



From the Chair:

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3 July 2015

Simon O'Brien,
Chairman,
Liverpool Strategic Green and Open Spaces Review Board
City of Liverpool Mayoral Commission

Dear Simon,

This document contains the five principal recommendations that are submitted by Merseyside Civic Society (MCS) for consideration by the Review Team. Each of the recommendations is accompanied by a statement of justification and an indication of the potential beneficial consequences of the application of the principles in practice.

The recommendations have been drafted, on behalf of MCS, by MCS Council member and SharetheCity.org planner Jonathan Brown MRTPI who, for many years, has served as the MCS Champion for Parks and Suburban Heritage.

Five Recommendations for the Parks and Green Space Review Team

- 1. Differentiate between historic parkland and grassed-over demolition sites**
- 2. Measure the number of park users to enable impacts to be better understood and demonstrated**
- 3. Identify providers with public funding that benefit from parks and should contribute more**
- 4. Smart management and maintenance**
- 5. Linking up Liverpool's Parks and Promenades in a Green Web.**

Planning context and background to MCS Five Recommendations

- Liverpool's parks and playing fields are an investment, not a liability. They are an investment in public health, social well-being, economic growth and environmental services.
- The benefits of quality public open space are well-researched and well-established. However, as a free-to-use public service they can never be expected to be directly self-financing.
- The returns on investment are instead shared across Greater Liverpool's society and economy, through a healthier, happier population, a sustainable property market and functioning ecological habitats.



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- Liverpool's magnificent, planned ring of Victorian public parks is a unique legacy that we have inherited intact, and we must therefore take care to bequeath this legacy intact and improved with each generation.
- It is worth recalling that our forebears built much of this great civic designed landscape in just four years, beginning in 1868 with Newsham (121 acres) in the central inner city, quickly joined in 1870 by Stanley Park (110 acres) in the north, and culminating in 1872 with Sefton Park (235 acres) in the south.
- With other historic landscapes, like Paxton's earlier Princes Park, the Botanic Gardens on Edge Lane, Greenbank, Calderstones, Croxteth and the cemeteries at Toxteth and Anfield, Liverpool has an exceptional armature of major heritage parkland to complement its World Heritage Waterfront, Georgian, Victorian and Garden City suburbs and boulevard 'parkways'.
- We recognise that, as a non-statutory service, revenues for maintenance and improvement are subject to growing constraint.
- We also applaud the city's ambition to continue growing its population, which the most recent Census (2011) showed rose 6% since 2001, the first ten-year increase since the 1930s.
- However, Liverpool council must avoid the temptation to cherry-pick from its inheritance of historic parkland and salami-slice green field site sell-offs to its developer partners.
- This would be a betrayal both of those ancestors who worked and paid for these public benefits and subsequently protected them through world wars, disease epidemics and economic depressions.
- It would also be a betrayal of our children and those not yet born to rob them of an inheritance that our own generations have enjoyed.
- [Merseyside Civic Society has been disturbed to hear Liverpool's head of planning publicly make the case that protections on green space, and prioritising the recycling of brownfield land, 'do not work'.](#)
- We believe this is wrong, and risks undermining the turnaround in population only recently achieved, by encouraging those who argue for purely market led land allocation. Wider green-belt protections, alongside brownfield first targets, have supported urban renaissance in all of the core cities and would be folly to discard.
- Green belt is highly relevant to Liverpool, even though there is very little of it within the city's boundary – alongside brownfield targets, sustainable planning policy prioritises core urban areas, partly by prevention of investment flight out to green field sites, a process that gravely damaged Liverpool through dispersal and depopulation up to the 1990s.



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MCS Recommendations for the Parks and Green Space Review Team

1. Differentiate between historic parkland, and grassed-over demolition sites

- Parkland in Walton Hall, Newsham Park, Sefton Park Meadow and Calderstones, etc. has been managed and used as such throughout the last century and beyond. Areas with such long established recreational use should never have been proposed for development by officers or approved by politicians in the Local Plan 'call for sites'.
- At the same time, Liverpool has many hundreds of acres of grassed over land on the sites of houses demolished during the 1960s and 70s clearances, and the disastrous recent Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder demolitions from 2003 to date.
- These open areas on Edge Lane, Stanley Road, Kensington, etc. are generally low in amenity value and fragment street form, acting as liabilities rather than public assets.
- These and redundant post-industrial land, including Liverpool Waters, are the areas upon which new development at appropriate densities should be focused, to refill the many gaps in the 'shatter zone' that disfigures the inner core, and to rebuild population and local services.
- Density is important. We believe the Local Plan target densities of around 30 dwellings per hectare are inappropriately suburban for sites in the inner core, and will make it unnecessarily difficult for the Local Plan housing targets to be achieved without encroachment on valued recreational parkland.
- The classic terraced streets, that still define Liverpool's urban character, are the appropriate form and density for the inner city, and it is regrettable that they have been officially maligned as obsolete and common place. Granby's Turner Prize nomination shows there is an enlightened alternative to clearance.
- Where former demolition sites have become established as recreation space or wildlife habitats over time, care will be needed where redevelopment is considered and local requirements must be respected.
- The principle of protecting parks and reusing previously developed buildings and land is core to good planning.

2. Measure the number of park users to enable impacts to be better understood and demonstrated

- Greater Liverpool contains exemplar or 'beacon' local authorities skilled in maximising resources without resorting to sell off of their parks and open spaces.



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- Fundamental to this is demonstrating the value of these assets to funders, including tax payers and other sponsors, and key to this is building an evidence base that Liverpool currently lacks.
- Halton and Knowsley, for example, undertake careful measurement of 'footfall' across their park estate, using mobile 'magic-eye' counters and also headcount tallying by local volunteers.
- This footfall evidence allows usage levels of parks to be properly understood.
- The impacts on visitor profiles of new facilities, or of disinvestment, can then be measured and assessed.
- By not collecting this information, Liverpool City Council cannot be sure of the outcomes from, and impacts on, its park estate.
- This is important when it comes to demonstrating to potential funders the benefits of green spaces, and also when it comes to making efficiencies as there may be ways of saving money that would not affect visitor levels.
- For example, there may be funding to assist with park care and maintenance from NHS or policing budgets, if the impacts on health or crime prevention of, for example, a new adventure playground, could be demonstrated.
- Alternatively, there may be areas that could be managed more cheaply and less intensely, such as, for example, by reducing mowing to allow wildflower meadows, without deterring visitors.
- Private sector businesses may also be more inclined to sponsor and assist if the authority were able to show how visitor numbers, or property values, are influenced by proximity to park environments.

3. Identify providers with public funding that benefit from parks and should contribute more

- The neighbourhoods round Liverpool's parks are home to many stakeholders who receive significant quantities of public funding, such as registered providers (aka housing associations/registered social landlords), private landlords of homes in multiple occupation (HMOs), Home Office asylum and bail hostels, and extra-care health providers.
- The City should consider ways of capturing some of the surpluses and benefits that these beneficiaries receive from their properties' proximity to public space.
- This could happen through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), higher planning gains through Section 106, voluntary partnerships or other revenue raising measures.
- For example, social landlord Plus Dane Group operated with a surplus of some £5m in the last financial year. Still larger amounts apply to landlord groups such as LMH, LHT, Riverside, Arena and so on.



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- A small percentage of the multi-million pound social landlord surpluses reinvested in public space each year would help the City to maintain parkland through this period of austerity, and potentially benefit the landlords by raising the value of their housing stock and improving tenant well-being.
- By the same token, certain uses have negative impacts on public spaces. For example, the conversion of larger park side villas to 16+ bedsit HMOs is happening around Liverpool's historic parks without resistance from the local planning authority, changing the character of historic neighbourhoods and intensifying pressures on parks through high turnover, transience and concentrations of vulnerable residents.
- The costs are socialised whilst the benefits are privatised; this needs to change.
- On a broader note, we are aware of cash rich bodies, such as the Lawn Tennis Association, Premier League Clubs, Football Association and English County Cricket Board, as well as the Heritage Lottery Fund and National Trust, who could be approached to assist in the maintenance of Liverpool's parks during this difficult period.
- Again, the essential caveat is that public park land must remain in public hands and the family silver not sold off.

4. Smart management and maintenance

Smart management

- MCS welcome the creative use of Liverpool's parks for events such as the Giant Spectacular, Brouhaha and Africa Oye, and believe that there is further potential for temporary or semi-permanent cultural, sporting and commercial uses which increase activity and also generate revenues.
- Open air concerts, food festivals, circuses, fun fairs, fireworks and sports events are already taking place, and could be intensified further without overly commercialising Liverpool's public spaces. Voluntary contributions could be requested, and more ticketed events take place.
- We believe more such activity needs to happen in the north of the city, to balance the focus on the south end – and again, we welcome recent advances in this direction. For example, Walton Hall Park could house a revenue-generating Grand National Festival during the week leading up to Aintree races.
- Examples, such as the Isla Gladstone in Stanley Park and Sefton Park Palm House, as well as the new café kiosks in Newsham and Sefton Parks and the Climbing Centre and café in Otterspool, show how a commercial focal-point can enhance park usage and also generate financial returns, without undue compromise to public access.
- The key point is to ensure that land is not removed permanently from public access, to avoid incentivising creation of 'Trojan Horses' for future land sell off.



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Smart maintenance

- A drive to identify false economies that end up costing more money will yield efficiencies whilst also improving public spaces.
- For example, Glendale (who we have found to be excellent and creative partners) tell us that the cage bins found in some of our parks were installed in the past because they were large and cheap – but that their operation is expensive, because the litter has to be picked out of them piece by piece.
- For just a few hundred pounds they can be replaced by a bin that can be emptied in seconds – but, even though this would obviously save time and money, there is little or no capital budget for new bins. So the old ones remain and staff time is wasted.
- This is an example of where smart working through Park Forums with other local stakeholders can yield rewards.
- For example, a community Park Friends group may well be able to raise modest capital funds for new bins that quickly allow council revenue budgets to go further.
- The council receives unquantified support from volunteers and local residents. We know of many people who willingly volunteer time and resources to work in Liverpool's parks, painting benches, planting trees, picking litter and organising free events, but the value of this is not defined.
- We envisage a city-wide 'volunteer force' or 'green team', along the lines of the BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers), who apply themselves across the city to fill gaps that the council and Glendale cannot reasonably be expected to fill. The Friends Forum could be asked to lead on this.
- Local groups, such as Treehouse CIC in Newsham Park, are showing how community led partnership working with the city and Glendale, through a stakeholder Forum and social media networking, can bring tangible improvements and a notable increase in park usage.

5. Linking up Liverpool's Parks and Promenades in a Green Web

- During consultations on Liverpool's emerging Local Plan, MCS council member Jonathan Brown MRTPI presented ideas for Liverpool's future urban structure.
- His concept is of a 'Green Web of Parks and Promenades', defining the city fabric round its radial spatial structure.
- **“The Green Web connects Liverpool's waterfront promenades and Ring of Parks via the great radial roads, parkways and side streets of Liverpool.”**
- A walkable, cycle-able web of connections between each of the major parks, the waterfront promenades, green boulevards and radial urban high street shopping districts is an opportunity staring us in the face.



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- Planning policies have for years stood in the way of maximising underlying urban connectivity by promoting main routes that prioritise commuters above communities. This can be seen most acutely in the hostile infrastructure around Scotland Road, Islington, Low Hill and Parliament Street.
- The clearances that replaced Georgian and Victorian inner Liverpool with a failed landscape of high rise and highways left long-term scars that have only partly healed by the suburbanisation of the inner core.
- These two waves of clearance and rebuilding have left a fragmented 'shatter zone' of wide highways, grass verges and walled low-density estates where there were once joined-up residential and shopping streets.
- However, the city's underlying structure remains strong, compact, coherent and sustainable, and the city's parks are set within many miles of well defined, well connected street networks.
- Linking the parks more clearly, safely and strongly is mainly a matter of addressing legibility and safety at key junctions and crossing points.
- For example, the waterfront World Heritage site promenades and Croxteth Park are easily linked by bike in about 20 – 30 minutes, crossing Newsham Park and the Loop Line via traffic-calmed Boaler Street but for a handful of lethal traffic death traps en-route, particularly at Islington, Green Lane and West Derby village.
- Simple traffic light and lane reconfiguration at these few points, enhanced by street trees and simple signage, would open up a family-friendly east-west 6 mile green link that could have huge benefits.
- There are numerous similar examples that do not require major infrastructure investment to connect up Liverpool's green space, waterfront and high street assets.
- **Joining up this latent Green Web will help make Liverpool 'more than the sum of its parks.'**

We hope that the simple statement of the five principles, and the associated statements of justification and illustrative examples, will prove to be a helpful contribution to the process of developing a coherent strategy for how the City's rich inheritance of parks and open spaces can be better managed in the future – and better recognised as an investment from which future generations can continue to look forward to benefitting.

Yours sincerely

Peter Brown