Sandwell Green Space Strategy

In Urban Sandwell our Green Spaces providing valuable space for a variety of physical, recreational and cultural activities. They are our green lungs and helping to retain our flora and fauna and reducing the impact of climate change. They are good for healthy minds and bodies as Nature has a restorative effect by reducing stress, boosting mental wellbeing and improving recovery from illness.

2010 to 2020

The Sandwell Green Space Strategy has been produced by Sandwell Parks and Countryside Service.
SANDWELL GREEN SPACE STRATEGY

Foreword

24% of Sandwell is made up of green space – including important parks, nature reserves and the wonderful Sandwell Valley. Some of our spaces have or are being prepared for the prestigious Green Flag Award as a mark of their quality. In Sandwell we have a great opportunity to build on and improve the abundance of green spaces and the contribution they make to the lives of the people who live in and visit Sandwell.

We know our Green Spaces can make a positive contribution to a range of cross cutting issues including reducing CO2 and therefore climate change along with the importance for flora and fauna, leisure, relaxation and physical and educational activities. It is also vital for our economic, social and environmental well being, along with the general image of the area that can affect investment levels in the borough. On behalf of Sandwell Council I am delighted to support this strategy and its successful implementation as a contribution to improving the quality of life for all of us.

We recognise that green space is “A community Centre without a roof”. Our Green spaces play an important role in the lives of all of our communities, of all ages and they have a key role in young peoples learning and physical, intellectual and emotional development through exploring the natural environment and informal play. We need to provide a range of opportunities for learning, recreation and play with local nature reserves, country parks, children's play areas and youth facilities such as skate parks and multi games areas providing an essential element in helping achieve this.

Councillor Linda Horton,
   Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure
executive summary

introduction
we need a green space strategy to ensure that we have a policy framework for the future management and maintenance of our parks and green spaces. we want our spaces to be highly valued, well used and a focus for community pride. over the next 10 years we expect this strategy to act as a catalyst for the ongoing regeneration of our green spaces by ensuring we are in a strong position to take advantage of any potential funding available.

our strategy takes as its starting point the results of a green space audit completed in 2006. in essence this audit revealed a great diversity of green space within the borough some of it of high quality and some less so. this strategy is the result of a collaborative attempt by the sandwell mbc parks and countryside services, our partners and our green space conscious communities to address any deficiencies revealed by the audit. the challenge for the strategy is to refocus how green space is regarded, managed, maintained and developed linked to the sandwell “climate change action plan”.

we recognise that sandwell is the only metropolitan borough with almost no access to the wider countryside and car ownership is below average. therefore our programme of events and activities primarily located in sandwell valley country park and the 6 town parks are essential for the people of sandwell. these range from festivals that attract local audiences to sandwell show and the historic vehicle show, which also attracts a regional audience. our green spaces have diverse and distinctive qualities that are valued for their own particular character and nature conservation by local people and any improvements should reflect the distinctive character and identity of each site.

our green spaces support community cohesion and sustainable communities between diverse cultures that live around green spaces and by using the space for a range of events and activities we bring people together. our strategy will contribute to future planning policy and support the creation of new spaces where there are deficiencies, supporting the council’s key priorities and encourage a more active healthy life style. the strategy includes that green space which has unrestricted access and is over 0.4 hectares. almost all of this is owned by the council. a notable exception is warley woods, a park that is successfully managed by a community trust.

a number of our green spaces have significant water features, especially sandwell valley country park and our key urban parks, including ornamental ponds, lakes and water courses. as part of our desire to improve the fabric and facilities of green spaces, water management and safety forms an important part of this work.

the summary highlights four significant areas of focus and they each carry equal importance in their delivery. they are: audience development, people and partnerships, space and places, resources and services.

sandwell parks and countryside….greener places active spaces
1. **Audience Development**

A key aim of our strategy is to develop existing and new audiences to our green spaces by encouraging those people who either do not use our spaces or those who only occasionally visit. Parks and countryside areas offer a broad range of facilities and opportunities and are used by people for a wide variety of uses, including walking, cycling, fishing, sports and leisure pastimes and as a place for relaxation and family fun.

Our Green Spaces host a significant number of events, festivals and activities throughout the year including band concerts, funfairs, historical vehicle show, the Sandwell Show, and a series of Christmas events at Sandwell Valley Country Park and Haden Hill Park. Small scale community events are equally as important for animating spaces and increasing local use. Our aim is therefore to optimise use of parks, countryside areas and green spaces by local people and visitors and we will achieve this by:

- Develop a marketing plan for green spaces
- Developing **promotional materials** in order to raise awareness of green spaces and their facilities at a town level and neighbourhood level.
  - Develop a marketing plan for green spaces.
  - Produce educational and resource information targeted at schools and colleges Events and Activities.
  - Develop electronic marketing information at Sandwell Park Farm Visitor Centre.
  - Maintain and update our web site on a regular basis in particular promoting events and activities
  - Signpost our Green Space facilities
- Increase and improve the range and type of local community **events and activities** in green spaces.
- Develop the range and quality of **facilities** within our green spaces, including play equipment, pitches, pavilions and other buildings, along side with general infrastructure and
- Develop a long term relationship with our **audiences**
  - Promote the health and wellbeing benefits of parks
  - Develop audiences particularly with hard to reach groups.

Meet access requirements for all sections of the community and improve accessibility of sites by identifying and reducing physical and social barriers to green spaces

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<tr>
<th>Key Actions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Promotional Materials</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Produce a Green Space Marketing Strategy</td>
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<td>• Provide notice boards in key sites with relevant, up to date information.</td>
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<td>• Develop the Green Spaces Newsletter as a key focus for dialogue on green space issues, including a feedback mechanism for those not part of the Friend’s network or Green Space Partnership.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promote participation of events and activities with in parks and countryside</td>
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<td>• Promote allotments for healthy eating, recreation exercise and links with education.</td>
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Sandwell Parks and Countryside….Greener Places Active Spaces
- Promote the health benefits of trees and woodland through implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy.
- Promote the value of conservation work for volunteers as a form of physical activity throughout parks and countryside areas.

### Events and Activities
- Identify the suitability of Parks and countryside areas for hosting particular activities and events
- to improve infrastructure to host and deliver a wide range of activities and events and to increase frequency of these events
- Work with key partners, including Children’s and Young Peoples’ Services and schools, to host activities and events
- Work with partners to deliver a range of physical health initiatives e.g. health walks and aim to increase the number of people participating in them
- Develop cycling routes across parks and green spaces, including safer routes to schools by seeking funding to deliver this.
- Develop a network of clearly marked routes for all abilities, promoting walking, running and cycling for health and well-being at key sites.
- Increase the number of people participating in walking as a form of physical activity.

### Facilities
- Improve facilities by implementing existing strategies, regeneration initiatives and improvement plans e.g. playing pitch facilities through implementing the Playing Pitch Strategy, Play Area Strategy, and Park Management Plans, Risk Management and Water Safety plans and DDA access plans.
- Develop facilities within green spaces to promote active recreation e.g. green gyms where appropriate.
- Use major regeneration initiatives to identify opportunities to provide better access to parks and green spaces as an integral part of sustainable living.
- Rationalise buildings and decommission those not in use. Schedule for either demolition or refurbishment creative/alternative change of use.
- Establishment of Green Gyms
- Provide inclusive facilities to encourage users to participate in the 5 times thirty minutes physical activities.

### Audiences
- Provide an Audience Development Plan for each of the key green flag sites.
- Promote the West Bromwich Dartmouth Park regeneration project as a significant contributor to the town as a Black Country destination.
- Promote Urban Parks and Country Park as visitor attractions attracting people to Sandwell as a place to visit live and work as an integral part of the Black Country Tourism Strategy.
- Promote parks and green spaces as a vital part of the cultural and tourism offer, as an incentive for the relocation of businesses and therefore an important part of economic regeneration of Sandwell MBC
- Develop audiences particularly with hard to reach groups
- Encourage pride and ownership and highlight how residents and visitors are benefiting from existing green spaces

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Sandwell Parks and Countryside….Greener Places Active Spaces
2. People and Partnerships

It is important that we continue to engage our partners, friends, users and wider communities in all aspects of green space management, maintenance and planning. In doing so we can ensure transparency and open accountability.

This strategy will enable us to develop a more community-centred approach to managing and improving green spaces and improve our natural environment. A key aim of the strategy is to bring more people into our green spaces and make them more lively, vibrant and safer places to be. Green spaces are often termed green lungs and the health benefits are well reported nationally. We want to support increased physical fitness and improving mental health through sports and walking opportunities in partnership with the Primary Care Trust, Sandwell Leisure Trust and other key organisations.

We will achieve all this by:

Releasing the potential of friends and users groups and volunteers to contribute more fully to the stewardship of their spaces including supporting the friends’ group network.  
Support and develop the existing and future workforce in delivering excellence in green spaces  
Working in partnership with local and strategic agencies for example with the PCT, Town Tasking etc.  
Advocating alternative forms of community management of green space through stewardship, lease and volunteer opportunities.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Friends, User Groups and volunteers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Continue to support and promote the Friends Group Network through a series of activities and promotion.</td>
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<td>- Review and develop a more structured approach to enable Friends and User Groups to share experiences and best practice at the forums.</td>
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<td>- Establish a working group to engage the community in Green Flag applications.</td>
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<td>- Establish consultations and Friends input into the Management Plans.</td>
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<td>- Develop volunteer programmes</td>
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<th>Workforce</th>
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<td>- Existing workforce training needs identified through annual Personal Performance Development (PPD) process.</td>
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<td>- Promote parks and green space as an attractive career option through apprenticeship schemes subject to funding.</td>
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<td>- Target career changes to consider parks and green space opportunities when vacancies arise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Establish a staff learning and development audit with action plan, and workforce development plan.</td>
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<td>- Improve frontline services and staff interacting and communication with the community</td>
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Sandwell Parks and Countryside….Greener Places Active Spaces
Partnerships

- Establish a Green Space Partnership with an annual Green Space Forum.
- Develop relationships with groups and users – e.g. sports clubs around those sites targeted for green flag award.
- Undertake an evaluation of partnership working, its potential and different partner’s perceptions of their operations using the Council’s tool kit.
- Continue to engage fully with Town and Borough wide Tasking.
- Ensure that externally procured services relating to the green space reflect and encompass the objectives of the strategy.
- Contribute to the actions arising out of the regional Green Infrastructure Plan

Community management

- Aspire to extend the pilot stewardship arrangements for local management of a range of facilities.
- Explore opportunities to transfer the management of assets to local partners such as Friends Groups for self-management of green space.

3. Spaces and Places

The physical management of our green spaces is vital to ensuring that we maximise community use and deliver the maximum value from our green spaces for local people. Resources available for the management, maintenance and development of green spaces are finite, and we therefore need to ensure that decisions are informed from within an agreed framework.

- Achieving **Green Flag** Award for our key Parks and Countryside sites and using the Green Flag criteria to manage and maintain other sites will lead the way in improving and sharing quality across the green space portfolio. We will aspire to expand the number of Green Flag awards, over the life of the strategy, to a total of 14 sites. The Green Flag Criteria is based around 8 key headings: -
  1. A welcoming place
  2. Healthy safe and secure
  3. Clean and well maintained
  4. Sustainability
  5. Conservation and heritage
  6. Community involvement
  7. Marketing
  8. Management

- Setting **local standards** will ensure that all residents of Sandwell will have access to good quality spaces within a reasonable walking distance. There will be three specific standards for publicly accessible green space in Sandwell:
  o Quality (including maintenance)
  o Access
  o Quantity

These standards will help to inform the planning process at a local and sub regional level and to ensure that minimum standards of the quantity, quality and accessibility of green spaces will be established in planning practice for future development activities.
Where appropriate we will seek opportunities to balance the green space quantity across the 6 towns where there is a deficit.

These standards will build on the planning policy protection for open spaces within the current Sandwell Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and, as well as quantity, quality and accessibility standards, it sets out a direction of travel in terms of the quality of spaces that people can expect. The Local Development Framework (LDF) (2007) will eventually replace the UDP as the overarching planning tool for the area. Right now the LDF is still being developed and key elements of the UDP will be incorporated into this new document. The Green Space Strategy will influence the LDF.

Establishing a **hierarchy of green spaces** to inform investment and decision making. For the purposes of our Strategy Parks and Green Spaces have been classified into 5 headings including Sandwell Valley Country Park, however it is recognised the Valley is a park of regional significance. The hierarchy is based on the range of site features visitors might expect to find at each location. This enables the opportunities for resources available to be more accurately matched against the hierarchy used here. Within each of Sandwell 6 Towns there will be a Town Park or Premier Park, below this there will be a number of Neighbourhood Parks, Playing Fields and Local Green Space. Our local nature reserves are primarily identified as being local spaces but we recognise the special contribution such spaces make to conservation of biodiversity in particular NI 197 and climate change mitigation.

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<tr>
<th>UDP Classification</th>
<th>Green Spaces Hierarchy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Parks</td>
<td>Sandwell Valley Country Park and Dartmouth Park both have a regional significance for West Bromwich, being a significant destination in the Black Country.</td>
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| Borough Parks                      | Town Park  
The recognised historical town park within each of the 6 Towns.                     |
| Neighbourhood Parks                | Premier and Neighbourhood Parks  
Essentially providing a range of visitor facilities at a much localised level.          |
| Strategic Open Space               | Playing Fields  
Large areas of open space with sports facilities and associated car park, children’s play area and complementary youth facility (usually a Multi Use Games Area) |
| Linear Open Space, Public Squares, and other Open Spaces | Local Green Space  
All other types of green space including our local nature reserves and Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation. |
### Key Actions

#### Security and Health and Safety
- Establishing Police accredited powers under section 5 of the Police Reform Act 2002 as amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods Act 2005 and Serious and Organised Crime Act 2005 for our Park Wardens Service.
- Continue to implement risk management and water safety action plans.

#### Green Flag
- Monitor progress against the performance indicator included in the Sandwell Local Area Agreement (LAA) for 5 Green Flag awards.
- Application to Green Flag Award across the borough, aspiring to achieve 14 over the life of this strategy through a rolling programme.
- Manage to standards set out in the Green Flag criteria. This does not imply an application for award, but with a holistic whole site management and maintenance approach using the reduced field assessment quality audit.
- Aspire to greater bio diversity to ensure more effective approach to conserving water resources reducing temperatures (including in our buildings) improving air quality and increasing access for recreation walking cycling and other healthy activities.

#### Local Standards
- Aspire to achieve a local quantity standard of 0.52 ha of green space per 1000 head of population in Sandwell. The current provision is 0.49ha.
- Aspire to improve the quality score of our regional, borough and neighbourhood sites to 50 out of a maximum score of 100 using the Green Flag criteria. The 2009 average score is 34.
- Aspire to achieve a local standard for accessibility per town of :-
  - Regional Park is 20 minutes by transport
  - Borough Park is 15 minutes by transport
  - Neighbourhood Park is 10 minutes walking
  - Strategic Open Space is 10 minutes local walking or 5 minutes by transport
  - Local space is 5 minutes walking
- Set the local green space standard in the Local Development Frame Work LDF, and ensure this standard is adopted as planning policy.
- Address the provision of new space within the context of this strategy, the impact on existing spaces that will serve the new communities to ensure this is taken into account.
- Establish management plans for key sites and all the local nature reserves.
- Review maintenance schedules.
- Contribute to the development a Green Infrastructure Plan.

#### Hierarchy
- For the purposes of our Strategy Parks and Countryside have been classified into 5 headings including Sandwell Valley Country Park, however it is recognised that the Country Park is of regional significance.
- The hierarchy is based on the range of site features visitors might expect to find at each location. This enables the opportunities for resources available to be more accurately matched against the hierarchy used here.
- Within each of Sandwell’s 6 Towns there will be a Town Park or premier Park,
below this there will be a number of Neighbourhood Parks, Playing Fields and Local Green Space.

- Our Local Nature Reserves are primarily identified as being local spaces but we recognise the special contribution such spaces make to conservation of both the natural environment and climate change

ENVIRONMENT
- retain flora and fauna and improve biodiversity and implement appropriate plans
- implement actions as identified in the climate change action plan
- implement the trees strategy as part of the sustainable environment
- design meaningful and pleasant landscapes while considering the environmental impact and resource sustainability
- Monitor NI 197 and contribute to the Biodiversity Action Plan

4. **Resources and Services**
Central to the messages contained within this strategy is the need to pursue excellence both in the quality of the spaces within Sandwell and the quality of the management, maintenance and development of those spaces. A key aim therefore of the strategy is to focus on quality and build a culture of pursuing quality through quality assurance standards. We will achieve all this by:

- From 2003 to 2009 capital **funding and investment** in green spaces has been over £15 million with improvements to both the landscape and infrastructure. We also supported Warley Woods Community Trust by acting as the accountable body for £1 million Heritage Lottery money to restore the park. We know from community consultations that investment in play is a priority for local people. In 2008 we were awarded £2.7 from Play England to develop play facilities across 28 sites in addition to a flag ship adventure playground 2009 – 2011. Dartmouth Park is also a major flag ship project associated with the regeneration of West Bromwich town centre. With £6.4 million restoration works financed through the Parks for People Lottery programme with Council match funding will start in 2010. This takes the total investment from 2003 up to 2010 to over £25 million. The challenge for the future is to secure more investment in the infrastructure specifically, paths, bins benches, signage, buildings, fencing, historical memorials, play areas etc. Sandwell Valley Country Park is of regional significance and we will continue to seek specialist funding opportunities to sustain and improve this very important facility, developing a more strategic approach to securing external funding.

- Council **ownership** of the 539 green space sites, which cover an area of 2,042 hectares equivalent to 24% of the total area of the borough, is spread across three main services – Parks and Countryside Management, Corporate Property, and Sandwell Homes. Overall there are 321 green spaces covering nearly 1200 hectares that have been recorded having unrestricted access. Overall 14% of Sandwell is accessible green space. Land management is divided between the Parks and Countryside Service who has overall responsibility for most unrestricted green spaces, Corporate Property has responsibility for a mix of restricted and some unrestricted green space, and Sandwell Homes manages
land historically associated with housing. The key ownership issue arising from the overall green space management is that affecting unrestricted green space within Corporate Property. Establishing the recreational value of this green space is essential in establishing any future options for possible land transfer into the Parks and Countryside Service. Our Green Space Strategy does not consider those green spaces that are not freely accessible to the public including allotments, school playing fields, or sites in private ownership/lease management. In addition land that has no meaningful recreational value such as road verges and small areas within housing is not part of this strategy.

- Ensure that **sustainability** drives our use of resources e.g. recycling, reduction in energy and use more renewable energy, contributing to the Sandwell Climate Change Action Plan.
- Review and improve the **management information** concerning users, assets, site management and maintenance standards to enable a greater understanding and hence response to the needs of users and spaces.
- Regularly review the **service quality** through periodic Culture and Sport Improved Toolkit (CSIT) assessment exercises.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Funding and investment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use section 106 capital as a means of match funding against potential external funding opportunities to carry out improvements where appropriate.</td>
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<td>• Work with community groups and partners to develop community led funding opportunities through Community Space type programmes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop commercial opportunities for franchising and sponsorship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prioritise funding opportunities with the Council’s Strategic Investment Unit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensure that revenue finance is targeted to protect capital investment in green flag parks either from section 106 or through the Council’s Shared Priority Actions (SPA) model.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Agree mechanism of distribution of S106 monies within a strategic approach in line with this strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use section 106 revenue finance to complement improved maintenance scheduled.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Seek to establish coherent management of green spaces as one estate across the Council’s Green Space portfolio holders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Re-evaluate appropriate areas of green space within Corporate Property that can be assessed for their suitability to be realigned within Parks and Countryside Service, subject to resolution of resource implications.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Establish a mechanism for advocating and prioritising green space in key decision-making forums especially those of the strategic partnership.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• reduce energy consumption and use material from sustainable source and at the same time increase recycling opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• consider sustainability and environmental impact when developing green spaces and their facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Improve biodiversity inline with NI 197 indicator as a systematic contribution towards dealing with Climate Change. Monitor improvements to NI 197 indicator.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Support the Sandwell Climate Change Action Plan</td>
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Sandwell Parks and Countryside….Greener Places Active Spaces
- Use Sandwell valley visitor centres to explain our approach to this policy as part of the educational offer.

**Management Information**

- Establish a series of local output performance indicators with grounds maintenance and cleansing service.
- Base investments on the green flag criteria as a performance measure.
- Improving gathering of visitor information and satisfaction ratings.

**Service Quality**

- Establishment of quality and performance frameworks to support Green Flag.
- Ensure Project Planning using the Prince 2 model including a project risk plan.