenda but this individual example is outweighed by the evidence from the sample group showing the majority of Local Authorities do not engage in partnership working, and that they simply are not interested. Only when faced with the bleakest scenario, of losing large areas because of policies for disposal, do local government officers consider 'other sectors' as an alternative method of delivering open spaces.

What this means is that only one of the five strands of neo-liberalism identified by Perrons is being pursued at the local level. It relates to the freedom for Local Authorities to dispose of assets at market value and the other four reforms are being largely ignored. It means reform to open spaces will take place in the absence of a stable framework provided by the State. It will also take place in the absence of evaluating need so the market will have a reduced role and the service will continue to be relatively monopolistic. This was not the way that New Labour envisaged its neo-liberal agenda being delivered and it could potentially significantly unbalance the outcomes.

9.0 Analysis of the Effect of Neo-liberal Reform on Open Space in England

The third research question sought to identify effects, to be able to say with some certainty how the application of neo-liberal reform, rather than the theory, is influencing open space provision. This was necessary because the literature review revealed government was intent on applying its new agenda without really weighing up what the risks to open spaces could be. There was concern by some, including the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) about the principle of evaluating open space and they recommended the much less sophisticated process of blanket protection. In contrast, evaluation was seen by government as a way of increasing market pressures on open spaces, by trying to identify whether the open space is needed and driving up standards. The evaluation process has not worked in the way it was intended and the worst fears of LPAC could have been realised. To ascertain the full effects of neo-liberalism on open spaces the following analysis compares the evidence from the assessments, about how new approaches are actually influencing local open space policy, with the evidence from the interviews about policy implementation. It is helpful once again to revisit the literature review to be reminded how neo-liberalism was designed to be applied in the UK.

The literature review identified neo-liberalism as a driving force behind de-centralisation, especially 'limiting State intervention', 'privatisation' and 'fiscal rectitude' from the Washington Concensus (Rodrick, 1996, p.1). Together these required State services like open space provision to be devolved. It looked at globalisation and the UK governments attempt to protect society from the negative effects globalisation is said to produce. It described the government's agenda for delivering economic growth alongside social equality. It highlighted the critical importance of partnership to this agenda and some of the difficulties government is encountering, including resistance by those opposed to the privatisation of public industries. The over-arching impression was of a conflict between local and central government that could be

damaging to services like open spaces because of inconsistent management and funding arrangements.

Public participation was explored as the second important element of the government’s approach, alongside partnership. The literature review showed how community groups were seen as key stakeholders in the government’s vision of a de-centralised service, based on ‘third way politics’. Broad debates were examined to understand how the idea of transferring local government responsibilities to the public has been received across the sectors, including debates in the Town Planning sector, where support is by no means comprehensive. Further examination was then undertaken into the way government is using its funding regime to increase the pressure on Local Authorities. This was followed by a brief historical review to identify how open spaces have been distributed in the past and the vulnerability of certain groups in society to losing their open space.

What can now be said with some certainty because it has been revealed by this research is that open spaces are not being reformed in the way government intended. The pressure for reform is not resulting in open space services being devolved to other partners, and stakeholders are not significantly shaping the way services are provided. Many of the decisions affecting open spaces are being made behind closed doors with the effect that people are being separated from open spaces, both politically and physically. Findings from the assessments and the interviews are presented together in the table below:

1. Thematic Effects introduced by the Neo-liberal Agenda - Funding	
Evidence from the Open Space Assessments	Evidence from the Interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Government Executive Directors and the Policy and Resources Committees of Local Authorities seem very likely to influence patterns of open space distribution in the future. ▪ Fear prevails about how to address the funding gap, perhaps related to the effects it would have on political power-brokering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Half of planning officers that were interviewed during this research felt they did not have enough knowledge to comment on the financial issues. ▪ There is a lack of joined up thinking. ▪ Planning officers can’t respond positively to the government pressure for reform because they aren’t aware of the heavy financial constraints that

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Authorities explored funding issues in a discrete way but showed they wanted to pursue their own agenda. ▪ Financial pressure has caused parks to be looked at in a new light. They are no longer places of recreation, but land banks ready to release financial resources. 	<p>their colleagues in the open space sector are under.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Budgetary cuts and shortages of development land are pressures that are not producing equitable service improvements and planners are not generally helping to strengthen the lobbying power of the open spaces sector. ▪ The new planning policy framework is not well understood by those involved in managing public open spaces services and overlook its finer requirements for open space evaluation. ▪ Maintaining quality across other sites can be a key justification for disposing of individual open spaces. ▪ Financial pressure is part and parcel of the government's approach but the interpretation of officers at the front line is that Local Authorities are not converting this into equitable services.
<p>2. Thematic Effects introduced by the Neo-liberal Agenda - Partnership</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 82% of Local Authorities do not know very much about the potential for partnership because they have not carried out the Open Space Assessment. Even amongst those that have, a significant number did not progress sufficiently well with to obtain a definitive record of open space in their area. They are simply not interested in moving towards public-private partnerships. ▪ The State's monopolistic style has led to localised deficits in quality and quantity, alongside surpluses, pointing to unequal service delivery. ▪ Local Authorities would like to retain service delivery responsibilities but local people are now widely exposed to falling open space standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ During the interviews very little evidence came to light about partnership working ▪ Only when faced with the bleakest scenario of the loss of large areas of open space; did local government officers identify 'other sectors' as a method of delivering them. ▪ The bleakest scenario could arise as a result of Local Authority activities but even so, they had done very little to support partnership working. ▪ Government has been too confident about the speed with which different kinds of initiatives would lead to partnership. ▪ Public open space is being put at risk before partnerships can be established.
<p>3. Thematic Effects introduced by the Neo-liberal Agenda - Participation</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Authorities support the principle of participation but they have no substantial ideas to take forward. ▪ They do not associate stakeholder involvement with any form of 'fiscal rectitude', treating it as a 'nice to do' option. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pressure for more stakeholder involvement is not having the desired effect. It is failing to help result in devolved decision-making or more accountability for open space services. ▪ Officers interpret Local Authorities as the most important stakeholders and they still have nostalgia

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are some individual examples of stakeholders carrying out tasks such as volunteering, or forming 'Friends Groups' but policy recommendations were on the whole 'weak'. ▪ The assessments themselves contained little evidence of a local demand for more control over the management of open spaces. ▪ Managerial systems of open space delivery are deeply entrenched in Local Government thinking. ▪ Local Authorities are keen to improve open spaces only within the framework that they themselves felt most comfortable and on the whole that doesn't involve other people making decisions for them. 	<p>for large, well-resourced services with a hands-on approach to delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite the gradual withdrawal of state funding there is very low use of stakeholder involvement to ease financial pressure. ▪ There has been very little public reaction to the assessments, raising doubt over how realistic the government's proposals for stakeholder involvement in delivering open space services is likely to be. ▪ The decision-making process is unnecessarily opaque. ▪ Local Authorities give little consideration to the local community in deciding which assets to liquidate. ▪ Community consultation has been carried out in a tokenistic way. ▪ Decisions to dispose of open space are not based on sound evaluation techniques and this is known because none of the interviewees were able to refer to the 'use and value' criteria set out in the guidance.
<p>4. Thematic Effects introduced by the Neo-liberal Agenda – Local Authority Constraints</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Almost half of Local Authorities that undertook an assessment are unwilling to confirm the full extent of surpluses; they are more willing to confirm the extent of deficits and hope for central grants to become available. ▪ They are reluctant to engage with the Neo-liberal agenda although this didn't stop proposals for the disposal of open spaces. ▪ The interests of the local community were found to be of fairly low importance when it came to considering the disposal of open spaces. ▪ When it came to meeting the governments requirements for applying the 'locally derived standard' Local Authorities often manipulated the outcomes by choosing criteria that are not shown in the guidance. ▪ Assessments were not robust and whilst the planning system cannot deliver improvements the State service cannot, be rolled back very easily. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local government officers, when questioned about the disposal of open space service, adopt a flexible approach. ▪ Local Authorities are keen to keep their options open regarding the disposal of assets because they are keen to pursue their own agenda. ▪ Local Authorities are secretly developing options surrounding key sites, and using the resources from the liquidation of assets to sustain monopolistic, hands-on methods of service delivery. ▪ Reluctance to engage with the government's agenda is significantly affecting open space provision by causing pressures to be channeled in counter-productive ways. ▪ Local Authorities have been exposed, on the whole, as unwilling to observe national policy and there is little evidence of spatial planning.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Authorities dream about expanding their portfolio of open spaces by capital investment but there is little entrepreneurial innovation and the large numbers of officers inputting into decisions affecting open spaces does not help this situation. ▪ De-centralisation means open spaces are being lost in urban areas where Local Authorities have a strong asset-base, but not being replaced and service responsibilities are not being shared. ▪ There are the beginnings of a process whereby open spaces are being physically 'marginalised'. ▪ There is separate evidence for the polarisation of service delivery, with the average Authority having significant over-provision in some areas alongside under-provision in others, which 'marginalisation' now stands to enhanced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Authorities have not developed strategies based around a 'network of open spaces'. ▪ Patterns of open space disposal are probably linked to market factors like land value.
---	--

Table 13. Neo-liberal Influences on Open Space provision from the evidence in the Assessments and the Interviews

The neo-liberal funding regime is having a significant effect on open space provision in England. Government has put planning policy guidance in place to help deliver a composite audit of quality and quantity. This is part of its drive towards de-centralisation but the wider funding policies are having an effect on the way the results of the audit are being used. Proper evaluation is not always the primary concern to those with management responsibility. Parks and green spaces are now being evaluated for the financial opportunities they represent and planning officers perceive this as distinctly different process to the type of planning they are involved with, because it is related to asset management.

The neo-liberal push for partnerships is having very little positive benefit for open spaces. Although government has set out its objectives for all Local Authorities to measure public and private provision, seen as the first stepping-stone to 'privatisation', completed assessments are infrequent. The evidence from a random sample of those that were completed along with the evidence from the interviews showed that many Local Authorities have stonewalled the pressure for reform and open spaces continue to be managed in a traditional

way. They will continue to be affected by shortfalls in funding, impacting on quality and quantity.

The government's interests in public participation have also had little effect on the open space provision in the UK. Against a background of uneven funding, open spaces have failed to capture the stakeholder support that would be necessary to safeguard them from disposal. There has been no significant move by local authorities, other than by paying lip service in their assessments, to engender more public participation. Networks of open spaces have not been created as government wanted. Instead, only the prestigious parks with existing support from 'Friends' groups, or other politically valuable allies, have been able to escape the attention of asset managers looking to release resources.

Finally, local political constraints on the neo-liberal regime have probably produced the most dramatic effect. The assessments provided evidence to show data had been manipulated to ensure Local Authorities could continue to pursue their own agendas. The interviews confirmed that the combined forces for reform were being channelled in one particularly unhelpful direction, the disposal of State owned open space to raise public finance. To make matters worse the interviews confirmed that the resources released from liquidating public assets would not be ring fenced, meaning the resources would probably be spent largely on other services. State owned open spaces would continue to be at risk from 'evaluation', like privately owned ones. The open spaces most at risk would be those where market pressures are the greatest, generally equating to urban locations.

10.0 Analysis of the Characteristics of De-centralised Open Space Services in England

Current changes to open space are an expression of neo-liberal policy in England. The evidence relating to low administrative de-centralisation but greater physical de-centralisation suggests that this policy regime could now start to manifest itself spatially. It is interesting to consider how open space infrastructure is likely to be re-distributed in the future, especially to see whether this will negatively affect disadvantaged people, and it may be possible to do this by looking at the characteristics of change. Identifying the general dynamics of change could also help predict the future of open space provision. The following analysis is therefore aimed at answering this third and final research question:

What are the characteristics of De-centralised Open Space Services in England and are there any spatial themes?

The research did not uncover any evidence that any particular type of open space is more at risk than any other. Private land is not, for example more at risk than public land and wildlife areas are not more at risk than formal gardens. It did however; uncover trends linked to policy and financial pressures. The evidence taken together shows Local Authorities will not be delivering an improved open space service. They will fail to re-dress the quantitative shortfalls that were evident in seventeen out of twenty-five of the assessments, and it is likely that capital sums from the disposal of open space will only be used on prestigious projects to raise the perception of investment in public park infrastructure, instead of across the network. The community is not engaged enough to take responsibility for service provision and other partners are not forthcoming. The evidence can be used to show that the State, civil society and the private sector will each have a different role with the following characteristics:

The State

- No strong plan for delivering a network of open space
- No leadership of other sectors to help deliver open spaces
- Plan making dominated by market pressures
- Weak, tokenistic open space policy
- Gradual loss of existing State owned areas
- Small number of high quality prestigious parks
- Few new parks and green spaces created
- Manipulation of evaluation and monitoring procedures
- Individual parks used as examples of good practice
- Little acknowledgement of the wider changes in provision to protect the political status quo
- Financial priorities leading the decision-making process
- Reactive solutions to complaints about quality from the public to save resources
- Ongoing financial pressure as resources trickle away

Civil society

- Detached from the processes of open space service delivery
- Poor degree of collective action to provide or care for open spaces
- Demand for good quality open spaces expressed through complaints about objective issues like dog fouling
- Uneven influence over the quality and quantity of nearby provision
- Greater demand for property with access to nearby open space
- Low support for increased public spending
- Unpleasant urban environment
- Lack of recreational opportunities
- Poorer quality of life
- Increasing reliance on charitable institutions to provide access for excluded people

The private sector

- Cater to public demands for more open space

- Specialised provision to the customer
- High profile marketing of open space within new housing developments
- Profit-driven design and layout
- Small informal areas with restrictions on use and access
- Focus on particular spatial locations e.g. affluent growth areas
- Cause a decrease in the demand for State owned open space
- Cause a decrease in the support for more public spending
- Low consideration of biodiversity issues
- Low consideration of equality issues
- Fee charges for provision of environmental tourist attractions
- Acquisition of public assets for redevelopment
- Privatisation of the public realm

The combined roles of these three sectors will, over time, be expressed in a new spatial distribution of open spaces that could be called the enviro-spatial distribution. This would be similar to the way Sassen describes socio-spatial distribution, but instead it would be an expression of the relationship between open space and the new economy in post-industrial cities. This is because the causes of change in open space provision can now be seen as similar to the causes of social polarisation described by Sassen in 1991. Future open space distribution could heavily reflect local land values and the casualisation of State ownership. It helps explain *why* open space provision is likely to become even more polarised, with some dense and some sparsely distributed areas but the precise nature of *how* this is happening is best described through the mechanics of the market combined with statistical probability.

The analysis of the evidence found that decision-making within Local Authorities is not transparent. It is carried out in secret without holistic input from the range of professionals involved in the service and it is not linked to a justifiable method of open space evaluation. Only four out of fifteen interviewees were able to confirm that disposal of assets would lead to more equitable service provision. Under these circumstances, where there is little managerial control over distribution, there is likely to be a strong correlation between disposal and market factors. Individual parcels of land from the Local

Authorities list of assets will start to be sold and the lack of alternative sources of funding for Local Authorities means this process will be ongoing, driven by the demands of the market. In the absence of a strong framework and on the basis of probability, open space will be more likely to be sold in areas where there is most demand, and least political resistance. The bid-rent curve (Heikkila, 2000, p.82) indicates that open spaces with the greatest value are usually those in central areas. Deprived urban communities in city centre locations may offer least political resistance to this pressure and they will be most vulnerable to losing their open spaces. They will be least well equipped to engage in the political process, and least able to get access to other alternative, private infrastructure.

This research showed that Local Authorities probably own about one third of the open space provision, around 300 ha each, and two thirds is owned by other sectors including the private sector, charities and trusts. Local Authority land is dispersed within centres of population and it is highly correlated with areas of social housing, from the post-war construction boom. Local Authorities are also responsible for many village greens, recreation fields and municipal parks. The other sectors are likely to own larger tracts of land on the periphery of urban areas, golf courses and wildlife reserves for example. Organisations like the National Trust and the Royal Institute for the Protection of Birds collectively own 276, 410 ha in the UK and they are the third and eighth biggest institutional landowners in the UK respectively (Cahill, 2001, p.147). These private organisations will not however be affected by the same market pressures as the public bodies and they will probably retain land ownership because of their independent status. The gradual process of State disposal of open spaces will result in a shift in provision, so that people will come to rely more on the peripheral areas. This shift will be enhanced by rural policy aimed at making Britain's countryside a playground for the urban population. Unfortunately people will only have good access to the countryside if they are in the elite group that owns private transport and can afford to pay any entrance charges that the owners of open space may wish to impose in the future.

The picture of a de-centralised open space service has emerged clearly enough to be able to understand what is happening and why. It is interesting now, in the final stages of this analysis to look at what should be happening. The Rural Strategy produced by DEFRA in 2004 highlighted inequalities in access to open space with the following statistics:

There is clear evidence that some groups of people visit the countryside less often than others or not at all. For example, 97% of visitors to National Parks are white and 70% are over 35.... Visiting the countryside can do much to improve people's physical and mental health, and general enjoyment of life. There is, for example, clear evidence that regular walking can dramatically reduce the risk of certain illnesses. Our policies are particularly focused on encouraging more people to become more active in the countryside as part of the Government's overall health agenda. To this end we will invest in ensuring that those living in deprived urban areas become aware of such benefits (p. 44).

The reality of bringing deprived people into contact with remote countryside areas is perhaps more difficult. Sport England has been given this difficult task in their Public Service Agreement (PSA3) for delivery by 2008:

To increase the take-up of cultural and sporting opportunities by adults and young people aged 16 and above from each of the priority groups.¹ The priority groups are defined as those from black and minority ethnic groups, those with a limiting disability, those people in lower socio-economic groups and in the case of sport, women are also defined as a priority group (Sport England, 2008, p. 2).

What will make this target difficult to achieve, is the decline in accessibility to open space brought about by the neo-liberal agenda. This research has uncovered that it will probably affect the priority groups more significantly than any other. It reflects poorly on the key commitments set out by government in 1999:

- We will be forward looking in developing policies to deliver results that matter, not simply reacting to short-term pressures.

- We will deliver public services to meet the needs of citizens, not the convenience of service providers.

- We will deliver efficient, high quality public services and will not tolerate mediocrity.
- We will value public service, not denigrate it (Cabinet Office, 1999, p. 15).

Pressure to dispose of public areas could spell the collapse of much of the existing network and this will only serve the government's neo-liberal agenda by reducing the need for taxation. It will not however; serve the interests of deprived people who will lose access to publicly maintained open space in central locations. These are the locations where Local Authorities traditionally have the most assets. Deprived people have very little lobbying power to influence the political decisions that affect them. It raises the likelihood that because of the pressures of neo-liberalism, open space provision in England could be de-centralised to benefit the most affluent members of society. New open space could take a more fragmented form, 'Configured', as Graham & Marvin put it, 'To serve affluent communities and bypass intervening ones' (2002, p. 382). The communities that are most vulnerable to this loss will be the ones with least resources and less than equal power in the decision-making process. Instead of readily accessible open space within urban areas, there will be a need to gain access to private facilities or travel to rural areas to find recreational opportunities. It supports the second part of the research hypothesis that; a physical shift is occurring in parks and green space provision, away from central areas.

The second part of the research hypothesis has been proven but the first part, relating to administrative de-centralisation was not. It makes it possible to confirm that open spaces are being physically de-centralised but not politically de-centralised. Government appears to be benefiting from the asset disposal bonanza but it is failing to meet its Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for liveability, to:

Lead the delivery of cleaner, safer, greener public spaces and improvement of the quality of the built environment in deprived areas

and across the country, with measurable improvement by 2008 (Treasury, 2006, p. 1).

Secondary evidence from the literature review suggested it might be so. There was the National Audit report from 2006, (Cited in Regeneration News, 2006, p.1) explaining that 16% of green spaces are continuing to deteriorate. There were also concerns expressed by the Committee of Public Accounts in their study of Local Authorities Green Space Strategies which found that green space is in decline in one sixth of urban Local Authorities, predominantly in deprived areas (Unknown Author, 2006, p.8). There was also the evidence from the Urban Parks Forum in 2001, that there is a polarisation of parks, with good ones getting better and bad ones getting worse (2001, p. 78). Williams. & Green said that, 'Empirical research consistently shows that public space in deprived areas is poorer than in more affluent areas' (2001, p.11). This evidence shows the trend towards social inequality will probably worsen as the number of open spaces in the urban environment continues to decline, largely because of a less than transparent local decision-making process. The economic incentive for Councils to dispose of assets in urban areas is too great. It offers them a way out of their financial difficulties without devolving their responsibilities, which suits the local power brokers.

11.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has made findings that will be quite shocking to people involved in the open spaces sector. They will recognise the trends being talked about, but they may not have been aware of the wider picture and the uneven effect of reform. This is typical of the way open space provision has evolved over recent years. It is rarely considered in a collective sense. On the occasions that it is, evidence is provided after change has taken place. For example, the decline in standards highlighted by the seminal report 'Park Life' in 1995, was only evident from site surveys and interviews with members of the public following years of under-funding and neglect. When The London Planning Advisory Committee reported that 542 ha of open space had been lost in London over a four year period up to 1993 (Arup, 1999, p. 59), it was only able to do this by investigating planning decisions and by analysing aerial photography after those areas has been developed for housing. The shocking statistics produced by Cahill showing Local Authority land holdings had reduced from 402,130 ha in 1962 to 26,305 ha in 2001 (2001, p.147) were only available after nearly forty years. This research has taken a different approach by trying to warn about major changes in spatial distribution, which are happening at the current time.

The evidence has produced a fairly depressing picture about the political conflict that appears to be irrevocably changing open space provision but there are mechanisms available to compliment local *and* national agendas. Assuming Local Authorities would rather lose all the open space they own, than let go of service delivery and the power that goes with it, more of these mechanisms need to be found. The first identified here is the 'ring-fencing' of budgets. By ensuring that any resources obtained from the disposal of open space are re-directed into the service, there will be a less negative effect and existing disparities in distribution can start to be addressed. It may be difficult to achieve without statutory support but 'ring-fencing' has something to offer at all levels. This research showed officers were not interested in entering into public-private partnerships and the service they managed would not be guaranteed any financial benefits even if they did. The ring-fencing of revenue

as well as capital income could therefore be used to help stimulate partnership projects. The vocational rewards it would bring for individual managers could help encourage more entrepreneurial activity in the local government sector.

There needs to be more recognition of the fact that the public sector needs to be at the centre of open space provision. Building on the evidence produced by Alexander Garvin in his book, 'Parks, Recreation and Open Space – A Twenty-First Century Agenda', Local Authorities need to:

- update public facilities in response to continually changing public demand;
- manage the public realm efficiently and economically;
- renovate and reposition publicly owned property for public use;
- reclaim abandoned property for public use;
- combine recreation with other functions; and
- make more effective use of open space in public projects' (p. 5).

He strongly contradicts the idea that private sector involvement is the panacea to problems of under-investment and decline, but he does enforce the idea that Local Authorities have to be more innovative. The evidence in this research showed a poor record of innovation within local government. Changes like reducing the number of officers involved in the decision making process may have something to offer. Lifting the status and decision-making power of open space officers so that the public sector can attract talented individuals would also help. The discipline of Landscape Architecture has much more to offer the public open space service and it should be given more statutory support, like that afforded to the discipline of planning. Case studies, such as those produced by CABI in 'Is the Grass Greener?' also need closer examination to see what innovative ideas can be transferred from overseas.

Both local and central government would probably agree that a stable framework is needed, so this should be recognised as common ground between the two. Practical mechanisms that lever in private resources, without sacrificing this stable framework need to be identified. These could include the

much more widespread use of legal agreements, especially covenants to ensure local residents are made responsible for the care of public open spaces. This would have the effect of building on what is already there rather than taking it away and the planning system can help deliver this change. This approach would ensure 'fiscal rectitude' with the extra benefit of safeguarding open spaces in perpetuity. More areas cared for through carefully agreed covenants and residents management agreements, will break down the monopolistic styles of service delivery, adding individuality to open spaces by encouraging bespoke treatment. Local bio-diversity could also benefit.

Finally, the determination of value, in the 'step by step' process set out in PPG 17 (ODPM, 2002) was always going to be open to criticism. It was not satisfactorily linked to the deliverability of sustainable development. It incredibly underplayed the weaknesses embodied in the subjectivity of the evaluation process and needs to be revised to get away from sophisticated techniques for analysis with which Local Authorities have little chance of succeeding. Academics will no doubt continue to debate theoretical issues such as 'value' but it can't be allowed to impact on provision, in experimental policy production. The advice was 'of the day' and the consultants who wrote it probably felt it was the right time to help move Britain away from the rigid land-based decision-making processes typical of Fordism. In reality their guidance was a gift to those looking to extract resources from public infrastructure. This research has shown that current open space policy combined with the pressure for neo-liberal reform is not helping to address Post-industrial problems of deprivation. Anyone struggling to find new ideas and help ensure neo-liberalism does not lead to the disintegration of open space networks now needs simple guidelines and clarity.

12.0 Bibliography

Appleby, M. (2006) Parks Authority. *Horticulture Week*. 16/2/06, p.15

Arnstein, Sherry R. (1969) *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* [Online].[6/8/07]Available from the world wide web <<http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>>

Arup Economics and Planning. (1999) *Effectiveness of policy in protecting open space in London*. London: LPAC

Atkinson, R. (1999) Discourses of Partnership and Empowerment in Contemporary British Urban Regeneration. *Urban Studies*, Vol.36, (1), pp. 59-72.

Audit Commission. (2006) *Comprehensive Performance Assessment*. [Online]. [23/4/06] Available from the World Wide Web < [http:// www .audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/)>

Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England and Wales. (2004) *People, places and prosperity: delivering government programmes at the local level*. London: Audit Commission

Barnes, M, Newman, J and Sullivan, H. (2007) *Power, Participation and Political Renewal*. Bristol: The Policy Press

BBC News. (2005) *Cornwall fears Over Beach Lifeguard Cover*. [Online]. [15/4/06] Available from the World Wide Web<<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/m199899/cmselect/cmenvtra/477/477mem23.htm>>

BBC News. (2007) *Government Assets worth £337bn*. [Online]. [12.8.07] Available from the World Wide Web<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6316967.stm>

Blomfield, D et al. (2001) Deliberation and inclusion: vehicles for increasing trust in UK public governance. *Environment and Planning*, Vol 19, pp. 501-513.

Burgers, J. (1996) No Polarisation in Dutch Cities? Inequalities in a Corporatist country. *Urban Studies*, Vol 33, pp. 357 – 364.

Burns, D. Hambleton, R and Hoggett, P. (1994) *The politics of decentralisation: revitalising local government*. London: Macmillan Press

CABE.(2003) *Decent Parks? Decent Behaviour?: The Link between the quality of parks and user behaviour*?. London: CABE

CABE Space. (2006) *Do you know what you're getting for your money?* London: CABE

CABE Space. (2004) *Green Space strategies: a good practice guide*. London: CABE

CABE Space. (2004) *Is the grass greener ? : Learning from international innovations in urban green space management*. London: CABE

CABE Space. (2005) *Start with the park: creating sustainable urban green spaces in areas of housing growth and renewal*. London: CABE

CABE.(2004) *The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and public spaces*. London: CABE

CABE and DETR. (2001) *The Value of Urban Design*, London: Thomas Telford

Cabinet Office. (1999) *Modernising Government, White Paper*. London: HMSO

Cahill, K. (2001) *Who owns Britain?* Edinburgh: Canongate

Callaghan, D. (2007) *Loosening the Leash*. [Online].[2/3/07] Available from the World Wide Web<<http://www.PlanningResource.co.uk/doc>>

Cambridgeshire Horizons. (2007) *Driving Forward Sustainable Communities*. [Online].[7/8/07] Available from the World Wide Web< <http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/>>

Carley, M. (2000) Urban Partnerships, Governance and the Regeneration of Britain's Cities. *International Planning Studies, Vol 5, (3)* pp. 273-297.

Chouliaraki, L and Fairclough, N. (c1999) *Discourse in late modernity: rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Cityscape. (2007) *Innovations for the Built Environment*. [Online]. [2/2/07] Available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.cityscapeonline.com/conference>>

Council of Europe. (2007) *The European Landscape Convention*. [Online].[7/8/07} Available form the World Wide Web <http://www.coe.int/t/e/Cultural_Co-operation/Environment/Landscape/>

Curry N. & Ravenscroft N. (2001) Land Use Policy *Countryside recreation provision in England:exploring a demand-led approach, Vol 18, (3)*, pp. 281-291.

DCLG. (2006a) Liveability. [Online].[16.8.06] Available from the World Wide Web< <http://www.communities.gov.uk/citiesandregions/publicationscities/state/keyfindings/liveability/>>

DCLG.(2006b) *Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing*. London: HMSO

DCLG. (2007) *Statutory Homelessness: 1st quarter 2007, England*. London: HMSO

DCLG. (2006c) *Strong and prosperous communities: the Local Government white paper*. Norwich: HMSO

DCLG. (2006d) *Valuing Planning Obligations in England: Final Report*. London: DCLG Publications

DETR. (2000) *Our Countryside: The Future, A Fair Deal for Rural England, The Rural White Paper*, London: DETR

DEFRA.(2004) *Rural Strategy 2004*. London: DEFRA

DEFRA.(2002) *Working with the Grain of Nature*. London:HMSO

DETR.(1999) *The twentieth report of Session 1998-99 of the Environment, Transport and Regions Committee of the House of Commons: Town and Country Parks, the Best and ...* London: HMSO

Detroit News. (2005) *Big 3 market share dips to all-time low* [online]. [14/02/04]. Available from the World Wide Web: <<http://www.detnews.com/2005/autosinsider/0501/06/A01-50668.htm>>

DoE.(1996) *Involving communities in urban and rural regeneration: a guide for practitioners*. London: HMSO

DTLR. (2001) *Green Spaces, Better Places: Final Report of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force*, London: HMSO

DTLR.(2002) *Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces*. London:HMSO

DTLR. (2001a) *Planning Delivering a Fundamental Change*. London: HMSO

DTLR. (2001b) *Strong Local Leadership: Quality Public Services* London: HMSO

Early, C. (2007) Think-tank ridiculed for planning system attack. *Planning* 26/1/07, p.4.

Ellison, M. (2001) A new Role for Recreation? *Countryside Recreation, Vol 9* (3/4), pp. 26-31.

Environment, Transport and Regions Committee of the House of Commons. (1999) *Town and Country Parks, the best and...Twentieth Report of Session 1998-99*, HC 477-1

- English Nature.(1996) *Access to Natural Greenspace Standards in Towns and Cities: A review and Toolkit for Implementation*. Wetherby: English Nature
- Fairclough, N. (2000) *New Labour, new language?* London: Routledge
- Frean, A. (2007) Rich pull away from poor in the classroom. *The Times*. 31/12/06, p.1.
- Friedmann, J. (1995) 'The World City Hypothesis'. Knox, P. & Taylor, P. *World Cities in a World System* (Eds), 317 – 331 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Garvin, A. (2000) *Parks, recreation, and open space: a twenty-first century agenda*. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association
- Giddens, A. (1994) *Beyond Left and Right – the Future of Radical Politics*. Cambridge: Polity
- GLA. (2006) *Child Poverty in London: Income and Labour Market Indicators*. London: GLA
- GLA. (2003) *Housing for a Compact City*. London:GLA
- Graham, S & Marvin, S. (2001) *Splintering urbanism: networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition*. London: Routledge
- Green Space incorporating the Urban Parks Forum. (2003) *Claiming your share: a guide to external funding for parks and green spaces for parks and green spaces community groups*. Caversham: Green Space
- Comedia and Demos. (1995) *Park Life: Urban Parks and Social Renewal*, Stroud: Comedia
- Hackney Borough Council. (2004) Open Space Assessment Volume 1.[Online]. [4.6.07].Available from the World Wide Web<<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/index.htm/ep-local-development-framework-856/ep-evidence-base/ep-open-space.htm>>
- Habermas, J. (1992). *Themes in post-metaphysical thinking (W. Hohengarten, Trans.)*. In *Post-metaphysical thinking: Philosophical essays* (pp. 28-57). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Hall, P. (2002), *Urban and regional Planning: Fourth Edition*. London: Routledge
- Hamnett, C. (1996a) Social Polarisation, Economic Restructuring and Welfare State Regimes. *Urban Studies*, Vol 33 (8), pp.1407 – 1430.

- Hamnett, C. (1996b) Why Sassen is Wrong: A Response to Burgers. *Urban Studies*, Vol 33 (1), pp.107 – 110.
- Harvey, D. (1989a) From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler*, Vol 71B, pp.3-17.
- Harvey, D. (1989b) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell
- Healey, P. (1996) Consensus-building across Difficult Divisions: new approaches to collaborative strategy making. *Planning in Practice*, Vol 11, pp.211-216.
- Healey, P & Hillier, J. (1997) *Collaborative Planning – Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*. London, MacMillan
- Henry, N. McCewan, C. & Pollard, J. (2000), *Globalisation from Below: Birmingham- Post-Colonial Workshop of the World* [online]. [19/10/04]. Available from the World Wide Web: <[http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working% 20papers/henrywp.pdf](http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/henrywp.pdf)>
- Heikkila, Eric. (2000) *Economics of Planning*. Center for Urban Policy Research
- Hodge, G & Greve, C. (2005) *The Challenge of Public-Private Partnerships: Learning from International Experience*. Cheltenham: Elgar
- I&Dea Knowledge.(2006) *Liveability* [Online] [23/4/06] Available form the World Wide Web <<http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=77793>>
- Institute for European Environmental Policy. (2007) *Bio-diversity: New Evidence on How Wildlife Contributes to Human Wellbeing in the EU*. [Online].[23/2/07] Available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.rspb.org.uk/policy/Economicdevelopment/wellbeing.asp>>
- Institute of Landscape and Amenity Management. (2005) *Recognising innovation and imagination in open space management*. Reading: ILAM
- Jellicoe, G & S. (1996) *The Landscape of Man*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Kayden, J.S., New York City Department of City Planning and Municipal Art Society of New York (2000) *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience*, New York: John Wiley and Sons
- Kit Campbell Associates. (2001) *Rethinking Open Space, Open Space Provision and Management: A Way Forward*, A Report for the Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, Edinburgh: The Stationary Office.

- Labour. (2008) *Labour in Government* Available from the World Wide Web [Online].[19.1.08]< http://www.labour.org.uk/labour_policies>
- Law Counsel. (2006) Re: Oak Farm Little Downham. *Private Correspondence with Thomas Cosgrove*, 24.5.06.
- LGA. (2001) *Ministerial Urban Green Space Task Force*. Available from the World Wide Web [Online].[7/9/07]<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/executives/cultural/23_07_01/item11.pdf>
- London Councils. (2007) *Tackle Poverty in London*. Available from the World Wide Web [Online].[12/8/07]<<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=12035&cat=1649>>
- McDowell, L. (1991) Life without father and Ford: the new gender order of post-Fordism. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol 16 (4), pp. 400-419.
- Marcuse, P. (1989) Dual City: A muddy metaphor for a quartered city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, (13) pp. 697- 708.
- Marsh, S. (2006) Better Environment, Stronger Economy. *Conservation Planner*, Vol 24, p.1.
- Massey, D. (1984) *Spatial Divisions of Labour – Social Structures and the Geography of Consumption*. London, Macmillan
- Monbiot, G. (2001) *The Corporate Takeover of Britain*. London: Macmillan
- Morgan, J. (2007) Report Promotes idea for new £10m leisure centre. *Ely Weekly News* 19/7/07, p.5.
- National Parks. (2007) *Britains Breathing Spaces*. Available from the World Wide Web [Online].[11/8/07]<<http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/>>
- National Playing Field Association. (1992) *The Six Acre Standard*. London: NPFA
- National Playing Field Association. (2001) *The Six Acre Standard: Minimum Standards for Outdoor Playing Space, 2001*. London: NPFA
- National Trust. (2004) *The Annual Report and Financial Statement of The National Trust 2004/5*. Wiltshire: The National Trust
- Natural England. (2007) *Sites of Special Scientific Interest*. Available from the World Wide Web [Online]. [25/8/07]<<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/special/sssi/index.cfm>>

Nolan Committee Report. (1997) *Nolan Committee Papers*. Available from the World Wide Web [Online]. [6/8/07] < http://libwww.essex.ac.uk/Archives/Nolan_Committee.htm>

ODPM. (2002) *Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG17*. Norwich: TSO

ODPM. (2006a) *Best Value Performance Indicators* [Online]. [23/4/06] Available from the World Wide Web < <http://www.bvpi.gov.uk/pages/Index.asp>>

ODPM.(2004a) *Living Places: Caring for Quality*. London: RIBA

ODPM. (2002a) *Living Spaces: Cleaner Safer, Greener*. London:ODPM

ODPM.(2002b) *Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation*. London: ODPM

ODPM. (2000) *Preparing community strategies: government guidance to local authorities*. London: ODPM

ODPM.(2004b) *Skills for sustainable communities : the Egan review*. London: ODPM

ODPM.(2006b) *State of the English Cities*. London: ODPM

ODPM.(2002c) *Sustainable Communities: Delivering Through Planning*. London: ODPM

ODPM.(2003a) *Planning Policy Statement 7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas'*.London:ODPM

ODPM. (2006c) *The National Procurement Strategy for Local Government* [Online]. [23/4/06] Available from the World Wide Web<[http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index .asp?id=1136697](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1136697)>

ODPM. (2003b) *The relationships between community strategies and local development frameworks: final report for ODPM by Entec UK Ltd*. London: ODPM

Perrons, P.(c2004) *Globalisation and social change : people and places in a divided world*. London: Routledge

Planning Portal News. (2006) *Barker report proposes wide-ranging reforms to planning system*. [Online]. [13.8.07] Available from the World Wide Web< <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/wales/government/cy/1115314671412.html>>

Preteceille, E. (1990) *Political Paradoxes of Urban Restructuring: Globalisation of the Economy, Localisation of Politics?* in Swanstrom, T. & Logan, J. (1990) *Beyond the City Limits* Philadelphia, Temple University Press

Regen.net (2006a) *Councils are 'reluctant' to transfer public assets*. [Online].[07/12/06] Available from the World Wide Web < <http://www.regen.net/archive/results/>>

Regen.net. (2007a) *Idle bank cash asset transfer plan*. [Online].[16/3/07] Available from the World Wide Web < <http://www.regen.net/archive/results/>>

Regen.net. (2007b) *Kelly aims to deliver 40 buildings to local groups*. [Online].[17/5/07] Available from the World Wide Web < <http://www.regen.net/archive/results/>>

Regen.net. (2007c) *'No major barriers' to community asset transfer*. [Online].[12/4/07] Available from the World Wide Web < <http://www.regen.net/archive/results/>>

Regen.net. (2006b) *Review of asset powers launched*. [Online].[22/9/06] Available from the World Wide Web < <http://www.regen.net/archive/results/>>

Richardson, A. (c2006) *Plants Please*. *Nursery News*, Vol 17, p.13-17.

Rittel, H. & Webber, M. (1973) *Policy Sciences*, Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, Inc. Amsterdam. *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning*, Vol. 4, pp. 155-169.

Rodrik, Dani. (1996) "Understanding Economic Policy Reform" *Journal of Economic Literature* 34(1): 9 – 41. From *Neoliberalism* [Online].[6/8/07] Available from the world wide web <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoliberalism>>

Rydin, Y. (2003) *Urban and Environmental Planning in the UK*. London, Palgrave

Rydin, Y & Pennington, M. (2000) Public participation and local environment planning: the collective action problem and the potential of social capital. *Local Environment*, Vol 5 (2), pp153-169.

Sabatier, P. (1999) *Theories of the Policy Process*. Boulder, Westview

Sassen, S. (1991), *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, Princeton University Press

Sassen, S. (2001) *The Global City – New York, London, Tokyo* 2nd Ed, Oxford, Princeton University Press

Sbuttoni, A. (2006) Urban parks are improving, says watchdog chief. *Regeneration and Renewal*, 3/3/06, p.1.

Saxon, R.G. (2007) Valuing Sustainability: evaluating environmental, social and economic factors. *Environment on the Edge Lecture Series*, New Hall Cambridge, 15/3/07.

Scott, A. J., & Soja, E. W. (1996): *The City – Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*. Los Angeles: University of California Press

Secretary of State. (2006) *The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006*. HMSO: London

Shoard, M. (1997) *This land is our land: the struggle for Britain's countryside*. Stroud: Gaia

Shonfield, K. (1998) *At Home with Strangers: Public Space and the New Urbanity*, Working Paper 8: The Richness of Cities, London: Comedia and Demos

Sport England. (2005) *Taking Part Survey*. London: Sport England

Sport England. (2008) *Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and Sport: Progress report on PSA3: Final estimates from year two*. [Online].[15.1.08] Available from the World Wide Web <http://www.sportengland.org/071213_progressreportonpsa3finalestimatesfromyeartwo.pdf>

Stoker, G. (2004) *Transforming Local Governance*. London, Palgrave

Taylor, J. and Coalter, F. (2001) *Realising the potential of cultural services: the case for urban parks, spaces and the countryside*. London: Local Government Association

Tewdwr-Jones, M & Allmendinger, P. (1998) Deconstructing communicative rationality: a critique of Habermasian collaborative planning. *Environment & Planning, Vol 30*, pp.1975-1989.

Tewdwr-Jones, M & Thomas, H. (1998) Collaborative planning in local plan-making: planners' perceptions of 'planning through debate. *Environment & Planning, Vol 25*, pp.127-144.

Treasury. (2006) *Public Service Targets* [Online]. [23/4/06] Available from the World Wide Web <http://www.hmtreasury.gov.uk/documents/public_spending_and_services/public_service_performance/pss_perf_index.cfm>

UK Houses of Parliament. (2006) *Memorandum by The Open Spaces Society*. [Online].[22/4/06] Available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmselect/cmenvtra/477/477mem23.htm>>

Ulster University Centre for Property and Planning. (1998) *Accessing private finance: the availability and effectiveness of private finance in urban regeneration*. Coventry: RICS Books

Unknown author. (2006) Urban areas face green space cuts. *Horticulture Week*, 19/10/06, p.8.

Urban Parks Forum. (2001) *Public Park Assessment: A Survey of Local Authority Owned Parks Focusing on Parks of Historic Interest*. Caversham: Urban Parks Forum

Urban Task Force. (2000) *Our towns and cities: the future: delivering an urban renaissance*. London: Routledge

Urban Task Force. (1999) *Towards an Urban Renaissance*, London: E&FN Spon

Verma, N.(1998) *Similarities, Connections and Systems: The Search for a New Rationality for Planning and Management*. Oxford:Lexington Books

Whitfield, D. (2006) *New Labour's Attack on Public Services*. Nottingham: Spokesman

Williams, K & Green, S. (2001) *Literature Review of Public Space and Local Environments for the Cross Cutting Review*. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University

Wintour, P. (2006) Brown takes on critics with £26bn gamble. *The Guardian*, 22/3/06, p.1.

13.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Local Authorities in the Sample Group

Adur District Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Canterbury City Council
Chesterfield Borough Council
Chiltern District Council
Craven District Council
East Cambridgeshire District Council
East Northamptonshire District Council
Elmbridge Borough Council
London Borough of Local Authority 1
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Erewash Borough Council
Gateshead Council
Gedling Borough Council
London Borough of Hackney
Hart District Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
Mid Sussex District Council
Newark and Sherwood District Council
North Wiltshire District Council
London Borough of Southwark
Stratford upon Avon District Council
Swindon Borough Council
Worthing Borough Council

Appendix 2: Pro-forma for Analysis of the Local Authority's Open Space Assessments

Name Local Authority:

- Total amount of open space

Amount in Ha

- Amount owned by Local Authority

Amount in Ha

- Whether identified private and public open space separately in the audit

Yes/No/Some

- Partner ownership identified:

Yes/No/Some

- Charity ownership identified

Yes/No/Some

- Private ownership identified

Yes/No/Some

- Housing Association ownership identified

Yes/No/Some

- Local Authority ownership identified

Yes/No/Some

- Community ownership identified

Yes/No/Some

- Developer ownership identified

Yes/No/Some

- NGO ownership identified

Yes/No/Some

- Trust ownership identified

Yes/No/Some

- Common Land Identified

Yes/No/Some

- Other ownership identified

Info

- Partnership Management Identified:

Yes/No/Some

- Charity Management info

Yes/No/Some

- Private Management info

Yes/No/Some

- Housing Association Management info

Yes/No/Some

- Local Authority Management info

Yes/No/Some

- Community Management info

Yes/No/Some

- Developer Management info

Yes/No/Some

- NGO Management info

Yes/No/Some

- Trust management info

Yes/No/Some

- Common Land Management info

Yes/No/Some

- Other management info

Info

- Surplus of total POS

Total Ha

- Localised surplus of POS

Yes/No

- Amount of Localised surplus of POS

Total Ha

- Deficit of POS

Total Ha

- Localised deficit of POS

Yes/No

- Amount of Localised deficit of POS

Total Ha

- Surplus Quality of POS

Issues

- Localised surplus quality of POS

Yes/No

- Deficit Quality of POS

Issues

- Localised deficit quality of POS

Yes/No

- Local State expenditure on POS

Amount

- Adequate Capital Funding

Yes/No

- Adequate Revenue Funding

Yes/No

- Recommendations to Increase Capital Funding

Strong/Weak/None

- Recommendations to Increase Revenue Funding

Strong/Weak/None

- Recommended Better use of Funding

Strong/Weak/None

- Efficiency savings

Strong/Weak/None

- Re-structuring organisation

Strong/Weak/None

- Personnel Recommendations

Strong/Weak/None

- Other

Description

- Any Existing Partnership Co-ordination by the Local Authority

Yes/No

- Examples Partnership Co-ordination
- Any Proposed Partnership Co-ordination by the Local Authority

Yes/No

- Examples Proposed Partnership Co-ordination

- Any Existing Community Co-ordination by the Local Authority
Yes/No
- Examples Community Co-ordination
- Any Proposed Community Co-ordination by the Local Authority
Yes/No
- Examples Proposed Community Co-ordination
- Any Existing Private Co-ordination by the Local Authority
Yes/No
- Examples Private Co-ordination
- Any Proposed Private Co-ordination by the Local Authority
Yes/No
- Examples Proposed Private Co-ordination
- Examination of Public Sector POS Procurement - S106
Yes/No
- Examination of Public Sector POS Procurement - Central State Funded
Yes/No
- Examination of Public Sector POS Procurement - Local State Funded
Yes/No
- Examination of Public Sector POS Procurement - Partner
Yes/No
- Existing Open Space Strategy
Yes/No
- Proposed Open Space Strategy
Yes/No

- Partnership Policy Recommendation
Strong/Weak/None
- Partnership Policy Recommendation Type
Planning/Corporate/Both/LSP
- Partnership Policy Recommendation
Info
- Procurement Policy Recommendation
Strong/Weak/None
- Procurement Policy Recommendation Type
Planning/Corporate/Both/LSP
- Procurement Policy Recommendation
Info
- Strategic Policy Recommendation
Strong/Weak/None
- Strategic Policy Recommendation Type
Planning/Corporate/Both/LSP
- Strategic Policy Recommendation
Info
- Localised issues Policy Recommendation
Strong/Weak/None
- Localised issues Policy Recommendation Type
Planning/Corporate/Both/LSP
- Localised issues Policy Recommendation
Info
- Improve Quality Policy Recommendation

Strong/Weak/None

- Improve Quality Policy Recommendation Type
Planning/Corporate/Both/LSP
- Improve Quality Policy Recommendation
Info
- Improve Quantity Policy Recommendation
Strong/Weak/None
- Improve Quantity Policy Recommendation Type
Planning/Corporate/Both/LSP
- Improve Quantity Policy Recommendations
Info
- Sale of Assets Policy Recommendation
Strong/Weak/None
- Sale of Assets Policy Recommendation Type
Planning/Corporate/Both/LSP
- Sale of Assets Policy Recommendations
Info
- Other Policy Recommendation
Strong/Weak/None
- Other Policy Recommendation Type
Planning/Corporate/Both/LSP
- Other Policy Recommendations
Info
- Total Number Corporate Policy Recommendations

- Total Number Planning Policy Recommendations
- Proposed Standard for Amenity Space
- Proposed Standard for Parks and Gardens
- Proposed Standard for Natural
- Proposed Standard for General Open Space
- Population
- Robust Assessment

Yes/No

- Carried out by Consultants

Yes/No

Appendix 3 : Local Authority Recommendations regarding Surpluses and Deficits

Local Authority	Number of Vulnerable Sites	Recommendations in the Assessments
Local Authority 17	9	'Consider the relocation of open space and recreational facilities in localised areas where there is an oversupply...Address the circumstances in which the planning authority may allow the re-development of an existing open space facility' (Executive Summary). 'Value assessment of amenity sites; There are further sites which although they have above average scores for quality and accessibility, have been rated as having no use. The sites are as follows [9 sites] These sites will need further investigation' (p. 45).
Local Authority 10	13	'This assessment also sets out which are the most important sites we will protect from development, the sites which we will improve as a priority and those sites of low value which we may allow to be built on (p. 5). We make a lot of decisions about green space as a normal part of our day to day work. We decide whether individual green spaces should be built on or protected from development' (p. 10).
Local Authority 6	4	'There may be exceptions where it might be better to convert open space or facilities to other uses... should not be treated as an open door to developing on all open spaces' (p. 114).
Local Authority 18	11	'Current planning policy identifies circumstances when the loss of protected open space may be permitted...when loss is outweighed by need (p.35). 11 sites where there is low quality and low value... enhance... if this is not possible the space may be surplus' (p.18).
Local Authority 7	Not indicated	'Given competing demands for urban land and the need to resolve deficiencies in community park and immediate local open space provision, it will be important not to see all public open space land as sacrosanct' (p 31).
Local Authority 19	Not indicated	'Existing open space...will be protected from redevelopment for alternative uses unless this study identifies they are surplus to requirements [or] it can be demonstrated that have been changes to supply [or] there is no demand' (p.112).
Local Authority 5	Not indicated	'Planning implementation' outlining the process for determining whether a site should be re-designated or allowed to be used for development' (162-172).
Local Authority 13	5	'Planning implementation' strategy recommends sites where quality requires further investigation' (p.56).
Local Authority 11	Not indicated	'Decisions for XXX: Can the Council sell green space to increase maintenance budgets whilst still meeting any recommended standards? Sale of Council land...precedent at Glasgow, Bromley...pros and cons include public controversy' (p.112-113).
Local Authority 2	122	'35.9% of sites are low value & low quality...122 sites...should be prioritised for improvement...policy approach always to enhance ... spaces which do not fulfill any of the above criteria may be surplus to requirements' (p. 7-26).
Local Authority 3	14.1 ha	'Provide advice for any rationalisation (p. 1) Up to 14.1 ha of open space could be disposed of...capital receipts in the millions of pounds' (p.137). To identify where others [sites] can be released (p.3). Only 4% of respondents felt there was more than enough (p.16)...Glasgow and Bromley sold through their strategy' (p.137).
Local Authority 16	23	23 sites of low value and low quality. Sales given as option.
Local Authority 9	Not indicated	'Action plan includes methodology for identifying which if any

		POS have little if no inherent value and are in locations where there is already adequate provision, and which can therefore be shown to be genuinely surplus to requirements (p. 2.4.4) Action Plan... The following forms a checklist to examine individual open spaces 1. Will the loss result in a deficiency? 2. Future Housing sites taken into consideration? 3.High Quality? 4. Other sites considered first? 5. Well suited to other uses? (part 2).
Local Authority 21	112	'112 sites (45%) were identified as having potential for improved site utilisation ...12 of these sites have potential for introduction of other open space uses' (p 10-2).
Local Authority 23	8	'Where there are amenity spaces with overlapping catchments, further investigation should be made into the value of these sites and the level of usage. Where value is deemed to be low, re-designation should be considered...should be viewed as an opportunity (p 65). A loss of open space was a key theme in all consultations and emerged as the primary area of concern, with residents keen to ensure that all existing open space is preserved. Despite this, many consultees felt there to be sufficient open space (p.34). [Open spaces] face competition from various developers including sport and leisure' (p. 2).
Local Authority 8	91	Refers 'surplus requirements' advice in guidance (p. 194) 'Review the need for 91 sites' (p. 35) ...wasted space (p 205)
Local Authority 1	Not indicated	'Category 3 Sites with Low Value scores...There will be spaces that can be sold if surplus to requirements.'
Local Authority 24	Not indicated	'Small sites project... identify sites less valuable as POS...use for low cost housing.'
Local Authority 15	Not indicated	'[PPG17] does recognise that all open space is not equal in merit and consideration of alternative use may be appropriate, or replacement provision secured elsewhere.'
Local Authority 4	Not indicated	'Investigate the release of funds.'

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Do you know what the general outlook is on open spaces within your authority?

Do you know whether there are any financial pressures affecting the service?

Do you know whether central government funding policy is influencing the service?

Do you think PPG17 has increased the level of scrutiny on open spaces?

[Brief on policies in the assessment for areas that may be surplus to requirements]
Do you know what options exist for the disposal of open spaces?

The planning guidance places a lot of emphasis on 'use' and 'value', how do you think the 'use' and 'value' of open spaces should be determined?

Which open spaces do you think are most at risk?

What is the character of spatial location of open spaces most at risk?

Who would be the powerful stakeholders in any decision to dispose of open space assets?

Well this is the last question now. The research that has been undertaken has showed that 21 out of 25 local authorities have recommended the further analysis or disposal of open spaces. I think that that this could result in either of two possible outcomes; the first is that open space could be sold to generate resources to enable new open space to be provided in areas of deficiency. Providing a more equitable distribution of open space throughout the area. Do you think that's a possibility in [name of authority]?

The other outcome is that open spaces could be sold to reduce the authorities asset base, and bring about a greater reliance on partners to provide open spaces, which is also in line with government policy on rolling back state services. Do you think *that's* a possibility in [name of authority]?

Do you have any general comments on any of the issues we have discussed?

Appendix 5: Recommendations in the Assessments beside Local Government Officers interpretation of the Options for disposing of Open Space

Local Authority	Recommendations in the Assessments	Interviewees Comments on the Options for Disposal of Assets
Local Authority 10	<p>'This assessment also sets out which are the most important sites we will protect from development, the sites which we will improve as a priority and those sites of low value which we may allow to be built on (p. 5). We make a lot of decisions about green space as a normal part of our day to day work. We decide whether individual green spaces should be built on or protected from development' (p. 10).</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: 13</p>	<p>Erm, mmm, erm, to build on green space? [prompt] Um, there would have to be exceptional reasons for building on it. You can nibble, obviously we try to get compensation, like for like or better, er or and better. But there aren't any whole-scale losses at the moment, we are talking small, very difficult spaces that almost cause, if you like, a crime and disorder issue. You know, little old, alleys of space that were old garage sites or something like that. They attract problems, and, and, so we are talking size of maybe point 0, 0, no maybe point 01 something like that. You know we are talking very small beer compared to parks and football pitches.</p>
Local Authority 6	<p>'There may be exceptions where it might be better to convert open space or facilities to other uses... should not be treated as an open door to developing on all open spaces' (p. 114).</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: 4</p>	<p>Well the options are, well in terms of the wider way local development goes, a core part of our Core Startegy is, is that it goes predominantly in urban areas and judging by our policies and erm taking account of our existing designations, ie. you don't develop on open space if you can, if, if you need to or there's a cause for, and you have to go through. [Telephone reception becomes poor] We aren't in a position to dispose of many areas of open spaces, in the private sector.</p>

Local Authority 7 & 7a	<p>'Given competing demands for urban land and the need to resolve deficiencies in community park and immediate local open space provision, it will be important not to see all public open space land as sacrosanct' (p 31).</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: Not Indicated</p>	<p>Erm, sort of, what do you mean in terms of options? [prompt] Right, speaking from a planning point of view, we are not aware of any specific proposals. We have not identified any in the Local Plan at the moment. But we are aware, we are entering a period now where we are going to be looking at in terms sort of our future Core Strategy for our new LDF. And in the background to that it looks like our Regional Spatial Strategy is going to be pushing us for higher housing numbers. So we are going to be sort of, as part of that work, looking at an existing open spaces, to find sort of value and, and level of provision. Partly to identify areas that are lacking it, but also because we are aware that we may have to go to a sort of site selection process. But we've not identified anything specific at the moment. If you speak to parks, they might be able to fill you in on any sort of parks, that they are aware of, that they feel are perhaps surplus to their strategy. Erm, but at the moment, in the current Local Plan, we've not looked at sort of releasing any of those developments. So far.</p> <p>Well we've got some more work to do, in terms of the assessment locally and I'm looking to, starting to look to work with Planners on this and erm, really it's a matter of going, instead of having a generic standard, we want to go local so we are at Ward level or, just a bit bigger. To erm, agree, whether we have a surplus or in fact a shortfall in any particular area of different types of open space. And erm, in doing so, because of the pressures that are on, but, but generally because it makes sense, we, we need to be looking to balance things out a bit, not just have open space, for open space sake. Where its costing money but not really giving much back, erm invest in quality. And in the right places. In order to do that we will have to, look to release some land potentially.</p>
Local Authority 5 & 5a	<p>'Planning implementation' outlining the process for determining whether a site should be re-designated or allowed to be used for development' (162-172).</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: Not Indicated</p>	<p>No, sorry I haven't. Sorry you are going to end up with a big list of no's.</p> <p>That's a planning decision, so you'd need to ask them that. [prompt] XXX not necessarily the best person to answer that question. [prompt] Don't know XXX. Erm XXX, but yeah, yeah, or XXX who's the director.</p>
Local Authority 11	<p>'Decisions for XXX: Can the Council sell green space to increase maintenance budgets whilst still meeting any recommended standards? Sale of Council land...precedent at Glasgow, Bromley...pros and cons include public controversy' (p.112-113).</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: Not Indicated</p>	<p>No. I mean, that study we haven't actually adopted it, at the Council, it's a background study. Until we get to the stage of actually looking at our open space and seeing what we need to allocate, we have have decided that has been parked, essentially. Erm it's not been adopted by the Council its recommendations from our consultants. Haven't necessarily agreed or disagreed with them. So it has no status in that respect. We haven't decided whether to take it on board or not. Erm, but in terms of actually deciding whether to dispose of sites or not, we are not at that stage in our policy making yet. I think it's probably unlikely, because obviously open space is valuable and, because we're so urbanised, I don't think it would be very politically, right to start disposing of open spaces when they are so valuable for residential areas that are becoming high density. I think it's unlikely but obviously I can't pre-empt what we might do in the future. We will have to look very carefully at that report that our consultants prepared, to see if we agreed with the outcome from it.</p>

London Borough of Local Authority 2 & 2a	<p>'35.9% of sites are low value & low quality...122 sites...should be prioritised for improvement...policy approach always to enhance ... spaces which do not fulfill any of the above criteria may be surplus to requirements' (p. 7-26).</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: 122</p>	<p>We, this is what I was saying to you at the beginning, we have actually gone down that route of specifically you know targeting areas yet, we are still at our issues and options stage... there was a potential surplus in terms of playing pitch provision, erm, now, that was the finding of the study, that, it also said that you would need to do more detailed survey work to find out...so another, you know more in-depth survey would be required, to actually look into which of the pitches are truly surplus erm and you know, how can we deal with all our pitches together and make sure that we have enough to supply our needs, now and in the future and of course all the latent demands from other, inner London boroughs that need to come out to XXX to use the open spaces in XXX. [So you'd probably look at doing another survey] We'd need to go down that route before but we actually sort of ask the question in our issues and options paper ... But the loss or the open spaces, is erm very much the last thing on the list because what we might have is a surplus of pitches in that area but a deficiency of other types of open space. Because whilst we have a lot of open space we also have deficiency areas, just purely because of severance factors, or just their particular location so we would need to look at addressing all those issues before we started releasing land.</p> <p>Nah, we're actually going the other way. We are actually trying to create additional surplus, sorry trying to create additional open space. And we have actually got a couple of various things that we are looking at in the next couple of years. Erm, to create new parks. [prompt] Yeah depends what department your reading from. The statement that you are going to run past me in a moment, we may not have actually made. [complete quotation] ... If there was a large area that were looking to develop, and there was a small area that could be defined, if you like, as being surplus, think that we could, we could accrue some capital from, if, if we was then to sort of plough it back in to the green space to sort of increase its safety and play value and stuff of that nature. I don't think we would just throw it out. I think we would look at it. We are quite sensitive to we what the local views were. I mean we've got a very string Friends base, erm and quite a few of our Parks have now got Friends groups. So obviously we'd listen to them, listen to Councillors, and sort of come to, come to the best view. But, the general consensus is, that we definitely wouldn't look towards getting rid of surplus, as I've just expressed, we are actually looking towards increasing our green space.... [prompt] that would be fine, if the money is ring-fenced, to come in.</p>
Local Authority 3	<p>'Provide advice for any rationalisation (p. 1) Up to 14.1 ha of open space could be disposed of...capital receipts in the millions of pounds' (p.137) To identify where others [sites] can be released (p.3). Only 4% of respondents felt there was more than enough (p.16)...Glasgow and Bromley sold through their strategy' (p.137).</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: 14.1 ha</p>	<p>(laughs) I have absolutely no idea I'm afraid, on that because as I said I don't think this study's being used for that purpose at the moment. It's something that it could, well be used in the future. But I haven't heard anything that, the authority's thinking that way at the moment. May well change, so.</p>

Local Authority 9	<p>'Action plan includes methodology for identifying which if any POS have little if no inherent value and are in locations where there is already adequate provision, and which can therefore be shown to be genuinely surplus to requirements (p. 2.4.4) Action Plan... The following forms a checklist to examine individual open spaces 1. Will the loss result in a deficiency? 2. Future Housing sites taken into consideration? 3.High Quality? 4. Other sites considered first? 5. Well suited to other uses? (part 2).</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: Not Indicated</p>	<p>Well I think there are two things to say about that really. Erm I mean first of all, what in practice that recommendation in the assessment turned into was a policy in our replacement UDP... 'Loss of public open space will only be permitted exceptionally and any development or change of use proposal, resulting in such loss will be assessed to ensure that as far as possible, the open space in question is the lowest quality area of public open space in the neighbourhood in which it is located, in terms of recreational value, accessibility, visual quality and bio-diversity.'... The other thing to say is that we are now going on to prepare our Issues and Options' paper for the core strategy, the LDF and we haven't finalised that yet, but we are considering including erm, an issue and some options, relating to amongst other things, the potential either use of some open space for development or, alternatively erm improving it in some way. ... I mean we've incorporated that in the policy but at the same time we didn't feel it was realistic to, erm try to protect all open space everywhere in every circumstance. [prompt] I do have to refer to it quite a lot to tell, erm to point it out to development control Case Officers. Because, although we don't get a lot of applications for large scale loss of open space, we do sometimes get it for applications that would result in open space being impinged on. [prompt] Well there's a variety of things, I mean sometimes, the council itself is looking to accommodate new facilities for communities and, and some people in the Council naturally tend to look at open space as providing available sites, especially when it's already Council owned as so much of it is. [prompt] I'm personally a bit wary and sceptical of taking that approach [disposal] very far. Because you could end up selling 90% of it to make the remaining 10% stunningly perfect. But, you know, the amount of open space it important, and and having a variety and so on as well.</p>
Local Authority 9a	<p>'Action plan includes methodology for identifying which if any POS have little if no inherent value and are in locations where there is already adequate provision, and which can therefore be shown to be genuinely surplus to requirements (p. 2.4.4) Action Plan... The following forms a checklist to examine individual open spaces 1. Will the loss result in a deficiency? 2. Future Housing sites taken into consideration? 3.High Quality? 4. Other sites considered first? 5. Well suited to other uses? (part 2)</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: Not Indicated</p>	<p>Yeah, I really don't know. My only comment would be that we are just been completing the UDP and I'm not too clear on whether there has been any sites identified within the UDP. XXX would probably have been your best bet there, in that he co-ordinates the production of the UDP.</p>
Local Authority 8	<p>Refers 'surplus requirements' advice in guidance (p. 194) 'Review the need for 91 sites' (p. 35) ...wasted space (p 205)</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: 91</p>	<p>No, erm are these the ones that have come out as 'low quality low value' ? [prompt] Erm, the policy wording we're looking at the Core Strategy is to do with that. If, if these sites are shown not to be of value to the local community and not of good quality then, erm, then yes we could explore the policy, possibility of them being used for other uses. Erm, its difficult again in the core strategy about whether it should be going down to this level of detail. It's another problem we've got. Whether it should be, covering that. Otherwise we'd be, might have to come through on a DC policy which would be a couple of years behind that. [prompt] There is yeah, no we're certainly not releasing them straightaway, no definitely come through, policy.</p>

Local Authority 1	<p>'Category 3 Sites with Low Value scores...There will be spaces that can be sold if surplus to requirements.'</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: Not Indicated</p>	<p>No, erm, no I don't actually. There is a management asset process within the Local Authority, which my Manager attends from the planning policy point of view. XXX, who's the Parks and Recreation Manager, his budget obviously covers a lot of those areas. But I don't think that actually done that so far, I don't think it could be ruled out. I think you'd need to ask him a bit more about that. I'm not too up on that really.</p>
-------------------	--	---

Local Authority 4	<p>'Investigate the release of funds.'</p> <p>Number of Vulnerable sites: Not Indicated</p>	<p>I don't actually think that the assessment gave any comfort to releasing any of our open space land as surplus. The impression I get from the work is that we've taken that forward, to protect all open space that we have.</p>
-------------------	---	---

Appendix 6: Interview Transcripts

Local Authority 1

The general outlook: There has been a lot of effort put in over the last few years to improve both the quality and quantity of open space that we have got in the district. A lot of work has been done on developing a country park in the west of the district and also the council has got an aim to get more green flag space. At the moment we've got three or two, certainly the castle and recreation grounds aiming to get more green flags as the year goes on so there is a commitment I think to improve green space but as I'm sure Phil will tell you, they don't have much of a budget.

Financial pressure: Yeah you know I think because it is obviously a resource intensive service, I imagine the pressure comes from having to do lots of things in lots of different places, obviously as you've probably picked up from looking at the district, your know the profile, the district is quite, er quite dispersed, lots of settlements with some open space, erm, so, you know so there is that challenge I think.

Central influence: Mmm I think you need to speak to XXX about that one, I'm not too sure really.

Increasing scrutiny: Well the District Council has, since the open space assessment was done, the D.C. has developed a green spaces strategy which tries to take on some of the things that were identified in there and do a number of kind of mini-action-plans for different areas and I think XXX had to take that, it went to cabinet and was looked at by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. But it's a very visible service, people go in and use the open space and they see what's going on.

Options: No, erm, no I don't actually. There is a management asset process within the Local Authority, which my Manager attends from the planning policy point of view. XXX, who's the parks and Recreation Manager, his budget obviously covers a lot of those areas. But I don't think that actually done that so far, I don't think it could be ruled out. I think you'd need to ask him a bit more about that. I'm not too up on that really.

Use and Value: Yeah, I mean it's a difficult one. I think as part of XXX's work they do, I think they do snapshot surveys of use of open space don't know how often they do it, I can't recall. But they certainly keep a regular eye on it. I think, obviously for the more managed facilities, you know bowling greens etc etc then obviously they can keep a record of use, erm but obviously for some facilities that's not possible erm but there's certainly all three aspects, you know quality, quantity and accessibility are all equally important really.

Risk: Well I think that there is a, well certainly there is a, this is me personally speaking, I think there is a mindset within the land management within parks authorities, that small areas of open space are not much use, basically, they're the ones that they don't, they still have to maintain them but they are not as large. There is a perception that they are not as suitable. Now they are, I, I personally disagree with that because I think the small open spaces are just as important as you know, a park, perhaps more so, because they provide open space in places that perhaps don't have them. But that, perhaps that is the prevailing view that there is I think. I, I don't agree with that, that's misplaced, obviously that's the resource angle.

Spatial: Well I suppose they were mostly in areas that were built within the last 40 years I would think, its as simple as, I think its as simple as that because that's when they started to include open space in a proper, you know more co-ordinated way. Erm, slightly confused here at XXX by the fact that we have an almo, you know an almo that controls our housing I don't know if you have one in East Cambs, [No] But we still own the land and they manage the housing so we and the almo are looking at ways of using their land like that. [Whats an almo?] Sorry it's an arms length management company used to manage housing, still within the Council's control.

Stakeholders/asset base: Well I mean that's obviously the Council's asset management structure that manage that really at XXX.

Socio-spatial: It really just depends, I mean I wouldn't really know the answer to that but but obviously the council is looking to manage its assets all the time in the most appropriate way. I couldn't really answer that question.

General: Yeah erm I mean I haven't been involved in this one but I used to work at XXX and I tried to steer away from this idea of 'surplus' er, because 'surplus' is quite a negative word it implies not used or not needed and I think its a case of there's not enough or you have sufficient and I think that's, that's the key from my point of view although that's not where the policy steer is unfortunately. Do you works in a Parks Dept? [Planning] I think they are important politically you know good parks etc etc you know reflect well on the district because they are added value aren't they? Best Value.

Local Authority 2

The General Approach: Its erm, very erm highly valued. It's important to the quality of the Borough and its character erm in defining an outer London borough. Obviously erm suburban areas separated by open areas which are all protected. Loss of space is resisted wherever possible.

Financial: In terms of releasing land or ? [Managing the open space service] That I don't know because it's all done through our parks team and I'm actually planning policy.

Central: Again, I'm not involved in the funding side but I should imagine green flag award, things like that erm influence the quality of our open space in the end and erm any funding that's associated with aspects, again that's off the top of my head rather than.

Scrutiny: Erm, I don't know to be honest. The, erm, in XXX because we've got large attractive parks and we tend to sort of, invest in them erm and have that programme but I think that's true of the more wider things that the health, healthy living, quality of life and those sides, I mean obviously PPG 17, resisting the loss and all that as well.

Options: We, this is what I was saying to you at the beginning, we have actually gone down that route of specifically you know targeting areas yet, we are still at our issues and options stage. Now in that, that's on line so you might like to have a look at that section, just see if I can find it at my desk, our surplus, rather than being in open space, there was a potential surplus in terms of playing pitch provision, erm, now, that was the finding of the study, that, it also said that you would need to do more detailed survey work to find out, because obviously you could have an area that has several football pitches, so you could consider there to be a surplus in that area but if they are all very poor quality then, none of them are meeting the need, so another, you know more in-depth survey would be required, to actually look into which of the pitches are truly surplus erm and you know, how can we deal with all our pitches together and make sure that we have enough to supply our needs, now and in the future and of course all the latent demands from other, inner London boroughs that need to come out to to use the open spaces in XXX. So that's, sort of where, what we would need to do before we looked at the surplus [So you'd probably look at doing another survey] We'd need to go down that route before but we actually sort of ask the question in our issues and options paper asking sort of, what do we want? How do we want to deal with this? We also look obviously at the sort of PPG 17 advice if you've got a surplus of one particular use, you look at the alternative uses, before you actually say, it's surplus and it can be released. So I think if you, question 14 – balancing the supply and demand of playing pitches and how we could approach, or any other approaches, and then, from our feedback we'll then take that forward. But the loss or the open spaces, is erm very much the last thing on the list because what we might have is a surplus of pitches in that area but a deficiency of other types of open space. Because whilst we have a lot of open space we also have deficiency areas, just purely because of severance factors, or just their particular location so we would need to look at addressing all those issues before we started releasing land.

Use and Value: No, this is, I think those things are valuable in terms of knowing when you've got a development going in or something like that erm especially into areas that have low quality open space that doesn't actually perform much of a function, large residential development, something like that, there could be the opportunity to seek improvements to that open space, or those types of issues erm and having a guide to do with which open spaces could do with more investment its very helpful isn't it in that area. Again that would need to be in line with what the parks team, what their plans were, things like that as well. It all needs, you know it's very important to make sure the parks and planning work together on those sorts of issues.

Risk: Not off the top of my head, I can't remember what they are, erm I wouldn't, I would say that a lot of them will be the recreation grounds type of thing say a square of open space which is incredibly valuable in terms of it being an open space and the environment but actually doesn't provide us, the local community with the range of facilities that would benefit them if that makes sense. You know children's play areas, or formal gardens, or facilities like that.

Erm I would say that that's probably what came out of that. Again, I think there is a summary at the end of the document that sort of, sets that out. What they are.

Spatial: Again I'm just guessing but I can't remember, trying to think, you've got a copy haven't you? [yes] Yes again we've got a section at the back 10.1 and that shows different communities and they appear to be fairly well scattered through the borough.

Stakeholders: Well we have some open spaces are XXX land, the XXX corridor goes down the east side of the borough, erm so there is an element of cross-over with their open spaces with what they do with their open space, all the parks, well the majority of the parks and private spaces, well the majority, we own them the Council that is, you know, between the different services, erm have the ability to prioritise funding, prioritise funding accordingly. I'm not too sure where they prioritise, where they choose to invest. We are also doing, as part of the LDF we are doing four area action plans, now it could be that again these are at their very early stages but they might there could be areas were they highlight for investment that require investment improving our open spaces, so again we would be looking at all our evidence and then opportunities that come forward development in areas and then the parks obviously the parks erm improvement programme as well.

Socio-spatial: Our aim would be to address those issues wherever possible however the nature of XXX the sites, there are very few opportunities for new open spaces, erm so it's a case of working with what we've got and taking opportunities up when they arise, to try and influence and minimise deficiency areas wherever possible.

Local Authority 3

General outlook: Basically its seen, because I think we are one of the Local Authorities in XXX with the greatest amount of erm, open space, so its like a really important characteristic. A lot of the open space, because we are about 42% green belt as well, a lot of our open space has management plans. For example, XXX has got a management plan. Its also sort of, a lot of it's got multiple designations, there are I think national, erm local nature reserves. I think the XXX has also got a management plan although I'm not completely sure about that, I need to check that with the countryside manager. [Importance?] I think it is, its not sort of, a priority but as I said it is an important part of our Borough so it is perceived to be quite important.

Financial: Its difficult obviously because the Council is always under pressure to find land for housing, and because we are quite constrained by, we are either basically built up area, or green belt so any open spaces within the built up area, there's quite considerable pressure on them. Which was part of, what the open space study was, set out to see, what our provision is like. Erm I'm not aware of anything that's not public knowledge anyway, as far as particular open space pressures go.

Central: I think because its more our countryside manager that manages a lot of the open spaces. I, I yeah I wouldn't really know any more about that.

Scrutiny: Erm I think it will do, I have to Say that we did have this open space study produced in 2005, and I've actually just been using it over the past couple of weeks to erm develop our developer contributions supplementary planning document and erm, obviously we are using the standard to calculate what our developer contributions will be. Erm I'm not sure how other departments have used it because we do have a few other copies of this floating around other departments. Because as I said it did have a bit of a wider remit, ie: for built sports facilities as well.

Options: (laughs) I have absolutely no idea I'm afraid, on that because as I said I don't think this study's being used for that purpose at the moment. It's something that it could, well be used in the future. But I haven't heard anything that, the authority's thinking that way at the moment. May well change, so.

Use and Value: Erm I wouldn't at the moment no, because I think that this open space study would be the first stage in identifying them, and as I said because I'm not sure the authority has done that before, I'm not sure how they would do that. Definitely take account of local opinion, would be an important factor.

Risk: Erm not off the top of my head no. I mean I know which ones are, we got strategic open space and things like that but they'd definitely be protected, erm SSEI or something, anything that doesn't have a formal planning designation would be more at risk.

Spatial: I would think that those areas where it would be most at risk would be those areas where they have the over-supply, this study was sort of done on accessibility criteria and we've got areas being flagged up as sufficient, albeit, not very many, with our authority, but I'm sure there are some areas that are sort of over-supplied with open space.

Stakeholders: [Prompt] I would think the politicians would have a big influence on that erm, I think also quite a few sort of local groups, environment forum and things, they'd be very interested, well they'd want to put forward their views. But I think that the politicians would probably have the greatest influence.

Socio-spatial: In our sense it would be more of a qualitative rather than quantitative issue because as I said we are pretty well supplied with open space across the authority we don't really have any real deficiency needs, erm I think if that was to happen, and it would be more to fund qualitative improvements.

Assetbase: That could happen, well I mean I really don't know (laugh) that could be a potential.

General: At the end of the day I don't know what our Council is doing, whether it will go down that route, but erm I think it would be a very difficult decision to take. I suppose at the end of the day it's whether the benefits are going to outweigh the actual loss. [prompt] I suppose it's so much financial pressure on the Councils you know reducing their costs and things.

Local Authority 4

Tradition: Well I think, funnily enough I was at a meeting last night, with the cultural services section that maintain our open space. Traditionally XXX Council give it a high priority. Leisure facilities to, that does actually reflect the priorities that the Council gives that area.

Financial: Constantly, erm particularly the capital that could actually deliver improve. There is serious pressure there.

Central: Erm, the only central government funding would be erm, the ability to apply for lottery grants and such like which has help us to erm when spend its appropriate.

Scrutiny: I definitely think it has actually, now, really drilling down into the issues that the study has highlighted. Primarily because XXX is in a position where, albeit they concluded a surplus, the decision of providing new space is difficult for a borough which is quite confined in its urban area. It is confined by XXX to the North and obviously the east, so trying to actually create new space in a market which is particularly competitive in terms of land use that erm, quite a difficult challenge so, improving the existing is seen as the priority, erm and in order to improve the existing, drilling down into the actual assessment, something quite key is what areas need improvement, erm and also, how you finance it.

Options: I don't actually think that the assessment gave any comfort to releasing any of our open space land as surplus. The impression I get from the work is that we've taken that forward, to protect all open space that we have.

Use and Value: Well only other than the survey work that was carried out. And the value that people actually give the open space. And various policies that people value over others I suppose. But that's that's about it.

Spaces at Risk: Well that would be a real mixture because there will be issues associated with playgrounds, on the quality side, with issue like litter and various things like that, erm and then there are other policies which and the ability of that use to meet a variety of other issues, which you've got fairly informal area which doesn't have any play provision or provision for young adults and the priority there will be what you can bring to that area so that you can actually give it such variety.

Spatial: There will be areas that have been identified as having more access, more choice of open space. [prompt] I don't think its clear cut. I think a lot of its do with the way that the Town has actually been developed over the years. Because it's a historic seaside town you've got very nice Victorian Parks along the seafront and central areas. Maybe a lack of other provision because there isn't the space I'd say for playing pitches or things of that size as there may be in the outskirts of the area. So a lot of may be derived from the way the town has developed as a seaside town, erm, interestingly enough, whilst there are some gaps in a few of our wards but I think I would be very careful to associate that with them being in deprived wards. A lot of it has more to do with the way its developed and the constraints, so compact central areas erm so that aside, we have recognised how we can keep provision in a more manageable way, but yeah very difficult. The other issue is that the way they are developed, a lot of areas aren't in the control of the Local Authority. Play areas or open spaces aren't maintained by the Council. [prompt] They are more vulnerable if they are not managed by the Council. There aren't many that are outside but there are some areas that are outside our own ownership therefore wouldn't be maintained by ourselves, and therefore we don't have as much control as the bringing them back raise the quality. That's not something we can count on.

Stakeholders: I think it would be a combination, I think you'd have some direct, some strategic direction from the Council but that would only be fought by those who use them. Maybe the children who use the space, the clubs, the organisations that access the open space. You can't really define who uses the space could be somebody living across from a green patch who have value in that so it, so you have to try and decide where the values are and I think it would be worth doing a consultation on maybe losing an open space you'd start to form an

idea of who the stakeholders are for that development I think that response came back and it could be quite wide ranging.

Socio-spatial: Not possible. That is our dilemma because we don't have the space, to be able to provide that distribution and our policies are very very different. Whilst that would be the ideal, there aren't spaces where you could do that. Provide key, essential space within the commuter belt. Constantly, we haven't got that luxury.

Asset base: No I don't think there is. Would want or wish to do that. [prompt] Like I said at the beginning the priority is very much there for open spaces and there's no danger at this point that we would release any open space. In fact, quite the opposite, with that comes the opportunity to bring them up to good quality standards whilst recognising that being able to balance supply across the area would be a very difficult situation.

General: Disposal of open space has to be done within the context of looking at what you are going to be improving, and what's that going to serve rather than just saying what's ... and it might be surplus you have to ask why is it? Is it in terms of the number crunching or is it because it's not performing well as an open space but could be. It would be very easy to dismiss an area rather than actually look at it and ask well, how could it work better? [prompt] Financial pressures are taking the decisions out of planning more and more. [prompt] So far we have resisted loss but there will be pressures, we have to acknowledge that, we haven't had the framework that we needed to be able to resist the pressure, you know what are the criteria for getting where you are at.

Local Authority 5

Erm, I'm not going to be very good at this. It's fairly important. Didn't the survey show over-provision. Really we are just using that as evidence and working from that I think. Park, which has a lot of, slightly important open space, we are looking at enhancing it but yeah it is something that is taken into account and valued.

Pressures: Erm not that I know of.

Central: No, I really don't know, sorry.

Scrutiny: Er I really don't know, I haven't been in this office for that long so. [prompt] yeah, it was done to be used for the LDF but, its not had much impact and there's not much pressure to develop them. It was really making sure we safeguarded the ones that were seen as important and put policies into the new LDF. That's about it really.

Options: No, sorry I haven't. Sorry you are going to end up with a big list of no's.

Use and Value: No, I really don't know.

Risk: No we haven't got that far. They would probably be, if we are going to re-allocate anything it would probably be like a re-allocations DPD. That's not, we haven't really got that far on that yet. Its not due to be adopted until 2010. [prompt] Site allocations DPD.

Characteristics: I don't really know. [prompt] Not really, not that I know of, I mean there hasn't really been that much pressure to develop any of them or use them for anything different.

Stakeholders: No, there would be some sort of consultation I am sure but I'm not sure who would be. [prompt] The Council members would. And the local community.

Socio-spatial: Yeah, it would be a balancing yeah.

Asset-base: I don't know sorry.

Local Authority 6

General outlook: In terms of surplus we've got a large surplus primarily because we've got a large area to the south of XXX. It is considered to be very high priority erm certainly when you talk to other people and members about it and you say 'Whats good about XXX?' they will say, 'Open space, trees, greenery.' OK, and we've found that over and over again. Really, really strong message there. With the inception of new towns, back in the 1960's, the 4.3 ha provision [sports et al] was derived from that. We've had an above average open space standard and that is really, and the town was been built on that and that is maintained today. Subsequent to that we've created policies through our Local Plan, which protects open space, no loss of open space, and that has followed through into our next document which we are just sending today actually. Erm, our Core Strategy, which our PPG17 study was presented for. OK?

Financial Pressure: Erm, I can't say specifically what, there are always funding issues, so. Yes.

Central Govt: Erm, probably but I'm not sure on that. I'm a Planner rather than a strategist. I can't really answer that one.

Scrutiny: It definitely has and the study has pretty much been the link between our leisure and our planning function and its one of, of many that will be produced over the future. For example, the headline might be in our Core Strategy, then we're producing one called our 'Limiting Elements', SPG for the S106 side of things, which in turn, thresholds, development contributions, how much money will we get for them, recreational facilities, and erm their work will be sewn in up in a revised 'Parks and Open Space Strategy'. So erm, erm that would, so we would, in planning, have an input into that as well and that would build on the results from the study especially the quality audit.

Options: Well the options are, well in terms of the wider way local development goes, a core part of our Core Strategy is, is that it goes predominantly in urban areas and judging by our policies and erm taking account of our existing designations, ie. you don't develop on open space if you can, if, if you need to or there's a cause for, and you have to go through. [Telephone reception becomes poor] We aren't in a position to dispose of many areas of open spaces, in the private sector. XXX Town Football Club wanted to move to a site n the green belt. We would approve the application. How do you justify to the public?

Use and Value: The primary typology, specific in the audit. All got quality rating. Figure showing good quality, poor quality. We developed a standard, the +1 principle to push up the standard and make the most of what we've got.

Open spaces at risk: XXX That's gone. Redeveloped. Football ground. Green belt problem with losing sites.

Spatial Location: Recreational provision is very good in areas of deprivation, we have a high standard anyway. Least deprived and best areas are next to each other.

The powerful stakeholders: Landowner, B.C. Strategic Partnership, Leisure and Recreation board.

Socio-spatial: Can't comment. Most likely benefit interest uses, playing fields etc. Might be used to fund the re-location of that facility. Can't see it happening though. Sell sections off to supplement the budget.

Asset base: Not sure. Historically have done that already. Lots of open spaces are leased to XXX Town Council. Relinquish ownership, get away from management of open spaces. Local ownership might be encouraged. Open to suggestions there.

General: Core policy up to date. 'Recreation and Culture' 'Retain, improve'. Not looking to make a quick buck but we are aware of the cost implications.

Local Authority 5a

General: We want to increase the quantity but also to increase the quality. In one or two areas, you know, to try and open up access. If you've got an open space that's closed to the public it's easier to try and negotiate open access than to try and build a completely new open space. We did looking at benchmarks but also team generation ratios for the different sports and that then underpins the demand analysis, leading into your action plan of you know where do you need greater improved provision. We did split the district up because it's very large, very very large, we split it up into five sub areas and that allowed us to sort of ration it according to the population in each of the areas. But we also did catchment boundaries for each of the areas. Because you could identify that, you know there is population where the demand is not being met but there's no hope for that community because it's a very dispersed population over a rural area. It's actually difficult then to put in a type of facility that er meets that demand because everybody is so geographically dispersed. Yeah, but we have a lot of interesting debates and some very tough decisions to be made.

Financial pressures: Financial pressures as in ? [prompt] Well first of all Kelley. We have sort of two roles within the district Council. One of our roles is to manage the open space that we own, er and above that we own a very very small percent of the overall district stock. Er, we have one park. And we lease several open space er to other people, we have one cemetery and we have a few civic spaces that we own, so we have a direct management role there and in terms of budget and resources we are doing ok with that. We've got a sort of balanced equilibrium there. There's sort of no growth and no restriction. However, about 95% of the districts open space is both owned and managed by both Parish Council's and Towns Councils, Playing Field Associations and other community groups. And we then play an enabling role with these groups so we try and support them to develop their own parcel of land based on the action plan. And you know, some good examples in sport is where I've gone and met with the groups and we planned out improvements, we've managed to secure grant aid of which the District Council has contributed some grant application grant funding, to help them improve that open space based on the strategy and action plan. So we have steered resources towards delivering the action plan from our grant aid programme.

Central Policy: Well, erm its difficult to separate you know things like the lottery and erm grant aid sources from central government. Erm, certainly, central government no. We have hardly any links. We have links with the range of different quangos, like Sport England, we have strong links with you know The Lottery partners through you know football foundation funding or you know national governing body of sport funding. And we are also working towards putting in a major Heritage Lottery Fund application on the, sort of largest park in the district. Erm, but in terms of additional funding coming through erm XXX District Council to support this work, no there isn't.

Scrutiny: Oh massively, massively. Oh, you know up until we did that work, we had a very limited understanding of the total quantity. And we had no understanding of quality of that provision. What it's allowed us to do is to get a very clear understanding of both those, within all of the seven typologies. However, I would say it's an, actually massive piece of work. Er it was sort of, £60,000 and we had four or five hundred pages of documentation and from 2003 up until now, some areas, some of the typologies we've been very pro-active with because we've got a resource to support that. Particularly in sports development. But other areas, we haven't necessarily had a strong, we haven't had somebody leading the delivery of it. But also in terms of resources, we are working through the LDF to ensure that our open spaces are clearly recognised and mapped and the LDF. However, we are not doing a SPD for S106 agreements, so in terms of using government policies, erm on S106 agreements to increase resources, we're not doing that and that's a major weakness. [prompt] Yes, it's limited capacity and priority within the planning department. We have a higher issue, sorry a greater issue in relation to affordable housing so we are doing an SPD on affordable housing as opposed to erm you know, S106 agreements. And we've been very poor in negotiating and securing S106 resources to improve open space. [prompt] In terms of growth, we have seen in 100 years, something like a 10% growth in housing stock and business development. So 10% that's very very low, that's one percent per ten years. Other districts are probably growing at between one and three percent. [prompt] Yeah I mean the development pressure at the moment is

predominantly around sustainability because we are a National Park area. We have very tight curtilages around all of our villages and towns. We have massive, massive areas of you know, green space, that a significant proportion of that is you know a special landscape area. It's either a National Park, an SSSI or an AONB. So you know we are restricted there. It's a tourist destination. The biggest growth areas that we have to address are housing, to ensure that we have affordable housing, so local people are still able to purchase and live here locally. And also economic growth in terms of business space. If we don't get those two right, we are gonna become a dormitory.

Options: That's a planning decision, so you'd need to ask them that. [prompt] XXX's not necessarily the best person to answer that question. [prompt] Don't know XXX. Erm XXX, but yeah, yeah, or XXX who's the director.

Use and Value: Erm, I'm not really aware of use and value. From my understanding it's quality and quantity. Those are the two key areas that the PPG17 guidance pulled out. [prompt] Yeah, we didn't use that process to assess, we looked at the quality and the quantity. We did do quite a significant use and demand analysis on the playing fields because we had clearly identified users. Erm, whereas a whole range of other processes, research processes are needed to determine that. Er we did do a sort of a user and a non-user survey across each of the five geographic areas. [prompt] That was two-fold, one was doing a site visit to assess the site, to measure it and look at the amount of open space, but also a visual assessment erm to look at the quality. And then we also inputted the, er a whole range of different questionnaires and feedback, so each parish Council, each playing sports association, sports club was contacted, we then did this user/nonuser survey and a whole range of qualitative information which was fed back into the sort of analysis, and fed back into the action plan, leading to a strategy.

Risk: Yeah, erm there are several. I couldn't name of all of them but erm you know, through our asset management erm strategy we've started to identify pieces of land that their usage could be changed. You know we've identified for example, a small green area that, I think was part of a park and we were going to try and develop it but it's completely waterlogged, its on unstable ground. You know, so we had to change our erm, our use of that space, erm or our intended use of it because of the quality of the space.

Geographical: No, erm the deficiency in quality and quantity is pretty erm, broad sweep across the district. We don't have any significant erm, hotspots where the whole provision is weak. No, its very generic, very broad spread.

Stakeholders: Well certainly through the LDF there's been significant community consultation with a whole range of community organisations. And that ranges from local businesses, local charities, to Parish Councils, Town Councils. So there is a good consultation process as part of the LDF. I would also say that within each, if one piece of area, er was identified for disposal, there would be local consultation on that. Erm, if not that would be with any current unit and any neighbourhood groups such as Parish Councils. Yeah so there is a pretty, sort of robust, consultation process there.

Socio-spatial: Erm, we are looking at that with our, with quite a large amount of our assets. However, I would say that not many of those assets are open spaces. Whilst that's our general, er, has been our general move in direction over the last few years, it doesn't include that many open space areas. Er, so and we are a pretty stable district in terms of, we do have a lot of land, you know a lot of land. So open space is fairly well protected and you know there's a lot of other potential areas of land that don't have open space, don't fall within these seven open space typologies that can be used. So, erm I can think of less than five areas where it might be effective.

Asset base: Erm, very similar to my last answer, yes we have identified assets that we are trying to dispose of erm, but they are not necessarily in the open space typologies. Things like, public conveniences. But because we own, very very few open space areas, and we have a very small grounds maintenance contract, we are not really looking at that. It's just not an area where we have huge potential to off-load assets or sell assets. You know we have areas of

land that are not open space typologies that we are sort of leasing to community organisations and we are sort of helping them to bring that piece of land into open space use. Erm, we've done that with allotments with erm playing fields as well, erm you know where there's a deficiency in demand, sorry a deficiency in provision. And an identified demand.

General: Core policy up to date. PS8 'Recreation and Culture' 'Retain, improve'. Not looking to make a quick buck but we are aware of the cost implications.

Local Authority 7

General: Erm, do you mean generally or within the planning area? [prompt] Well that's probably a question better directed to XXX. Certainly within the planning areas, we've taken the view I think that er, in as far as possible, we've protected all of our open spaces, of any particular size or value, from development. And except in case with recreational use anyway, so any that would involve loss, we will look at them on a case by case basis. Generally the presumption is that if, if there development or loss for other uses.

Financial Pressures: I don't I'm afraid, I think that would be XXX.

Scrutiny: I think it has. Its certainly erm made it easier to require evidence for anything that would involve the loss of open space erm and its certainly pushed us more towards sort of preparing local standards. So erm, its sort pushing us towards a much better understand towards the local demands and needs for open space. Across the whole of open space. And its sort of helped with identifying the range of types of open space that need to be considered, so beyond just the traditional parks, playing fields.

Options: Erm, sort of, what do you mean in terms of options? [prompt] Right, speaking from a planning point of view, we are not aware of any specific proposals. We have not identified any in the Local Plan at the moment. But we are aware, we are entering a period now where we are going to be looking at in terms sort of our future Core Strategy for our new LDF. And in the background to that it looks like our Regional Spatial Strategy is going to be pushing us for higher housing numbers. So we are going to be sort of, as part of that work, looking at an existing open spaces, to find sort of value and, and level of provision. Partly to identify areas that are lacking it, but also because we are aware that we may have to go to a sort of site selection process. But we've not identified anything specific at the moment. If you speak to parks, they might be able to fill you in on any sort of parks, that they are aware of, that they feel are perhaps surplus to their strategy. Erm, but at the moment, in the current Local Plan, we've not looked at sort of releasing any of those developments. So far.

Use and Value: Erm, this is one of the areas that we are having a look at, at the moment. We are looking at sort of, our evidence base for the new local development framework. And to be honest we haven't worked out how to approach that respect. Its something that we are going to be looking at, but I don't know how we are going to be doing it at the moment.

Open Space at Risk: I couldn't say at the moment I'm afraid no.

Character: I suspect there would be. Without having gone through the exercise it's difficult to say. But I know we have got some areas of the Borough, that because of the are[a], the sort of time, the time at which they were developed, are either sort of better or worse provided with open space. For example, we have a number of sort of older areas, where, space tends to be sort of minimal, it tends to be quite small scale, quite tightly packed in, and then other sort of particularly sort of erm, post-war, expansion, where we've got sort of much, greater provision. We've got larger areas and more of them. Which ones of those at the moment, are likely to lead to sort of surpluses isn't entirely clear. But I expect we'll find certain characteristics sitting on the edge of the area.

Stakeholders: Erm, within the Council it would be Parks and Estates primarily, who'd pick up on that. But obviously we'd have a role as well in planning on that, in terms of identifying their potential for other uses. Erm, actually defining the spatial strategy for it, really. The LDF.

Socio-spatial: I think that's quite likely to be honest. We know that there are other areas that have deficiencies so in, in the amount of open space, or particularly in the quality of open space, I think we would expect to see it re-invested in that service as far as possible.

Asset-base: I think its likely to be something that we are likely to be looking at in a couple of specific cases, erm, for example we've got an area regeneration scheme going on in er the er sort of corridor of land. Er, Former industrial land, where we are looking at the end development being managed away form the Local Authority. I think, in the majority of cases,

we'll still be looking to maintain the sort of, the key open spaces ourselves. Or there may be sort of specific assets that it would be better to sort of look at alternatives. But again that's something that again that's something that XXX will be able to expand on and his thoughts on how to operate the service and what they should be doing.

Local Authority 7a

General: Well, we've actually had since 2002, a Parks and Open Space Strategy so we've got a view on, erm, protecting and enhancing open space and erm, making it as accessible as possible.

Financial: Very much so, yes. [prompt] They are, the Council as a whole, are in, having difficulties, at the moment, the medium term at the moment, the short/medium term, I think next year, for instance, one point, over one and a half million pounds. Er, in cuts. And with leisure being a non-statutory service, they look towards, and, and of course a large spender in the Borough, they look to us to try to find deficiencies. And so how that manifests itself, is not only saying right, here you are, make those cuts and try and make do with less, and they have efficiencies, they also ask, they are looking at whether we go into Leisure Trusts or whatever. Or the other procurement options.

Central: Very much so, I think there is a definite issue there. Erm and Greenspace, as an organisation, charity are er, really battling for us, trying to raise the stakes on the agenda and really and get us heard at Central Government.

Scrutiny: Yeah, I think they have generally yes. [prompt] Well really it's about quality and access and making sure that you know what you've got, whether it's of value locally.

Options: Well we've got some more work to do, in terms of the assessment locally and I'm looking to, starting to look to work with Planners on this and erm, really it's a matter of going, instead of having a generic standard, we want to go local so we are at Ward level or, just a bit bigger. To erm, agree, whether we have a surplus or in fact a shortfall in any particular area of different types of open space. And erm, in doing so, because of the pressures that are on, but, but generally because it makes sense, we, we need to be looking to balance things out a bit, not just have open space, for open space sake. Where its costing money but not really giving much back, erm invest in quality. And in the right places. In order to do that we will have to, look to release some land potentially.

Use and Value: Well, we've got some ideas. Obviously we are learning from others and that's our next step really. To er, really focus down on that. I mean it's, we, parks and open spaces strategy that we've got pre-empted PPG17. It came out just before it was released. Or became, erm Law. But what we've got I think it sets the scene really well and we did do a lot of consultation at the time. Er, the, if you want to look at it have a look on our website under Leisure. The documents are all set out there. They're not exactly in handy format but it'll give you a good jist of where we're headed, what our thinking is.

Open Space at Risk: Not yet, no. I mean we know there are areas that are more blessed with open space and just fairly basic open space, but it's there in just fairly big tracts of land. Compared to others that are built up with hardly anything, so there's a clear message there that we need to improve and in many cases, where there are areas of multiple deprivation.

Spatial: Do you mean typology or do you mean location as in parts of the borough? [prompt] Well, we've got a good idea of that and we certainly got a good guide from the parks strategy but that didn't really go too far down the road of disposal. And er, that's the next route we've got to take. We've not got to necessarily go down that route for that sake, we've got to be measured about it and what I'm looking at with Planners, is how we do that with what little resource we've got.

Stakeholders: Well obviously, erm, local people, er visitors, Councillors, erm any users, groups or otherwise, and erm we've not got to forget, they may not be as powerful, but certainly its important for ethnic minorities groups, disabled people and so on. The other ones are all our partners such as the Primary Case Trust and erm, there's a long list of those. And erm staff as well I mean people that live in the area, everybody really counts.

Socio-spatial: I think it is and I'm, I, I don't know whether you had a response from this authority or even went to them, but Bristol was quite an interesting case, and I went to a seminar recently where they were advocating, well they've got a real shake up recently in the way that they look at their er, parks. But they are also going for 'Excellence' in investment in some of their major facilities, and er, that's exactly what they were doing and they were looking to raise somewhere in the region of, I think he said £87 million, over a very short period, by, through sale er and to re-invest and erm I think it makes a lot of sense because we're so stretched. We've got quite a lot of open space but it's not necessarily in the right places, and certainly in places, not of the right quality. And another, quite a lot of places have done the same, just with play areas, where they have quite a lot, we've got about 80 now, a lot of which are of really low value, and we want better spaces and more exciting spaces but we can only do that if we can release some of the others.

Asset-base: Well I'm not sure, I won't pre-empt that really. Our options has to be open the situation we're in. I hope that we don't go too far down that line. But er I can't really say which way we go yet. [prompt] Well that's, that's actually interesting because we've got a meeting coming up in August with The Land Restoration Trust. I don't know whether you've heard of them but they, they're actually taking over some large sites like the Liverpool Garden Festival site, er in perpetuity. But they are looking at ways and means of raising funding other than just, I mean a lump sum up front which isn't feasible for us. Er, but ways of raising funding to keep green space going on the East of XXX and that, you know is quite interesting for us as a model which hopefully, protects the open space for the future and in fact improves it. But, but with local input. I don't know whether we'll go down that route or whether it will get off the ground. We're exploring it anyway.

General: Well what we need, I know there's a gap there in terms of determining, in terms of really satisfying PPG17 and think, I think the mistake was made, I suppose it was the expediency and the actual timing of the Local Plan Review. They actually rushed in and said right, we'll take it that the parks strategy satisfies much of PPG17 and that's not true. [prompt] They've got to back track and they're not sure how they are going to do it. We certainly, I was hoping we'd get some planning grant and so on to do some of this work, but it's not forthcoming. [prompt] Just one other thing, did you, was there much reference in those documents you read about making S106 contributions work better for the local people? [prompt] No and I think that's unfortunate and in terms of erm, they have been quite imaginative though some authorities by creaming off quite a bit of off-site money, to go into strategic need because the argument is well, it's ok saying locally they'll use but they will also use those strategic routes or whatever. [prompt] So I'm hoping to try and re-dress that this time or not while, I'm still employed here (laughs) but we'll see.

Local Authority 8

General Outlook: Yeah it's very highly regarded. We've got the, the three leisure centres that are owned by the Council, so obviously, they, leisure is important to the Council. And we did various surveys before this one, a Play Space Survey and a Playing Pitch Surveys as well. This is the first sort of comprehensive one that took them all into account.

Financial pressures: I, I don't know that side of things no, the, our leisure services would be, is that what you mean ?[prompt] er XXX ?

Central: Funding, oh er no XXX the best person for that sort of thing, funding.

Scrutiny: Sorry, beg your pardon? [prompt] In terms of what the Council's done or for the general public? [prompt] For the wider public, I imagine its not made too much. But certainly our leisure colleagues are impressed with it. They use it a lot and obviously it's come in handy in our planning work. [prompt] Erm, it's all to do with housing sites as always in this area of the world. The impact of, areas, which erm people put up, want development in certain areas. So what we'd need them to provide with that housing. The requirements in terms of that. [tape runs out] One erm, one, quite interesting problem with this, that er, our existing Local Plan policies refer to the NPFA standards. And that means you can't actually use this new, the new standards we've come up with, as obviously one of the reasons for PPG17, until we've got the replacement policies erm, so we can then remove the local plan ones. [prompt] That's right yeah. It's frustrating really because we've obviously go this huge amount of work that we've managed to get done and can't apply it.

Options: No, erm are these the ones that have come out as 'low quality low value' ? [prompt] Erm, the policy wording we're looking at the Core Strategy is to do with that. If, if these sites are shown not to be of value to the local community and not of good quality then, erm, then yes we could explore the policy, possibility of them being used for other uses. Erm, its difficult again in the core strategy about whether it should be going down to this level of detail. It's another problem we've got. Whether it should be, covering that. Otherwise we'd be, might have to come through on a DC policy which would be a couple of years behind that. [prompt] There is yeah, no we're certainly not releasing them straightaway, no definitely come through, policy.

Use and Value: Erm, they went and visited each site and quite a thorough erm sort of, tick chart, something like 90 points they were looking at for each individual site. I should have it to hand here somewhere, if you just bear with me a sec. The audit sheets you need. [prompt]

Open space: Erm you mean the ones that have come out scoring low value low quality uh? [prompt] Well a couple of them have been put forward in a housing document that's at examination at the moment. [prompt] Erm one of hem is, the one I'm thinking of XXX is a erm, is unusual in a way. Is open space, it's actually sealed off from the public. Erm, at least it's got fencing all around it. None-the-less local people were saying it formed a valuable, they claimed it had a lot of value in terms of open space. So that was audited and it came out low quality, low value, potentially because there is no public access. People, there are no facilities on site and things like that. Erm, so that's been put forward for housing. But we'll wait and see, if the inspector's report is due later in the year.

Geographical: Not, erm as I say we haven't really gone down the line of picking out a you know, a mass of sites that we can get rid of really. It's just, there are just a couple of odd examples, of actually developers who have come forward. [prompt] Oh no, there's no real pattern to it. They are all over the place.

Stakeholders: Obviously the District Council and the various departments within that. Now we've got the PPG17 assessment we can use that as a base. But there's taking it forward and you'd obviously have to have discussions with Parish Councils. Sports facilities, users then, erm obviously them.

Socio-spatial: Erm, er the second part of the statement I certainly agree with. First step is to improve the existing facilities, but rather than the traditional approach is always to try and find new, new land, new facilities. I think the emphasis now has shifted to improving what we've got. If you've got money left over after that, then start expanding. But as I say, we've not gone down the path of actually looking in detail at all the sites that have come out as scoring low value low quality. So we haven't actually got a strategy as such and that side of things.

Asset base: Selling off our sports fields and things? [prompt] I think, kind of a thing for our leisure department really. You'd have to take a lead from them. As far as I am aware they are not advocating taking that approach. In fact you could speak to XXX he'd enlighten you on.

General: Well, erm. Again I'll go back to the example of the XXX one. I mean that was identified as being low quality low value, erm the existing landowner was erm. Cos I mean it's not one of our, we don't own the land. The existing landowner put it forward for housing. And then we obviously went back to the PPG17 assessment to see what impact that would have. It wasn't, it was an area of informal open space. It didn't have any, formal function. As I say, scored lowly in both regards, then erm. There's a case to put it if forward for housing. [prompt] I haven't come across that situation [council owned land] in my experience. [prompt] Quite a lot of it [privately owned land] erm off the top of my head, trying to think of examples you know, which ones did come out that badly, erm I mean the few that are coming to me are all ones that are in the private sector but I'm sure there are ones in the Council owned ones. [prompt] The slight problem with it is that in terms of the high quality low value, it was just an average of all the facilities in the district. The low quality only means that it's in the bottom 50% of facilities in the district. Similar to the low value that's, so they're quite broad ones. I wouldn't say that all 91 are under threat in any way at all.

Local Authority 9

General: Erm, aspects of it are, I mean aspects of it are, we have in particular a flagship Victorian Park, XXX, which has been restored with er, a I think it was an £8 million pound Heritage Lottery fund grant in recent years. Some other aspects such as the more incidental open space sites have perhaps struggled a bit for funding like so many other things in recent years. So it's a mixed picture on that really.

Financial pressures: I don't, I'm afraid I don't deal with that myself. Really, very much being on the planning side, so I'm afraid I don't really have any detailed knowledge of that.

Scrutiny: It's, errrm its helped us, it its allowed us to improve the approach, in the sense that, particularly in terms of what we require from developers, we've now got a robust, up to date assessment that's compliant with PPG 17. So it's not so much that it's increased the scru, do you mean within the Council and general interest groups and so on ? [prompt] I don't think it's done that particularly but we'd have been going backwards without it. But we have had, I mean that's the open space assessment that was done specifically for our replacement unitary development plan. There has been a wider green space strategy done which has been more of a, an overview type document, which we did to CABE good practice standards which, probably, was probably more aimed at increasing general awareness and commitment. And the last thing I heard, it was being, well, er, they were looking at using, say for stronger cleaner greener, whatever it's called, communities fund money to upgrade various open spaces and that was supposed to be in the context of that wider green space strategy particularly.

Options: Well I think there are two things to say about that really. Erm I mean first of all, what in practice that recommendation in the assessment turned into was a policy in our replacement UDP, which has just been adopted now incidentally. To deal with situations where there was a potential loss of open space. Erm and effectively incorporated those criteria. And what the policy says is; shall I read it out to you? [prompt] Policy says; it's a bit on the long side but never mind; 'The loss of public open space without replacement will not be permitted unless provision will still meet the relevant standard or standards' and then it names the three policies that, set the standards. 'And there is no identified deficiency in outdoor sports facilities or accessible natural greenspace, or the site in question would be incapable of meeting it'... 'Meeting any such deficiency. Where the standards in those policies' previously cross referred to, 'are not or will be infringed, the loss must be made good by the creation of alternative site of at least equal size, quality and recreational value, serving the same residential are or neighbourhood. Where the standards are comfortably exceeded.' And this is the bit that you were particularly asking about. 'Loss of public open space will only be permitted exceptionally and any development or change of use proposal, resulting in such loss will be assessed to ensure that as far as possible, the open space in question is the lowest quality area of public open space in the neighbourhood in which it is located, in terms of recreational value, accessibility, visual quality and bio-diversity.' And then, it then says; 'Existing public open space will, where possible, be improved, especially to enhance visual quality, bio-diversity, nature conservation interest and recreational opportunity.' So for one thing, we've tried to address that checklist approach that the open spaces assessment recommended by incorporating the material in that policy. And applying that to any proposal that would result in the loss of open space. The other thing to say is that we are now going on to prepare our Issues and Options' paper for the core strategy, the LDF and we haven't finalised that yet, but we are considering including erm, an issue and some options, relating to amongst other things, the potential either use of some open space for development or, alternatively erm improving it in some way. Or, or of course potentially of course a mix of those things depending on more local consideration, and the detailed nature of the open space in question. So we are now considering it in the context of putting something in the issues and options paper. [prompt] I think we would be happy with that description yes [no blanket protection] because the presumption in PPG17 of course, against the loss of open space, and quite a strong presumption, I mean we've incorporated that in the policy but at the same time we didn't feel it was realistic to, well obviously we didn't feel it was realistic to erm try to protect all open space everywhere in every circumstance. [prompt] I do have to refer to it quite a lot to tell, erm to point it out to development control Case Officers. Because, although we don't get a lot of applications for large scale loss of open space, we do sometimes get it for applications that

would result in open space being impinged on. Certainly open space in the broadest definition. [prompt] Well there's a variety of things, I mean sometimes, the council itself is looking to accommodate new facilities for communities and, and some people in the Council naturally tend to look at open space as providing available sites, especially when it's already Council owned as so much of it is. We do get, quite a lot of applications, or in the first place, just usually pre-application enquiries, also about the enclosure of small pieces of open incidental open space across, to within the curtilage of dwellings, and we do actually have a specific policy to deal with that. With it's own checklist of criteria. But that's another type that crops up quite a lot. [prompt] In fairness, I can't think of a case here where a developer has taken us to appeal over development on open space. [prompt] I'm personally a bit wary and sceptical of taking that approach [disposal] very far. Because you could end up selling 90% of it to make the remaining 10% stunningly perfect. But, you know, the amount of open space it important, and and having a variety and so on as well.

Use and Value: Erm, well value is. I presume we are not talking about monetary value here, we are talking about value for recreation and so forth. Well, in which case you just need to, you need to look at the quality of each individual open space and what, what sort of functions it can fulfil. Erm, use [tape runs out] It's not something that happens any other way [people counts]. Unlike traffic counts etc it's not something that happens otherwise. But I mean you can usually get a degree of an idea, just from local knowledge and, if not your own then you know, other people who know the area.

Open space at Risk: Erm, well the erm, the poorest quality ones, in terms of physical condition. And I mean we have, her we have a certain amount of open space which so far has been open space because it hasn't been economic to do much else with it, in other words, its land with fairly serious ground condition problems for example. The legacy of mining or other activities of that kind. The incidental open space in housing estates is also quite vulnerable. Because there are always people wanting to potentially enclose it into their gardens. Er, and tends not to be, not apparently to be very highly valued by the local population. In which cases there is only very localised interest in it. Different people whose windows overlook it and so on. [prompt] Not really, I mean the deficient areas are scattered across the borough. [prompt] No, I would say not, I would say deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods are about equally represented. You know, in terms of either the deficient and the non-deficient areas.

Stakeholders: Erm, well if it was Council owned, the Council's property services department would be involved in the sense that they would be asked to site searches if there was a need for a new built facility. So they might be the ones who were potentially putting forward open space sites for development. Doesn't mean it would necessarily go through. Erm the stakeholders in the broadest sense could be almost anybody. You know including anybody who could comment on the resulting planning application. [prompt] Well in XXX local Councillors often take quite a leading role in the sense of both championing something that they think is a good solution to a local problem and in terms of going out and getting the community to give local views as well. I mean to give you an example that doesn't involve the loss of open space but is controversial, we had a number of cases where we have wanted to put multi-use, or a section within the Council has proposed putting multi-use games areas or marked out sports pitches or ball courts or whatever, on land that has previously be generally open green space for informal use, dog walking, casual play by children, all those sorts of things. So although that's not loss of the open space, it's changing its function and attracting a different clientele, eventually and that can be highly controversial with local communities. Which are often split down the middle of course.

Socio-spatial: Erm, if you mean using the proceeds from selling one piece of open space to provide another piece in a, in an area that's been deficient, no. Well I can't say it would never happen, but I haven't seen it happen so far. In the last few years, in the cases where we've provided major, extra open space sites, they've been very specifically in urban fringe areas and they've been funded by er, derelict land reclamation type grants, because they've been brought about by reclaiming derelict or damaged land. So that, the funding hasn't come from, we, we haven't sold any open space in order to fund providing more open space in a different location, not that I can think of anyway. Certainly not on a major scale.

Asset base: We, er arguably we've done that with allotments, if, if that comes within your category. Because we've had a large, a long term decline in allotment use. I know there's a national upsurge but in this area it hasn't necessarily hit us yet and what we have had is a very high level of allotment provision in what are former mining villages and the more rural parts of XXX. And that level of allotment provision has been much higher than there's any interest in now. Or potential tenants. So there has been a tendency to get rid of the allotment land or sometimes to, well to lease it out for grazing instead, which isn't getting rid of it but it's bringing in a more reliable rent. But in terms of more mainstream open space, no, I don't think there's any evidence of what you mentioned here.

Local Authority 10

General: Erm, since it become apparent that we are doing the open space assessment, some of the results have become quite popular with members. With, erm some leading lights of the local community.

Financial pressures: Erm, in short, er national government doesn't give enough money money to maintain its estate for parks and open spaces. Seems to be diminishing every year.

Central: Erm, I can't really comment on broad stuff, on green space I think the government is trying to look at planning obligations to fund virtually everything going. Circular 5/05 seems to give us some leeway to try and provide, if you like, a roof tax on a variety of community infrastructure. Including green space. [prompt] We might drop into some of those categories [robustness]. [prompt] We've sort of avoided that [identification of surplus areas]. We are trying to get a discussion going about what we want. Which ones we want. Erm, that's proving to be little bit hard.

Scrutiny: Yes, definitely. By highlighting open space, by identifying functional open space its much harder for asset management, development control to develop open space, no matter how small or how poor in quality or how, sort of unloved it is in terms of value. So, in a way the onus is on those people to prove that it is surplus. Erm, so we've, we've in a way plugged the leak and now we've got to figure out, what are we going to do with this leak? That's where our area forums and our members might help us, but members are very protective of every blade of grass that's in the borough. They see it as erm, something, they, they feel that they've lost a lot of open space over the years. Blame the planners!

Options: Erm, mmm, erm, to build on green space? [prompt] Um, there would have to be exceptional reasons for building on it. You can nibble, obviously we try to get compensation, like for like or better, er or and better. But there aren't any whole-scale losses at the moment, we are talking small, very difficult spaces that almost cause, if you like, a crime and disorder issue. You know, little old, alleys of space that were old garage sites or something like that. They attract problems, and, and, so we are talking size of maybe point 0, 0, no maybe point 01 something like that. You know we are talking very small beer compared to parks and football pitches.

Open space at risk: At risk? Well to developers every site is um, potential. They, at the moment it's quite good they seem to be um, very quiet at the moment about our greens spaces. I don't know whether we've got enough brown sites around but they are certainly not hopping up and down on disused allotments like they used to. It's very quiet. The lull before the storm probably.

Use and Value: We, we, we, we got our parks people to go out and provide, I spose a very um subjective view, which all these things are, but um, it's a personal view of the parks people because they know how a lot of the open spaces are used. In terms of value, there are some conflicts because erm, obviously some people will just passively look at open space and enjoy it that way, it doesn't mean that there are hoards of kids, old people and, and mums and dads and stuff running around all over it. It is quite difficult you know to assess value. But what we are trying to do through the members and our area forums, is actually try and get them to say; erm; 'Do you regard' I mean they are all gonna say, 'Yeah, it's a valuable site'. Erm, but we have said that to the members don't do that because it will just cause more problems. Erm, so in a way there is a sort of filtering on value. We don't have to go along with that. It depends where it is and whether we can improve that value by, I dunno, improving it or changing its function. Could be disused allotments, we could turn it into a fun playground, and all of a sudden everyone loves it! So we are trying to do it step by step and not sort of rush into anything that's derelict and poorly valued, that's not a reason to get rid of it as PPG17 says. But, erm I'm just one of maybe two people in the authority and, if I get told to get rid of it I get rid of it. Erm, I've actually got to go in two minutes.

Location: No they are all over the place.

Stakeholders: Our parks, parks department.

Socio-spatial: Erm, it might, it might. Only a might though.

Asset base: That's possible. [prompt] There are pressures to dis-invest. Because they don't see that there are the resources to maintain them in the future.

Local Authority 2a

General: Its, its, its towards the top of the political agenda at the moment, in so much as erm, its being supported by Council. There's been a recognition that there's been a lack of investment so, erm for the next three years it's been given er, just over three million pounds to start putting into the infrastructure, upgrading toilets, playgrounds, etc. Erm towards the top of the, top of the pile now. And there is a suggestion that, when we get to the end of three years there will be further support of money as well. [prompt] Well, it's just money that is probably in reserve and everyone pitches in for capital on a yearly basis and that gets prioritised and erm, parks is, as I say, since parks is come to the top of the pile. We've been given some priority by securing that funding.

Financial pressure: Erm, I think you are going to always be under pressure with regards the sort of revenue and that side of things. So for us that's all part of Best Value so.

Central govt: Erm, I know there's been some talk over the last few years about potentially taking parks out of Council control. And actually having a National body and actually going back to CCT, because when everyone went erm, went out, under direct labour, erm, going back a number of years ago. With that was obviously budget cuts to achieve that. And I think, what's now, where all of the parks have actually come back into Council ownership and been sort of, run through Councils, they've found it a tight squeeze. To achieve that similar standard if you like going back fifteen, twenty years ago. [prompt] No, it's because, there have probably been a number of different groups lobbying central government with regards to the fact that erm, they've recognised that as they've gone round the country, erm the country and as they've received feedback from members, and various Councils, there is an acknowledgement if you like, that a lot more needs to be spent on parks. But its how you achieve that, you know, do you put up Council tax even more, or is education more important so.

Scrutiny: Erm, I think it possibly has. I haven't really thought about it too much, probably think its, it's probably helped inform erm, where we are looking around the borough er, increasing green and open spaces, where we've identified deficiencies so. It's certainly homed in on that area.

Options: [start] Nah, we're actually going the other way. We are actually trying to create additional surplus, sorry trying to create additional open space. And we have actually got a couple of various things that we are looking at in the next couple of years. Erm, to create new parks. [prompt] Yeah depends what department your reading from. The statement that you are going to run past me in a moment, we may not have actually made. [prompt/complete quotation] No I mean my understanding of where we are going at the moment is as I just sort of expressed, we are actually trying to increase open space. Not actually try and get rid of it. However, that said. How can I give an example. If there was a large area that were looking to develop, and there was a small area that could be defined, if you like, as being surplus, think that we could, we could accrue some capital from, if, if we was then to sort of plough it back in to the green space to sort of increase its safety and play value and stuff of that nature. I don't think we would just throw it out. I think we would look at it. We are quite sensitive to we what the local views were. I mean we've got a very strong Friends base, erm and quite a few of our Parks have now got Friends groups. So obviously we'd listen to them, listen to Councillors, and sort of come to, come to the best view. But, the general consensus is, that we definitely wouldn't look towards getting rid of surplus, as I've just expressed, we are actually looking towards increasing our green space. [prompt] that would be fine, if the money is ring-fenced, to come in. I think people would need that comfort zone for that. What we are looking at, is, for areas of the Borough where's there's not an area of green space within four hundred metres of someone's front door. And it's about looking at those areas, and when development comes on stream, that developers look at PPG17 to try and address those issues.

Options: No, as I say we are going the other way.

Use and Value: Well, I think that's something else that needs to be done as well, and sort of PPG17 then becomes a strand of that. Because what we haven't got at the moment, we

haven't got a full blown strategy, and really in doing a strategy and hanging the strands, that'll inform us of the best way forward.

Open Space at risk: Phhh, probably areas where there's intense pressure. Just trying to think. [long pause] Obviously the guidance gives us, gives us some leads as to areas that we might need to look at. [prompt] Well no, because there's all sorts of lobbies on those groups now, you've got playing fields groups, and some of the fields are being pushed over to trusts. Like King George trusts etc. I think our mind frame at the moment is actually increasing. The, the interesting thing at the moment is though, is something that we will actually be doing as part of our review, is, the land pockets erm where, if you like were identified as, as possibilities of additional parks and this is change of use from allotments to parks, erm. [prompt] No I don't think so [character of the area]

Stakeholders: Well first and foremost, obviously its people that are local, immediately local, to that area, and as I've just mentioned, we've got quite a few Friends groups, so, we would certainly need to listen to their views.

Socio-spatial: What, get rid of all the crown jewels like they did years ago? (laughs) [prompt] I think the other thing is, some of the Boroughs, what they've tended to do which, maybe crosses over with some of your answers is, they've tended to identify what they term as 'Premier parks'. So they might direct additional resources to, if you like, the main parks, and then spend less money on some of their green spaces. [prompt] Premier parks, it's, it's something that's cropped up in the last few years, and if you look at some of the websites, for London, Waltham Forest has got premier parks, Barnet has. And they are on our borders so, and what it is is where you've only got a limited resource, going back to your other question, across a few of them, where you've only got a limited resource, you can only keep up, say nine to a dozen of your main parks, to a particular standard. Then you direct the majority of your finances to or resource into those areas and let the others, sort of, you don't keep them to as high standard. So, I don't know, one cut of grass a year, and your premier parks, three cuts of grass a year. Yeah, and do it that way. [prompt] It might do and going back to might point that I made a couple of minutes ago, it's the strategy that will drive those sorts of things and we haven't sort of, discussed those things here, so. I'm not saying it might not happen in the future but at this moment in time that's not our thinking for the way forward.

Asset base: No. As I say we are going the other way.

General: Yeah, I'd like to think that, that's, cos I think sometimes people think there's sinister purposes behind sort of carrying out various processes, and using them for, sort of very ulterior motives, etc. But we've used them to inform ourselves, first of all, of what we've got in the public realm and then, as I say, that will help, inform my strategies one way or the other. But I'm pleased to say that our current stand is that, we are looking to increase and looking to invest. And not er, sell off anything to achieve that.

Local Authority 9a:

General: Erm, what type of open spaces? [prompt] Right, yeah, I think that we view them as an important part of people's lives and if there are areas that you want to develop.

Financial: Yes [prompt] Erm, essentially finding erm, efficiencies and savings.

Central: Er yes. [prompt] Erm budget being squeezed by central government, which means that services are having to make efficiencies.

Scrutiny: Yeah, yeah it has. With the main thing that we're actually consulting on an open space strategy. [prompt] In the way at looking at it more strategically through management. Parks and open spaces where, those assets weren't really managed, erm.

Options: Yeah, I really don't know. My only comment would be that we are just been completing the UDP and I'm not too clear on whether there has been any sites identified within the UDP. XXX would probably have been your best bet there, in that he co-ordinates the production of the UDP.

Use and Value: I think that we, not in terms of particular sites and we've not, as, as I am aware, gone down that particular road. There's been quite extensive consultation in terms of what people general value is in terms of open space and in terms of analysing particular areas. And in terms of particular areas, it leads on from your first question, I'm not aware of any individual assessment that have gone for plots of land. So again I'm having some difficulty answering that one.

Risk: No, again, if there is any, they would be identified in the UDP but I'm not aware of them.

Spatial distribution: Well certainly within the Borough, that we have disparity in that we're, there, is areas of high urbanisation and areas of like massive, rural areas. But within the Borough there is disparity and some people that live within the east part of the borough, have very little access to open space so, there is disparity across the borough. Ninety-five percent of the population lives in quite a small area of the borough. There are quite big areas of rural space. It's just the nature of the Borough that it's semi rural and an urban area as well. [prompt] No, I think it's a bit of a mixed bag. There are areas of deprivation within the more rural areas erm, as well as erm you know areas of affluence, if you want to call it that. And in the urban areas it's a mixture as well, it's not one or the other.

Stakeholders: I think for me, probably a combination between erm, er, Councillors and residents.

Socio-spatial: Erm, I think it's a difficult answer because I'm not aware of the analysis as to which open spaces are potentially for disposal. I think my principal would be that there is an element of equitable access or erm as much as we can get for erm, different areas within the borough.

Asset base: Erm, I wouldn't have thought so, I think that my view is that the Council would tend to hold on to areas of open space, and I think that the maintenance and management costs are insignificant against the weight of opinion of disposing against some open space.

Local Authority 10

General: Oh! Can I stop you there? Erm because essentially the assessment was done in consultation with our leisure department and my primary concern is that my name has been given to you. Erm, the study was undertaken, er it was funded by the Planning Department, but the actual consultation was carried out by my colleagues in Leisure. Who may be better placed to answer that question, because I'm afraid I couldn't. Erm, my team, in the LDF team have only actually been working on policies for the last three years. I mean my only involvement with that study has been working with the leisure team so I've got no background I'm afraid as to what, past views were. [prompt] Yeah, yeah, I'm not trying to discourage you, the consultations, it's just that I might not have the knowledge and I'd imagine that leisure might be able to help you further.

Financial: I'm not aware of any, no.

Central: No, I mean at the moment XXX's biggest issue is to provide the housing. Erm, we are obviously very aware that that shouldn't be at the expense of open space and the green belt, so apart from that I'm not aware of any specific pressures.

Scrutiny: I believe it has but let me say. I don't have the in depth knowledge but it was brought out to do that and actually increase the protection of it. And hence that's why you had to do the PPG17 study to see what your assets were. To set your local standards.

Options: No. I mean, that study we haven't actually adopted it, at the Council, it's a background study. Until we get to the stage of actually looking at our open space and seeing what we need to allocate, we have have decided that has been parked, essentially. Erm it's not been adopted by the Council its recommendations from our consultants. Haven't necessarily agreed or disagreed with them. So it has no status in that respect. We haven't decided whether to take it on board or not. Erm, but in terms of actually deciding whether to dispose of sites or not, we are not at that stage in our policy making yet. I think it's probably unlikely, because obviously open space is valuable and, because we're so urbanised, I don't think it would be very politically, right to start disposing of open spaces when they are so valuable for residential areas that are becoming high density. I think it's unlikely but obviously I can't pre-empt what we might do in the future. We will have to look very carefully at that report that our consultants prepared, to see if we agreed with the outcome from it.

Use and Value: I would say, I'm afraid not. At the moment, I mean we've got so many things that we are dealing with in planning, we start looking at those issues when we get to them if you know what I mean. Er, I mean again, again, that might be something you talk to leisure department about because we do own a lot of the open space and commons in XXX. They would probably be advising us on that.

Open space at risk: Erm, I don't I'm afraid. I wasn't involved in the study well enough to know the sites in XXX. As I say, our Leisure Services worked with the with mapping with our consultants to obviously, identify the ones that had been put on the asset list. Erm, and to qualify whether there was good accessibility and so on. I don't know them that well.

Spatial: I don't know again I'm afraid. Just through lack of knowledge I'm afraid.

Stakeholders: It would be the local residents and I would imagine the local businesses as well because they have views during the working day but it would also be our Members and our Community Strategy partnership people. Erm, so very wide ranging.

Socio-spatial: If, if they were found that would be an obvious thing, think the character of, of XXX is that quite a lot of open spaces around it. We have a very high proportion of Green Belt and a lot of that is open space or common land. So, it's not an option I'd rule out. We'd look at all options. Because that's what planning requires you to do these days, is look at all options before you start homing in on the right ones. And so it's not, I don't think it's something we'd rule out but, think the character of XXX, we've got quite a lot of open space scattered.

Asset-base: I think again, because, you know it is another option we could look at. That would be something you know speak to leisure because they actually manage the Council's assets. I think, so, I think they'd probably give you a better answer than me but. Again from a planning point of view we'd look at all options.