



ENHANCING THE IMAGE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR THROUGH MARKETING COMMUNICATION

Birmingham City Council, UK

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Abstract <p>The aim of the Bachelor's Thesis was the creation of two informative booklets for two country parks in Birmingham, the United Kingdom. These two parks; The New Hall Valley Country Park and the Sheldon Country Park are both under the ownership of Birmingham City Council to which the thesis was done. The basis of the booklets derives from a need for marketing communication between the Council and the citizens of Birmingham and how this can contribute positively to the Council's image as a service provider.</p> <p>The booklets were done in co-operation with the friend groups of the parks and various parties from the Birmingham City Council. The purpose of the consultation was to gather the relevant information needed, and then create contents for the booklets. The drafts produced were then handed in to the marketing department of the Council.</p> <p>The results of the thesis are the two informative booklets containing 11 pages and 14 pages. The booklets are drafts including information about wildlife, flora and fauna in the parks, history of the parks and about the events and other services available in the parks.</p> <p>The booklets will serve the citizens of Birmingham and after being published they will be distributed to everyone in Birmingham. The results aim to tie in the theoretical framework used in the thesis with the publics need to be informed, thus justifying the booklets being created to fill the market's purpose</p>		
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Tiivistelmä <p>Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli esitekirjasten luonti kahdelle kaupunkipuistolle; New Hall Valley Country Park:lle sekä Sheldon Country Park:lle. Puistot sijaitsevat Birminghamissa Iso-Britanniassa ja ovat kaupunginvaltuuston omistuksessa. Lähtökohtana esitekirjasille oli kaupunginvaltuuston tarve markkinoida kahta puistoaan kaupungin asukkaille ja näin saada enemmän kävijöitä sekä nostaa omaa arvoaan palvelujen tuottajana.</p> <p>Esitekirjaset tehtiin yhteistyössä monien tahojen kanssa kuten puistojen ystävien sekä kaupunginvaltuuston eri tahojen kanssa. Yhteistyön tarkoituksena oli keränää olennaista tietoa puistoista, kasata se yhteen ja näin luoda sisältö esitekirjasille. Kirjasten luonnokset annettiin kaupunginvaltuuston markkinointiosastolle viimeisteltäväksi.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tuloksena syntyi kaksi informatiivista esitekirjasta, suuruudeltaan 12 sivua ja 14 sivua. Esitekirjaset ovat luonnoksia jotka sisältävät olennaista tietoa puistojen kasvillisuudesta, eläimistä, historiasta, tapahtumista sekä puistojen palveluista.</p> <p>Esitekirjaset palvelevat kaupunkilaisia ja julkaistuaan esitekirjaset tulevat yleiseen levitykseen koko Birminghamin alueelle. Perusteluna esitekirjasille opinnäytetyö pyrkii osoittamaan kuinka esitekirjaset voivat positiivisesti muuttaa kaupunginvaltuuston imagoa palveluiden tuottajana pitkällä aikataulilla.</p>		
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
1. THE PREMISE OF THE THESIS.....	4
1.2 Birmingham City Council.....	4
1.3 New Hall Valley Country Park.....	5
1.4 Sheldon Country Park.....	6
2. MARKETING AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING QUALITY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SECTOR SERVICES IN THE UK.....	7
2.1 Introduction to the characteristics of the Public Sector in the UK.....	7
2.2 The Birmingham City Council as a service provider.....	8
2.3 Marketing in the Public Sector.....	10
2.4 Demand for recreation within Birmingham.....	11
2.4.1 Demographic-, socio-economic,- and situational characteristics.....	12
2.4.2 Birmingham City Council as a supplier.....	14
2.5 Considerations of quality.....	15
2.5.1 Evaluation of the Physical Surroundings: Tangible Aspects.....	16
2.5.2 Evaluation of Ability to perform: Responsibility.....	17
2.5.3 Evaluation of Responsiveness.....	18
2.5.4 Evaluation of Assurance.....	19
2.5.5 Evaluation of Empathy.....	19
2.6 Recreation marketing.....	20
2.7 Marketing needs for the New Hall Valley.....	20
2.8 Marketing needs for the Sheldon Country Park.....	22
3. MAKING THE BOOKLETS.....	24
3.1 Planning the booklets.....	24
3.2 Commitment and contribution to the process.....	24

3.3 Consultation.....	24
3.5 Cooperation with the marketing team of the Council.....	25
4. THE BOOKLETS	26
4.1 New Hall Valley Country Park booklet	26
4.2 The Sheldon Country Park booklet	26
5. DISCUSSION	27
REFERENCES.....	30
APPENDIXES	32
APPENDIX 1. THE NEW HALL VALLEY BOOKLET.....	32
APPENDIX 2. SHELDON COUNTRY PARK BOOKLET.....	46

FIGURES

FIGURE 1. The decision-process in outdoor creation.	11
FIGURE 2. Model of service quality gaps.	15

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to address the complex issues involved in marketing within the Public Sector. The basis for the thesis derives from a need for marketing material of two country parks in Birmingham, The United Kingdom; The New Hall Valley Country Park and the Sheldon Country Park. Both of these Country Parks are under the ownership of Birmingham City Council, which has major control of the management of the sites and the marketing methods that should be directed and utilised. The targets of this thesis aim to examine;

- 1) The role of the Public Sector within the UK and the Council's role as a service provider.
- 2) The quality of the Council's services and how this reflects the needs and wants of the citizens of Birmingham.
- 3) The ways that marketing can contribute towards this.

The role of the Council as a public service provider and its historical context are examined in order to create a realistic framework for the thesis. The theoretical framework for the thesis is based on two methods; the decision-process in outdoor recreation by Pigram and Michaels (1999) and the Servqual method developed by Parasuranam, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985).

Through Pigram's model on the decision making-process on outdoor recreation the issues of demand and supply in outdoor recreation within Birmingham is examined. The Servqual method introduces five dimensions of quality that are dealt with in the context of both Country Parks. The marketing needs for each Country Park are identified and examined on the basis of these two theories. The aim of the thesis is to create informative booklets for each Country Park, created for the marketing purposes of the Birmingham City Council. The booklets produced would be used as a marketing tool for the Council to raise awareness of the two Country Parks. The booklets contain various forms of media to attract attention and recognition from the public. The booklets are aimed at reaching a wider audience of users and inform the current users of their local Park. The thesis aims to tie in the theoretical frameworks that are going to be discussed with the publics need to be informed, thus justifying the booklets being created to fill the market's purpose.

1. THE PREMISE OF THE THESIS

In order to form a realistic basis for the thesis there needs to be a deeper insight to the background of the institutions that will be discussed as well as an introduction to the two Country Parks.

1.2 Birmingham City Council

The Birmingham City Council is the largest local authority in the UK and also the largest council in Europe. Birmingham City Council is a unitary authority which means that as a local authority it has a single tier and is responsible for all local government decisions and functions within the local area. From 5th April 2004, responsibility and budgets for a number of services were downsized and handed down to 11 district committees, as part of a rising inclination in the UK to use area committees for the larger councils. From 1st June 2006 the districts were reduced from 11 to 10 in order to correspond with legislation from the UK's government, and renamed "council constituencies". The council operates all aspects of the city's workings through its planning and leisure services and it also deals with all planning applications as well as adding designations for locally listed buildings. (Birmingham City Council 2008), (Ahmad 2008)

The New Hall Valley Country Park and the Sheldon Country Park are both under the management of the Birmingham City Council which manages over 3237 hectares of parks and open spaces in Birmingham. Both of the parks are considered as important parks in the Birmingham Parks Strategy and the habitats and the species of the parks are recognized in the Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan, which aims to conserve the habitats and preserve the local species thus supporting the Council's Sustainability and Action Plan. This in turn aims to create a more sustainable future for;

[A] city whose local neighbourhoods and vibrant urban villages are flourishing and whose people benefit from prosperity (Birmingham Community Strategy 2005, 3).

1.3 New Hall Valley Country Park

The New Hall Valley Country Park is an area that covers 67 hectares and is situated in Sutton Coldfield in the North-East of Birmingham, United Kingdom. The site links to two residential areas and is home to a watercourse called Plants Brook. For centuries the area has been farmland and the cultivation of this has shaped the landscape along with its wetland, grazing meadows and wet woodland. The site is regarded as an important area for nature conservation. It is also rich in wild flower meadows and the site operates as a green land for the local community. (Bodnar 2005, 3)

New Hall Valley Country Park was created on the fundamental legislation of Council Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which: “allows for the cross funding for public benefit of leisure provision from the capital receipts of a development.” (Bodnar 2005, 4) The Birmingham Local Authority partly financed the development of this area ensuring that approximately 600 houses were built, the country park was developed and the local library was refurbished. The developers transferred 100 hectares of land to the City Council. 33 hectares were set aside for playing fields ensuring that the other 67 hectares were left for the New Country Park. (Bodnar 2005, 4)

The purpose for the creation of the park according to the New Hall Valley Management Plan was that; “The Country Park was created for free public use in a district with few open spaces incorporating two new play grounds.” (Bodnar 2005, 5) The developments in the New Hall Valley are taking place in order “to create a varied series of landscapes, views and experiences of space and structure. The aim is to maintain the habitat and structural diversity whilst reflecting the historical land-use and landscape patterns for the area.” (Bodnar 2005, 5)

The New Hall Valley was given the name of Country Park in 2004 and was designated as part of the Green Belt within the Birmingham Plan (2001). The whole Valley is part of a Key Wildlife Corridor in the area meaning that the Park has wildlife that is considered to be of high importance for the area. The management of the Valley is, however, subject to a wide range of environmental and planning legislation, which requires thorough consideration on the challenges of bringing forth change. (Bodnar 2005, 8)

1.4 Sheldon Country Park

Sheldon Country Park is situated in the south-east of Birmingham right next to Birmingham International Airport. It covers an area of approximately 1 hectare of Country Park land and is home to the Old Rectory Farm (a 17th century dairy farm), open grassland, wetlands, hedgerows and mature woodland. It has escaped major industrial expansion and has become a natural haven for wildlife. The Farm and its surrounding land have a rich history and are very important for the local community. The farm is a dwelling for cattle and other farming animals such as pigs, horses, goats, ducks, chickens and geese. The farm uses traditional methods and is relatively small farm, which presents an educational tour in agriculture for its visitors. The Country Park is very child friendly as well as a play area for children. The Country Park also has three football pitches, a walk 2000 route and a cycle route path. (Birmingham City Council 2008)

2. MARKETING AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING QUALITY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SECTOR SERVICES IN THE UK

2.1 Introduction to the characteristics of the Public Sector in the UK

The public sector in the United Kingdom has a major influence on people's lives in modern times and this important role can be sourced back to the period during the Second World War when the government was forced to take social responsibility on everyday life facets such as rationing of food, clothing and electricity. The Second World War was enormously costly to the UK and the undertaking of John Maynard-Keynes' economic policies such as higher spending and higher taxation that were installed to maintain the war effort had cut down on unemployment created a climate of acceptance of the public sector. The middle and upper class families were appalled by the state of evacuee children who had come to stay with them from the bigger cities, and this realisation aroused the UK into the belief that they deserved something better. The post-war period and the rise of the Labour government is given the most credit for setting up the welfare state whereby the government would try to provide the best social services such as, health care, transport, electricity, gas, iron, civil aviation for everybody and the best way for the government to do this was to nationalise the services. (Lowe 1998, 307- 329)

In the period between 1979 and present day new ideas in government practises were introduced deriving from the need to introduce citizens' new rights in respect of the quality of the services that were being produced. The recent changes in public sector thinking are characterised by prominently ensuring the best value for tax-payers in the provision of services. A greater emphasis on the control of services, evaluations of the performance of the public sector, more effective planning strategies and a greater emphasis on collaborative working were all pivotal in improving the public sector service quality. (Lowe 1998, 307-329)

According to Sargeant (2005) "The range of services provided by the public sector is very diverse: from criminal justice and social welfare on the one hand to social housing and public transport on the other." Sargeant (2005) identifies three defining

characteristics of these services: “dominance of political objectives”, “primacy of citizenship needs rather than of the consumer needs”, and a “need to serve multidimensional customers.” Behind these characteristics are underlining political objectives and a need to sell services to groups on the basis of equity and the customer’s needs rather than being economically driven. Many of the services of the public sector are aimed at specific groups of citizens instead of the individual consumer needs. This shows that although the needs of individuals are important and should not be forsaken, the true nature of the service is to focus its attention on the needs of the wider community. Furthermore, some attention needs to be placed on the necessity of satisfying additional stakeholders and their requirements. All these characteristics of the public service sector need to be taken into consideration when determining the appropriate approach on marketing for its services. (Sargeant 2005)

2.2 The Birmingham City Council as a service provider

As a service provider, careful consideration of the Council’s approach to producing the best value services for its citizens and in this case the users of the country parks should be considered. The Commission Audit 2000, which determines the best use of public money within the UK, has defined best value as a duty to deliver services to clear standards- covering both cost and quality- by the most economic efficient and effective means available (The Commission Audit 2000, 4-11). This represents a challenging new performance framework for local authorities. In other words the services that the Birmingham City Council produces should be delivered to the best service standards as well as in the most economically efficient way. This consequently puts pressure on the Council as the general climate towards the local authorities is becoming more and more negative especially in the environment of Birmingham. One major reason for the Council’s negative public persona is due to the taxation system used in the UK. The Council tax is payable on nearly all domestic properties. Amenities are collected to maintain local public services such as education, transport, policing, refuse collection and the fire service. Each property within the local authorities constituency is given a band (or a level) and then the council sets a charge for each band. Council tax bills are generally made up in two parts, 50 % property and 50 % personal with the personal percentage being based upon the number of people living in each property. (Birmingham City Council 2008) The popularity of the

council is damaged by charges that are sometimes deemed to be excessive and also by an extensive bureaucratic system which means that any decisions regarding circumstances that could result in amendments to the amount of tax that some members of the public have to pay are often held up by red tape legislation and delays in processing paper work. (Lowe 1998, 307- 329) Approximately £ 19,5million per annum of the tax council receivables is going towards the management of parks and open spaces in Birmingham. £ 12 million of it goes to grounds maintenance, employment costs are approximately £ 5 million and running costs £ 2,5 million. (Bodnar 2008) This means that the recreational value what the parks and open spaces give to the citizens should be reflecting the amount of council tax money invested in maintaining these parks.

According to a poll made in 2007 by the Birmingham Democracy Commission two thirds of the respondents were “happy to let the Council do its job”, however, over a quarter of the respondents wanted to be more involved with the decision making of the Council. Compared to the post-war era in the UK the general attitude towards Councils and local authorities has become and is becoming increasingly sceptical. This means that there is a growing number of people who are not simply content to be on the receiving end of the Council’s decisions but also wish to be part of the decision making process. According to the Birmingham Democracy Commission (2000) for the residents of Birmingham what matters most is the way they are served by the Council instead of the way in which the Council is organised. This poll indicates that the people of Birmingham are much more interested about the services that they are offered and the provisions that the Council set aside to improve the public’s life. In the light of the results of the poll and the amount of council tax which the Council uses on parks annually, the obvious conclusion is that the parks’ services need to be of a standard which satisfies the public demand for recreational activities. (Birmingham Democracy Commission 2000)

2.3 Marketing in the Public Sector

Traditionally marketing originated within the market-based private sector rather than in the public services. This has been because of the nature of the government being a monopolist supplier which has meant that competition has been non existing as well as the nature of the marketing being profit free (Buurma 2001, 1287- 1300). However, the environment in which the Councils operate nowadays has changed as well as the opinions of the public. This has driven the Councils to move towards more effective marketing of its services and products. According to Walsh (1994, 63-71):

Councils making such a move towards more sophisticated and varied services in a more complex environment...will need to develop the skills of marketing in order to understand more clearly the concerns and needs of the public and to make services more widely accessible.

In other words effective marketing can enhance the accessibility of services provided and meet the needs of the public better which in turn will enhance the image of the Council. This enhancement would be due to the positive nature of the marketing material the Council had decided to use. In the case of Sheldon Country Park and New Hall Valley Country Park, questions such as who the users and the potential users of the service are, how the service provided is directly related to the demand of the potential users, what these users would like from their service, what they do in fact receive from the service, what difficulties are encountered by those using or trying to use the services and what causes those difficulties, what suggestions have customers for service improvements and finally are these likely effects in accordance with the policies of the authority? (Sargeant 2005) These are questions in which the thesis seeks to find an answer.

2.4 Demand for recreation within Birmingham

The demand for recreation and tourism can be explained using Pigram's (1999) model of the decision-making process in outdoor recreation. In his model Pigram explains the factors which influence on the decision-making process and all the variables affecting the process. When using this model to evaluate the decision making process in the context of both the New Hall Country Park and Sheldon Country Park, the theory is used to show a comparison of the demand for recreation in these areas to the supply provided by the Birmingham City Council. From this comparison justification for marketing can be made because according to the Pigram's model there needs to be adequate supply provided before any decision is made when participating in an outdoor recreation. This means that the Council as a supplier needs to have adequate and effective resource characteristics and accessibility provided of the service. The theory then shows that there is a need for marketing material and information about the services in order for a perception to be created. At the moment the opportunities for outdoor recreation exist in the City of Birmingham, however if there is a lack of a positive perception of the service the participation to the outdoor recreation will not take place. (Hall & Page 2006, 35-37)

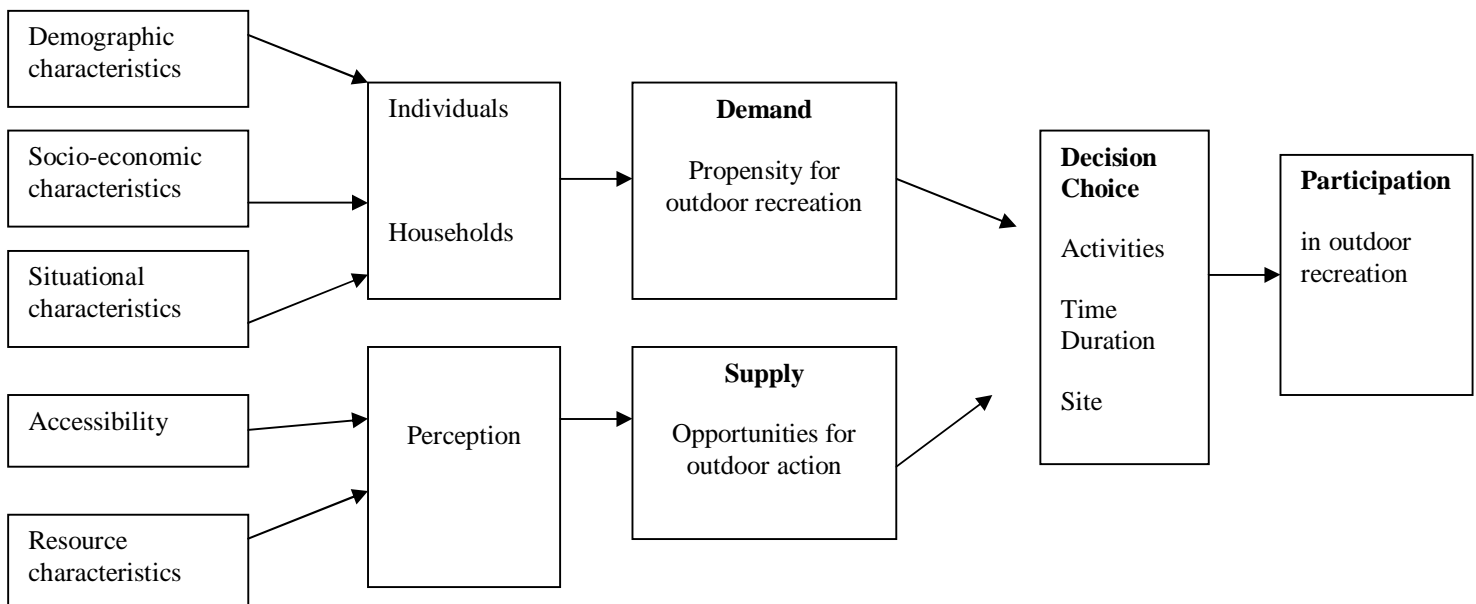


FIGURE 1. The decision-process in outdoor recreation. Modified from Pigram & Michaels (1999, 22)

2.4.1 Demographic-, socio-economic,- and situational characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the City of Birmingham such as the overall size, structure and distribution of the population are important factors that need to be considered when evaluating the decision process in outdoor recreation. The City of Birmingham has approximately 1,006,500 residents with population density of 3,649 per square kilometre (Birmingham City Council 2007). The population density is relatively high which means that there is a need for green spaces to be provided for people. The population is divided as follows: 23.4 % under 16, 57.7 % aged between 16 and 59, and 18.9 % over 60. 29.6 % of the population is of an ethnic background other than white, showing Birmingham to be a multi-cultural city, with a public that may have different cultural needs. The majority of people in Birmingham 60.4 % are working or seeking work (Birmingham City Council 2007). The city has a rich industrial history, which has shaped the outlook and design of the city. The city was also heavily bombed during the Second World War and a lot of the infrastructure was rebuilt after that. The post-war infrastructure has left the city with dense industrial and residential areas built known as “concrete jungles”. (Birmingham City Council 2008) In response to this there should be green spaces and possibilities for outdoor recreation for the people of Birmingham. The city has a wide number of people from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures which means that the services provided need to satisfy all groups of people. (Census 2001, 1-10)

The demographics of Birmingham and the surrounding areas of each Country Park are aspects that need to be considered when marketing for specific target customer groups. However, the main target consumers for each park would be their respective local communities on the boundaries of each park. These communities differ both socially and demographically from each other. The New Hall Valley Country Park is located in Sutton Coldfield, which is situated approximately 13 kilometres from central Birmingham and has an estimated population of 105,452. The area has rich history and it still enjoys the title ‘royal town’ so called because it is one of the wealthier areas in Birmingham. During World War II, Sutton Park was used as a prisoner-of-war camp, housing German and Italian prisoners. After the war, Sutton witnessed major redevelopments. (Birmingham City Council 2008) A large new shopping centre replaced the demolished parade, and other shopping centres within

the local vicinity were constructed much to the protest of the local community because local landmarks were lost to make way for them. In 1974, Sutton officially became part of Birmingham, again to the objection of local residents. (Birmingham City Council 2008) It is clear then that the local residents of the New Hall Valley Country Park would like some say into how the Council develops the area. Statistics from the 2001 Census show that the unemployment rate is lower in Sutton than in the rest of Birmingham. In contrast Sheldon is situated upon the very edge of the central Birmingham suburbs and is not as prolifically wealthy an area as Sutton Coldfield. The 2001 Census statistics show that Sheldon has higher unemployment rates in comparison to Sutton Coldfield, but when compared to the rest of Birmingham, Sheldon's unemployment rates are relatively average. Sheldon also has a relatively high number of families with children compared to Sutton Coldfield (Census 2001, 1-10). These statistics show the characteristics of the communities surrounding both parks. Conclusions can then be made about the demand in both areas. For example Sheldon being an area with relatively high number of families with children there is a need for outdoor recreation for families with children, substantially which Sheldon Country Park offers. Then again New Hall Valley can be seen as reflecting the demand of the community of Sutton Coldfield due to its rich history and outdoor recreation possibilities such as walking.

Pigram & Michaels (1999) states that; "Recreation is a form of social interaction, and the way in which society is organised affects recreational behaviour." (Pigram & Michaels 1999, 24) In other words society needs to be organised in a way that the socio-economic factors such as social relationships, community structure, education, occupation and income are all taken into consideration when providing recreational services. As a multi-cultural city Birmingham has a wide variety of areas with people of different social backgrounds and religions. The local communities of each park serve different cultural needs and therefore both parks will need to serve different recreational purposes.

Situational characteristics such as location, time and mobility have a major impact on the decision on how and where to spend one outdoor recreation. The time that the consumer would have available is a major influence on any choice regarding outdoor recreation. The location of the place and its accessibility are also vital considerations that need to be taken when considering developments and marketing for each park, for

example whether each park has easy access for people who drive will vastly change the catchments area for marketing. (Pigram and Michaels 1999, 25) If there is an easily accessible car park for instance, then people who live further away from the location may still take the opportunity to go to the park. Both of the parks reflect the situational needs of their surrounding communities. New Hall Valley County Park is located near a residential area and the park serves the surrounding community with easy accessibility and mobility within the site. The Sheldon Country Park offers activities for families with children and an access to the park and its wildlife.

2.4.2 Birmingham City Council as a supplier

The Birmingham City Council maintains and manages over 3,237 hectares of parks and open spaces in the Birmingham area, which makes the city one of the greenest cities in the UK and in Europe. (Birmingham City Council 2008) In both residential areas, Sutton Coldfield and Sheldon, the supply for outdoor recreation is existing and accessible for the local communities as well as for the citizens of Birmingham. Both parks are accessible to people from different social groups as well as for people with disabilities. Both parks are free to enter including the farm in Sheldon Country Park. The pathways have been built to be accessible for wheelchair users and people with other disabilities. (Birmingham City Council 2008)

The booklets produced for each park would add value to the service in the perception and decision making phase. An increase in information about each of the sites, their activities, accessibility, history and wildlife would increase the participation of the consumer in outdoor activities, especially because there is a lack of information available to the public at the moment. The Birmingham City Council as a supplier is meeting the needs of public demand in the case of both parks. However by producing marketing material for each site (such as the booklets) the perception of the public can be increased because they will be more informed. As well as this the value of each park will also increase because the use of each park by the public is likely to increase. In the long term public perception of the Council may improve because the public will see that the Council is providing them with activities to improve their standards of living.

2.5 Considerations of quality

The consideration of quality produced from the Council services is a key aspect of this report. The expectations of the customers determine to a great extent the perception of quality produced. This quality can be achieved by controlling and managing the service elements produced. (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004) The service quality of the Birmingham City Council Parks, New Hall Valley Country Park and the Sheldon Country Park, is rated on the basis of the Servqual method created by Parasuram, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985). The Servqual method examines the service quality performance against the customer service quality needs and it is useful when analysing and wanting to improve the service quality. (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004, 128-136) As a whole the Servqual method is based on the evaluation of seven service quality gaps that are based around five key dimensions, which measure customers' perceptions of service quality. In the following figure the service quality gaps are shown

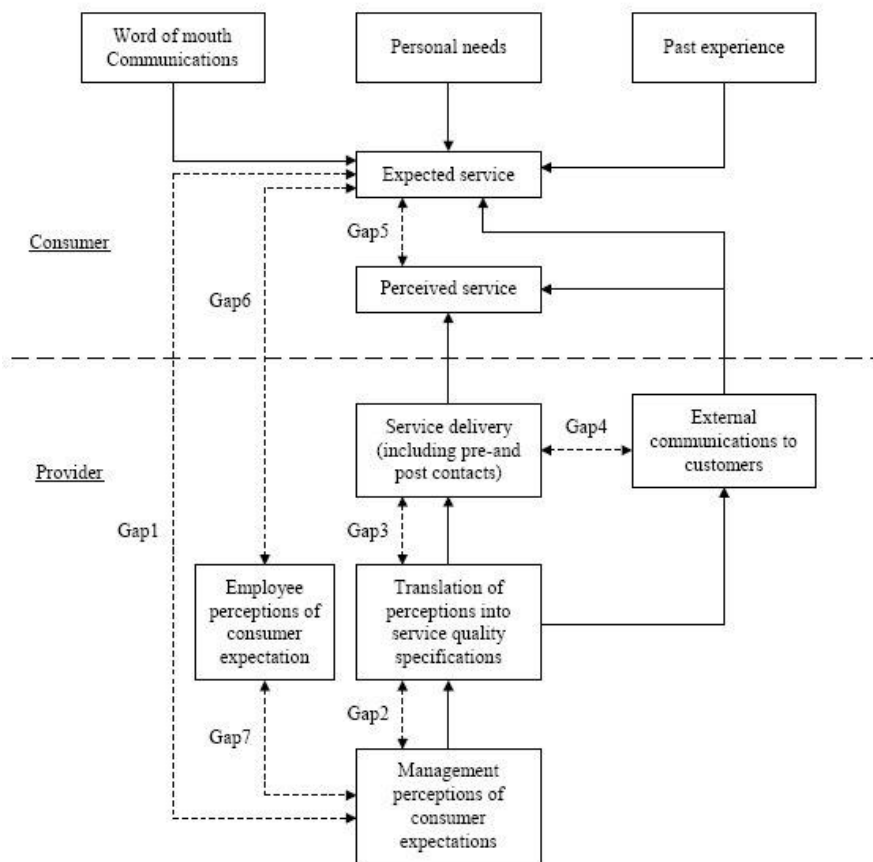


FIGURE 2. Parasuram et al., (1985); Curry, (1999); Luk and Layton, (2002) Model of service quality gaps. Adapted from the FMGG & Retail Marketing Blog (2007)

According to the FMGG & Retail Marketing Blog (2007) The seven quality gaps are: Gap 1 “Customers’ expectations versus management perceptions”, Gap 2 “Management perceptions versus service specifications”, Gap 3 “Service specifications versus service delivery”, Gap 4 “Service delivery versus external communication”, Gap 5 “The discrepancy between customer expectations and their perceptions of the service delivered”, Gap 6 “The discrepancy between customer expectations and employees’ perceptions” and Gap 7 “The discrepancy between employee’s perceptions and management perceptions”. (The FMGG & Retail Marketing Blog 2007)

In the report the emphasis is on the five dimensions in which the quality of the service gaps are evaluated and adapted on the basis of individual perception. The first dimension is based upon the tangible aspects of the service such as the physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials and how these meet consumer needs. The second dimension is the responsibility of the service, which can be explained as the ability to perform the promised service in a reliable and accurate way for the consumer. The third dimension is the responsiveness of the service, which can be summarised as the willingness of employees to help customers and provide them with a good service experience. The fourth aspect is called the assurance, which measures the knowledge and professional skills of employees and finally the fifth dimension is empathy which is the caring individual attention provided to the customers throughout the service. The dimensions of the service quality are measured according to the Ranger service and the Councils efforts on producing quality at both of the two sites. The reasoning behind the use of these dimensions as a measurement of service quality is to attempt to identify the service which is in offer. By identifying the service in offer conclusions can be made on what is the gap between the customer expectations and the received service and how the booklets can narrow this gap. (Fitzimmons & Fitzimmons 2004, 128-136)

2.5.1 Evaluation of the Physical Surroundings: Tangible Aspects

Both of the Country Parks’ physical surroundings naturally include natural and park surroundings with nature and meadows. The Birmingham City Council is evidently taking care of both sites physical surroundings through the use of its Ranger Service.

The aim of the Ranger Service of Birmingham is to “protect, promote and enhance the natural environment of Birmingham for the benefit of its wildlife, heritage, the local community and visitors.” (Birmingham City Council 2005, 4)

It can be argued that to a certain extent this has been achieved because they have maintained nature conservation and they are looking after woodland areas and working to preserve, record and monitor the habitats of the local wildlife. However there is a distinct lack of communication between the Ranger Service and upper level management from the Council and especially in the case of Sheldon Country Park, this has left the Ranger service without any clear management structure.

Approximately £12 million is set aside for Grounds Maintenance of Birmingham parks a year. (Bodnar 2008) However, the lack of supervision at Sheldon Country Park in terms of how the grounds are managed and developed has lead to a lot of litter to be left on the site. The Farm and its management are being handled well but the park and the valleys are left without notice due to lack of staff available in the park. (Bodnar 2008) To the visitor the Sheldon Country Park offers services such as a 17th Century dairy farm, a children’s playground, picnic areas, cycle routes for bicycling, pathways for walking and within the grounds of the dairy farm there is a tea room. Sheldon Country Park Ranger service also provides activities and events throughout the site such as the Countryside Festival, which is one of the major annual events in Birmingham’s parks. The New Hall Valley Country Park is mainly parkland with walking and cycling routes. The park has Wardens who manage the site and there are activities that are arranged by the Ranger Service such as bird watching and hiking tours. At the moment there is difficulty in accessing communication material for both sites. Information on both sites can be found on the Birmingham City Council’s website and in a brochure of events around the parks in Birmingham but while New Hall Valley Country Park has a basic leaflet, Sheldon Country Park does not.

2.5.2 Evaluation of Ability to perform: Responsibility

The ability to perform the provided service and providing a precise and responsible service is the second dimension of service quality. (Fitzsimmons & Fitzimmons 2004, 128-136) The Birmingham City Council has made efforts to measure the performance of the Ranger Service within Birmingham by monitoring against the Council’s Nature Conservation Strategy, the Birmingham Action Plan and by the City’s Community Strategy targets. As well as this, the Council’s performance is measured against

national targets set by the Core Cities Ranger Service Bench Marking Group (an assembly of urban authorities from the major cities in the UK). The Bench Marking Group defines five key elements in the performance of the Ranger Service. Firstly they must “work with partners to achieve environmental and Community Strategy targets”. They must also “publish an inclusive annual events programme”, “be committed to an environmental education and lifelong learning programme”, “be committed to continuous staff development” and “publish and work to an annual service improvement plan”. (Birmingham City Council 2005, 7) The first element of the performance measurement is demonstrated in both New Hall Valley and Sheldon Country Park where an expansion of grazing and hay-cutting management has been a key achievement for habitat and species management. These have been done in co-operation with partners such as the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. Sheldon Country Park is part of Environmental Education and Life long learning programmes in partnership with the Birmingham City College where the park is running courses in animal care and horticulture as well as providing adult support learning for people with disabilities and learning difficulties. The work done in the farm can be a confidence boost for many people with difficulties in learning or disabilities with the help of the staff. The Birmingham City Council is aiming at continually training staff at both parks. (Birmingham City Council 2005, 4-10)

Although the Ranger Service in both parks is actively involved with the every day maintaining and keeping up with the standards mentioned above, the lack of line management participation can be a hindering factor in producing quality, especially in the case of Sheldon Country Park. New Hall Valley Country Park has an active friends group interested in maintaining and keeping the site to its highest standard, which has been a great asset to the park. However the Sheldon Country Park does not have this facility and has meant that the park is in need of extra attention.

2.5.3 Evaluation of Responsiveness

Responsiveness is concerned with the willingness of the Ranger Service to respond to the needs and wants of the visitors and to provide exact service. (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004, 128-136) The accessibility of Ranger Service help is much more visible in the Sheldon Country Park in comparison to New Hall Valley and this is

mainly due to its smaller scale. As well as this the Ranger Service being located in the centre of the Sheldon Country Park means that their presence is more readily accessible and available. The presence of Ranger staff in the New Hall Valley is relatively limited which means that the responsiveness of the service rests on signage, maps and other sources of information such as the booklet that will be produced for the park.

2.5.4 Evaluation of Assurance

Assurance relates to the ability to perform the service in a way that will convey trust and confidence in the customers. (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004,128-136)
Assuring the customers of high standards of service requires good communication, politeness and respect towards the customer. The Ranger Service undergoes constant training and evaluation schemes, which helps to monitor and improve the quality provided by the service and received by the customer in both parks. Part of assuring good communication and respect towards the customer, especially in the case of New Hall Valley, is the importance of good communication material and marketing available as well as signage and maps. Working with the community and inviting it to take part in various activities can be a way assuring the local community that the park is maintained for their benefit. (Birmingham City Council 2005, 12)

2.5.5 Evaluation of Empathy

Empathy is concerned with how caring the service provider can be to its customers and how it pays individual attention to each of its customer's needs. According to Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (2004, 128-136) empathy includes features such as "approachability, sensitivity, and effort to understand the customers' needs." To analyse and evaluate the experience of visiting either of the country parks the views need to be focused on the individual's experience. The individual's needs have to be met so they feel that the park is of benefit to and maintained for them. New Hall Valley has good signage and maps around the site. However a booklet would contribute significantly to the empathy aspect because it would give individual attention and information to the customers. Sheldon Country park's signage needs improvement and is not to a high standard at the moment which would mean that

arguably the production of a booklet here would be even more beneficial for the consumer than it would be at New Hall Valley. Even though the Ranger Service is following the targets it has been set and is involving itself with various projects to enable it to help people, the production of the booklet would counteract any lack of information about the sites and will make the park 'better value' for its customers and help extend the information to a larger network of people within Birmingham.

2.6 Recreation marketing

Marketing in recreation can often be seen as something that brings little benefit to the marketer since it is not based on profit making. Mistakenly marketing is often seen as purely driven from economic need, a need to advertise a product in order to bring financial profit to its owner. (Keirle 2002, 1-5) However the philosophy behind marketing in its purest form can to a great extent be associated specifically with marketing for recreation which fundamentally derives from a point of view of what the needs and wants of the customer are. Kierle states the key aspect of marketing being:

The key aspect of marketing is an attitude of mind. It requires that in taking marketing decisions, the manager looks at these from a point of view of a consumer. These decisions will thus be driven by what the consumer needs and wants. (Keirle 2002, 1-5)

Earlier in the report the aspect of supply and demand was discussed as well as the product available through the five dimensions of quality, nevertheless it should be highlighted that the needs and wants of customers' need careful consideration.

2.7 Marketing needs for the New Hall Valley

The marketing needs for the New Hall Valley derive from the needs of its current and potential users. In outdoor recreation, people can be close to nature, feel peace, beauty and experience the wildlife in their neighbourhood. This was the starting point for the booklets produced. The history of the park is an important marketing facet for New Hall and with at least five historical buildings dating back to the 17th century in the local vicinity, the site is home to many important local heritage sites in the area. New Hall Mill is a Grade II listed building, which means that it is of special interest to English Heritage groups and that it warrants every effort to preserve it for future

generations. (Birmingham City Council 2008) The other historical buildings are Ford Keepers Cottage, New Shipton, Wincelle, Warren House Farm and New Hall. New Hall has been operating as a luxury hotel for a few decades, but the history of the building dates back to the 13th century and is one of the oldest manor houses in England. The historical buildings around the Valley have all, in the past, been under the estate of New Hall.

Today the historical buildings in the Valley are all in private ownership, which creates various limitations concerning marketing because the buildings are not open to the public. However all of the buildings can be seen from the footpaths of the Park and surrounding public roads, and this means that the wildlife set amongst the backdrop of historical England can take a precedent. From a marketing point of view the historical buildings would be very attractive however with them being under private ownership and not under the jurisdiction of the Council, making them the focal point of the booklet is not possible. The rich history of the park dates back to the Bronze Age with evidence of a burnt mount dating back to 1700 to 1000 BC. This historical side can also be one major focus point for the booklets.

The Country Park is also a part of an extensive cycle route that stretches around Birmingham. The cycle route running through the Valley was part of a project from “Sustainable transport” and financed by the National Lottery which aimed to create a cycle route from the Sutton Coldfield centre to the Good Hope Hospital which would give the local public a chance to be able to cycle to work. The cycle and walking routes are important to mention in the booklets. The site is regarded as an important area for nature conservation as it homes animals including brook trout, kingfishers, water voles, buzzards, kestrels, sparrow-hawks and heron. The valley is also rich in wild flower meadows and the site operates as a green land for the local community. The wildlife and the meadows of the Valley bring important recreation value to the surrounding community and information about the wildlife needs to be emphasised in the booklets. (Birmingham City Council 2008)

The entire park was recently designated a National Nature Reserve by English Nature and because New Hall Valley is relatively new the need for marketing material there has most likely been placed in the background with concentration going on Sutton Park. The need for marketing is then of even greater importance because of the

Valley's lack of recognition in the backdrop to Sutton Park. The park is attempting to gain a Green flag status, which is awarded as a means of recognising and rewarding the best green spaces within the UK. (Birmingham City Council 2005, 5) To assist in achieving this goal, elements such as a management plan, the setting up of a friends group for the park and also creating better and more easily accessible marketing material would help greatly. At the moment a leaflet does exist for the Country Park but this lacks information and depth. The creation of a larger, more informative booklet with the aim of informing a wider consumer base about the Park would be beneficial as a marketing strategy. As a Council project, the development of the park also needs to bring a greater value for its users. This is the main aim of the production of the booklet in this thesis. (Birmingham City Council 2008)

2.8 Marketing needs for the Sheldon Country Park

At the moment the Country Park does not have any ready marketing material such as booklets or leaflets which means that a need for an information pack to the public is essential. It is also lacking a management plan and a marketing strategy. The aim for the marketing done through the Bachelor's Thesis is to create a booklet for the Park through which all aspects of the park would need to be marketed. Sheldon Country Park offers a unique 'selling point' with the old Rectory Farm and its animals. The Old Rectory Farm dates back to the 17th century and has been used as a farm for centuries. The farm is operating today as a small demonstration farm and is in the ownership of the Council. Sheldon Country Park is the only park under the Council which offers agricultural demonstrations which is a great marketing point for the booklet. The farm animals that can be seen in the farm are Jersey cows, pigs, coats, ponies and poultry. The animals in the farm are friendly and generally considered to be lovely and approachable which makes the farm very attractive especially to families with children. Not only is the farm open every day throughout the year for people to visit but it also hosts a variety of events. Sheldon Country Park hosts one of Birmingham's biggest park events; Country Side Festival which gathers approximately 20,000 people. The event includes various activities associated with agriculture and is done in co-operation with the Farmers Union Festival. An event this size needs to be mentioned in the booklet. (Birmingham City Council 2008)

Another unique point of the Sheldon Country Park is its crucial role in helping disadvantaged and disabled people to get hands on experience to gain confidence through their role in the farm. The park also runs courses in animal care and gardening with the City College. Sheldon Country Park differs from the New Hall Valley in the way its marketing should be done. Sheldon is marketed in the booklet more on a basis of the farm, events and activities in the park. A section is dedicated for wildlife and history in the booklet. However, the park also has history dating back to the Bronze Age and it has a rich wildlife. The wildlife in the park includes traditional British wildlife such as foxes, birds and other small mammals. The park has walk routes that are part of the Walk 2000 which is a campaign in Birmingham to promote walking in the city. The park is also part of the East-Birmingham cycle route and has tree football pitches. Park is also wishing to gain a Green flag status and to achieve this goal a booklet or an information pack to the public would be absolutely essential.

(Birmingham City Council 2008)

3. MAKING THE BOOKLETS

3.1 Planning the booklets

Planning of the booklets commenced with careful consideration of both sites. The theoretical frameworks and the analysis of the sites have been a basis for the actual booklets. Consultation with various members has been an important factor from the beginning. When planning the booklets the corporative marketing standards were very important to take into consideration. The Council has a specific style in which it delivers its marketing products, this style is not determined but a similar style of design is noticeable in their marketing products. In the planning phase the most important thing was to gather the right information on what should be in the booklets and what the content of each booklet should be. The Sutton Country Park booklet was used as an example and the booklets produced and they followed the direction of it. In the planning phase consultation and material gathering was important.

3.2 Commitment and contribution to the process

The process of making the two booklets lasted for three months due to consultation with various parties. Work was done individually with meetings at least once a week with Biodiversity Officer, Dr. Stefan Bodnar and with Chairman of the New Hall Valley Park Steering Group, Marian Baxter, City Transport Officer, Graham Lennard, Planning Archaeologist, Dr. Mike Hodder and the Ranger Service of Sheldon Country Park who were involved in making and editing the text and providing the images. The booklets were accomplished and finished according to the wishes of various parties and left with the marketing department to finish to the Council standard.

3.3 Consultation

The importance of consultation with various parties has been one of the core aspects of the project. This was especially the case with the New Hall Valley Country Park which has an active friend group called the Steering Group including local councillors, ward support officers, council officials and local community members.

Consultation with Marian Baxter, who is the chairman of the group, was done frequently. She provided images for the booklets and edited the text. The booklet was also discussed in the Steering Group meeting which led to editing the text and changing the direction to more what was wanted from the group. The consultation with the Steering Group was important since they know the most about the Park and represent a rich variety of community members. Consultation with Dr. Stefan Bodnar was frequent and he provided with various materials such as the management plan of the site. The booklet for New Hall Valley was created on the basis of these needs. The booklet produced would be a draft for the marketing department of the Council, which will have the final decision on any changes that may be necessary before publishing. For the booklet to be what is needed in all aspects, there will need to be consultation with the Council, with the consumer and also with various individuals who are connected to the park.

The consultation for the Sheldon Country Park was done with the Ranger Service of the park. Meetings were held about the direction of marketing since the site did not have any existing marketing material. The personnel of the site were relatively clear on what was required, which gave a clear direction of the style and content of the booklet. The co-operation with the Sheldon Country Park was limited due to lack of response from the Ranger Service concerning various elements which meant that there was a great difficulty to receive information or images from the site. The images appearing in the booklet are from the Council's archives, Dr. Stefan Bodnar and from the BBC.

3.5 Cooperation with the marketing team of the Council

Co-operation with the marketing team of the Council was minimal. The aim of the project was to create two drafts for the marketing department. The marketing department of the Council was not involved in the making of the booklets because the goal of the project was to produce two draft booklets for the marketing department with all the text and images they would need. The reason why the booklets were outsourced in this way was the lack of knowledge about the sites in the marketing department and the lack of time that the department would be able to spend on the booklets which would mean that the consultation with various parties would be minimized.

4. THE BOOKLETS

The main results of the thesis are the two booklets that were produced for the New Hall Valley Country Park and the Sheldon Country Park.

4.1 New Hall Valley Country Park booklet

The booklet for the New Hall Valley Country Park consists of 13 pages. The information in the booklet was designed to meet the needs of the community surrounding the area as well as meeting the needs of various parties interested in the park within the City of Birmingham. The headings and the subject areas of the booklet are the introduction, the Historical Valley, Managing the Land, Flower meadows of the Valley, The Stream Plants Brook, Animals along the Stream, Birds in New Hall Valley, Butterflies of the Valley, the Historical Buildings of the Valley and Park close to you. The subject areas chosen emphasised the historical aspect of the Valley due to its rich history and the historical buildings within the site, the wildlife and bird life of the Valley which is considerably rich, the flower meadows which are very noticeable in the summer and the Stream Plants Brook and its animals which has a crucial importance to the natural life of the Valley. The graphics for the booklet were designed according to the pictures provided from the Steering Group and according to the historical and wildlife aspect of the Valley. The booklet can be found in the Appendix 1.

4.2 The Sheldon Country Park booklet

The Sheldon Country Park booklet consists of 11 pages with information which was gathered on the basis of needs stated by the Ranger Service in the Sheldon Country Park. The headings and the subject areas of the booklet include; the Introduction to the Park, The old Rectory Farm, Animals at the Farm, Wildlife at the Park, Meadow life of the Park, The Historic Park, Events in the Park, A park close to you and learning with the animals. The booklet emphasised the park being a family-friendly park both in text and images. The booklet can be found in the Appendix 2.

5. DISCUSSION

Throughout this thesis it has been emphasised that knowledge of the theoretical framework is vital when developing and making plans that affect the public sector. The characteristics and the history of the public sector in the United Kingdom have created a basis for marketing policies and structures within the Birmingham City Council. The need for marketing parks or open spaces has been of secondary interest because recreational services bring no economic value. However, the general climate of scepticism towards the Council's decision making and the increase in Council taxes have placed increased pressure upon the Council to produce better quality services. The public seems to be more concerned about the services that are offered to them, instead of the way that the Council is organised and this suggest that as the public sector voice and the demand for beneficial recreational facilities grows, the Council has no choice but to listen to the public sector demand, in order to retain a positive image and maintain the trust of the public.

In today's social climate the expectancy for high quality services from the public is ever growing because people have more time to spend on recreational services. Due to scepticism towards the Council motives, the public can become increasingly more difficult to satisfy. The Council thus needs to develop better marketing skills to help them understand the needs of the public. The marketing departments within the Council are a relatively new phenomenon and there is a lack of developed understanding as to what the public wants from the marketing products. The reason that the booklets produced were outsourced was because the marketing department lacked motivation and any time to consultate with the various parties that are associated with both of the parks.

As discussed in the main body of this thesis, there are various demographic, socio-economic and situational factors that affect the decision making process on outdoor recreation. The residential infrastructure of Birmingham can be described as being a 'concrete jungle' in many areas and this creates an obvious need for parks and open green spaces throughout the city. People expect parks to be safe, clean and accessible which the Council claims to ensure. However, if there is not adequate information available, the parks can never serve the communities fully. The Council has a duty to provide the public with information that can educate them about their local areas.

According to the theory of the decision making process on outdoor recreation (*see figure 1*) if the perception of the service is poor or not existing, the theory never reaches the decision making state. The perception is affected by the accessibility and characteristics of the service in which the Council's role is crucial. In order to create a positive perception, information needs to be available and preferably it needs to be information that appeals to the consumer. For the information to be appealing marketing methods and research need to be used. If the perception of the service is attractive, even matters concerning demand can be more readily placed secondary. The Council as a supplier needs to plan its services to meet the needs of the communities which it is doing to an extent with the two Country Parks. The sites are managed to an adequate level and they do both offer activities for many customer groups. The sites being open every day and accessible for people with disabilities are proof that the Council does attempt to listen to the needs of the consumer groups. However in order to attract more of the public to the site the perception of the site needs to be made more attractive. According to the theory justification of the need for the booklets is both topical and valid.

Another theory discussed in the main body is the Servqual method created by Parasuraman & Zeithaml & Berry (1985) which compares the service quality performance to the consumers' needs and wants. As discussed the theory is concerned with five dimensions of quality from the point of view of the Council being the service quality producer through the use of its Ranger Service at both of the sites. The management of the sites is placed under various jurisdictions from higher Government bodies as well as restrictions and a pressure to meet various deadlines. The responsiveness, the empathy and the assurance aspects of the service are set to a relatively high level by the Ranger Service. However, there is a lack of perception and demand from the public because there is a lack of awareness as to the actual services that the Ranger service provides, again emphasising the need for more information to be more readily available. When the Ranger service is not available, the responsibility of meeting the customer perceptions of quality rests upon other information being available at the site such as the signage, maps and other communication materials. In order to assure that the gap between the customers' perceptions of quality and the actual services they receive is as narrow as possible, customers need to be continuously kept up to date with the site's development and how this is beneficial to

them. Consumers should also be given the chance to offer feedback to the Council, and this is another issue that the Council should be addressing.

In order to create effective and attractive booklets for the two Country Parks the marketing needs of the two sites had to be considered. As the two parks have some unique selling points the focus for each of them had to differ. While both parks offer recreation for their surrounding communities, which to a great extent reflects the demographics of the local areas, the Sheldon Country Park is located in an area with many families with children. The booklet then had to be made attractive to children and the emphasis would be placed upon the farm and the events happening in the farm. In contrast, New Hall Valley is situated in Sutton Coldfield (an area which is more economically prevalent and has a rich history) and these factors are shown in the way the booklet is marketed with an emphasis on the historical context of the valley. Sutton Coldfield also has many green areas and nature surrounding it so an emphasis on the wildlife was also an important aspect for the booklet.

The two booklets aim to appeal to different consumer groups because the local communities have different needs. To conclude, however, it should be shown that despite the differences between the two communities for whom the booklets were aimed at, both booklets have an equally important role in maintaining the Council's image and for the Council to maintain its own political agenda both consumer groups need to be kept satisfied.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1. THE NEW HALL VALLEY BOOKLET



The Cover Page

The cover page of the New Hall Valley Country Park booklet includes elements which were chosen to promote the park in a way which gives an approachable and an attractive image of the park. A picture of the stream Plants Brook was chosen to be the main image since it is the stream that runs through the Valley and thought of being the focal point. Pictures of valley flowers and a picture of a bird were chosen because they describe the park's surroundings in a realistic way. The design of the cover page is relatively simplistic which the Council's style is. Birmingham City Council logo had to be included in the cover page. The final design of the cover page will be determined by the marketing department of the Council.

Introduction to the Valley

New Hall Valley Country Park is situated in the North-East of Birmingham just one mile to the south east of Sutton Park. The park covers 198 acres of green belt land and is an important site for nature conservation. New Hall Valley Country Park consists of historic wetland grazing meadows, former farmland and part of the Plants Brook stream. It borders on a number of privately owned listed buildings, including a corn mill that dates back to the 17th Century. The park includes a network of cycle routes and footpaths and two play areas for children.

The New Hall Valley is valuable as a wildlife and landscape corridor, linking the complex of parks from Plant Brooks Local Nature Reserve in the south through to Sutton Park National Nature Reserve in the north. Areas of the site are designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.

The Valley is home to a wide range of animals, birds, insects and plants. Brook trout, kingfishers, water voles and heron can all be seen along the Plants Brook. Oxeye daisy and black knapweed grow in the wildflower areas, whilst other wild flowers such as greater burnet, ragged robin and yellow rattle can be found in the meadows.



Page- Introduction to the Valley

The introduction page includes general information about the New Hall Valley such as the size, the surroundings, wildlife, flora and services. It includes information that will be covered in the booklet and present the park to the consumers. The image used in the page is from the New Hall Valley and was considered suitable and apt for its use.

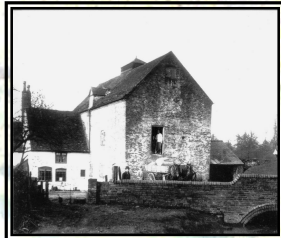
The Historical Valley

The six historical buildings located in the Valley, although privately owned today, have played an important role in both in the historic context and in the development of its landscape.

From the prehistoric to the modern times

From the prehistoric to the modern times the area has been habituated for farming which has shaped the landscape and made the land appealing for many owners.

New Hall Valley is unique to Birmingham and especially to Sutton Coldfield. The Valley contains archaeology below the ground dating back to the Bronze Age, and above the ground, six listed buildings. The Country Park contains remains of at least 3000 years of its use and management. The oldest site so far discovered is a burnt mound possibly used for cooking or for sauna-type bathing dating to between 1700 and 1000 BC.



The New Hall Mill 1907



Ford Keepers Cottage

The next evidence of the history of the Valley is from the Middle Ages. The original New Hall and the moat surrounding it were likely to have constructed in the 13th century

In 1528 the Charter granted to Sutton Coldfield by Henry VII provided for the enclosing of land out of the commons, and the fields between New Hall and Walmley Raod were probably enclosed under this clause. From the 1590's to 1729 the Estate and the lands were owned by the Sacheverell family

During the 17th and 18th centuries changes in farming practise led to the subdivision of large fields. By 1857 the field systems were established within the area of what is now the Country Park.

Page- The Historical Valley

The Historical Valley page includes information about the history of the site and about the six historical buildings at the site. The page was done in co-operation with Marian Baxter, most of the information was received from her as well as the pictures. The images were chosen because they are relevant and useful to visualize the rich history of the park.

In 1882 New Hall Estate included the two farms Warren House Farm and The Blabbs, New Hall Mill and Ford Keepers Cottage. In 1923 the New Hall Estate, which included the New Hall Farm, Wincelle and New Hall Mill was sold to the Midland Industrialist Alfred Owen. The farm and the land included pasture for beef and milking cattle, poultry, and arable farming, which included potatoes, barley, carrots, beetroot, parsnips and oats.



New Hall 1907

In 1968 land was sold from the Estate for the building of the Bishop Walsh Catholic School, and in 1974 land south west of New Hall Farm was sold for housing. In 1992 Birmingham City Council produced a Consultation Paper with a view to setting up a Country Park. With more land released for housing, the New Hall Valley Country Park was officially opened on 29 August 2005.



The Plantsbrook that runs through the Valley in the 1960's

Page- The Historical Valley

Two pages were dedicated to the historical valley topic. In this page the information about the Country Park is more up to date and it describes how the Park was created. The images were chosen to visualize the old features of the site. The historical valley topic is placed after the introduction because it deepens the general introduction to how the park was created and what is the historical concept of it.

Managing the Land



New Hall Valley Country Park covers some 198 acres of Green belt Land. The Park is an important site for nature conservation and consists of historic wetlands, grazing meadows, former farmland and in the base of the valley runs the stream Plants Brook. The New Hall Valley is valuable as a wildlife and landscape corridor, linking the complex of Parks from Plants Brook Local Nature reserve in the south through to Sutton Park National Nature Reserve in the north. Areas of the site are designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.

The Valley is a home to a wide range of animals and plants. Brook, trout and water voles can be seen along the Plants Brook. Insects and birds thrive in the valley. To name but a few, the dragonflies, butterflies and moths and the birds include the green woodpeckers, buzzards, kestrels, sparrow hawks and bats can be seen. Wildflower meadows are a delight in the summer and in the wet lands and the meadows many species can be seen.

The habitats within the New hall Valley reflect its historic shaping by man's activities. The field system developed, characterised by grazing and hay cutting, and annual flooding of lower meadows. The decline of agriculture has allowed succession to take place and scrub and wet woodland to develop in places. Planting of a woodland to mark the Millennium, and planting of shelter-belts of trees and wildflower areas has recently taken place.

The aim of the Birmingham City Council in managing the land is to blend historical land use patterns of hedges, grazed and hay-cut meadows, with developing other habitats of woodland, scrub and wetland. A key objective is to maintain and enhance the diversity of plants and animals that the valley sustains. Pathways have been improved and cycle paths created to enable access for everyone.

Page- Managing the Land

This topic was added to add value to the Council as a service provider. The page tells about how the park is managed and what the importance of it is. The text is a subject to changes which has been left to the marketing department of the Council because it possesses more information about this aspect.



Flower meadows of the Valley

One of the most beautiful features of the New Hall Valley is its wildflower meadow fields. In the summer the Valley is rich with typical English wildflowers. The wet meadows provide an excellent ground for many lovely flowers that bloom in the Valley.

In the summer the most noticeable plant is the Himalayan balsam that has spread along the valley, along with shining cranesbill and stonecrops, introduced with the materials used to canalise the brook. The wildflower areas consist of swathes of oxeye daisy and black knapweed. On the wetlands butterbur can be found and more elusive plants such as greater burnet, ragged robin and yellow rattle, species typical of flood meadows.

On the wet meadows, ragged robin and greater burnet can be found whilst the wildflower areas are a mass of colour with oxeye daisy and greater knapweed. These areas support many butterflies and moths such as the Gatekeeper and day flying moth, the Burnet Companion. In the winter snipe can be found here.

Page- Flower Meadows of the Valley

One of the unique features of the Country Park is its wildflower meadows in the summer. A page was dedicated to this aspect with information and images of the most common species of flowers that can be seen in the Valley.

The stream Plants Brook

The stream Plants brook flows through the New Hall Valley, supporting a wide diversity of species of birds, insects, plants and water creatures along its course.

The Stream and its history

The original name for this stream was E Brook, the East Brook. The name Plants Brook comes from the owner of one of nine mills which were powered by its waters over the centuries. Mr. Plant owned the mill which was situated where Plants Brook Nature reserve can be found today. What might come as a surprise for many is that the brook rises from a spring in Sutton Park and eventually in to the sea. The stream joins the River Tame near Castle Vale. The river flows on to Tamworth where its is joined by the River Anker. It joins the River Trent and eventually flows into the Humber estuary.



During the 18th and 19th centuries, water was released in winter from the channel feeding New Hall Mill to "float" or flood the meadows, which improved improve grass growth. In 1967 the stream was diverted into a concrete channel so that its flow could be controlled and flooding prevented. The stream has probably changed its course many times over the years, and ones of the old courses can still be seen in the Mill Meadow field today. When the surrounding houses were constructed in 1999 water was drained off into swales. These broad shallow hollows are ecologically beneficial because they prevent the wetlands from drying out and replenish the water table. Today the stream is managed by Birmingham City Council.

Page- The Stream Plants Brook

This topic was added to the booklet because the history of the stream is rich and it was considered interesting by the parties involved with the consultation of the booklet. The stream is a dominant feature of the Valley and it is useful for people to know where it comes from and where it ends up. The image in the page is of the Stream Plants Brook.

Animals along the Stream



Page- Animals along the Stream

This topic was considered to be important since the stream supports the wildlife of the park to a great extent. The small pictures were provided by Dr. Stefan Bodnar and the picture of the stream is from Marian Baxter.

Birds in New Hall Valley

Birds are amongst the most obvious of the inhabitants New Hall Valley. The attraction lies in the wide variety of inhabitants.

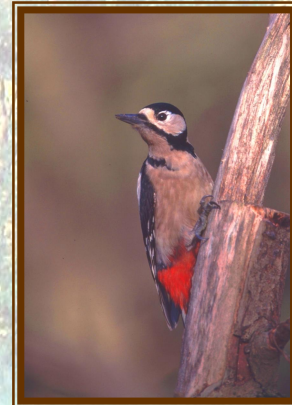


Migratory birds

In the spring as the migrating birds return to the Valley, the air is filled with birdsong. Along with warblers, such as blackcaps whitethroats, garden, sedge and willow warblers they return from their migrating grounds in sub-Saharan Africa to breed in our valley. They are joined wetland grassland areas. In winter these migrants are replaced by redwing and fieldfare thrushes.

Resident Birds

The woodlands and scrub are also the home to many indigenous species including finches, thrushes robins and tits. Woodpeckers and kingfishers are often seen as are birds of prey such as buzzards, kestrels and sparrow hawks.



Page- Birds in New Hall Valley

This page was especially considered to be important because bird life is very rich in the Valley and there are quite a big number of bird lovers visiting the Park on a regular basis. Information about what kind of birds can be seen was considered to be important. The pictures of birds were provided from Dr. Stefan Bodnar.

Butterflies of the Valley

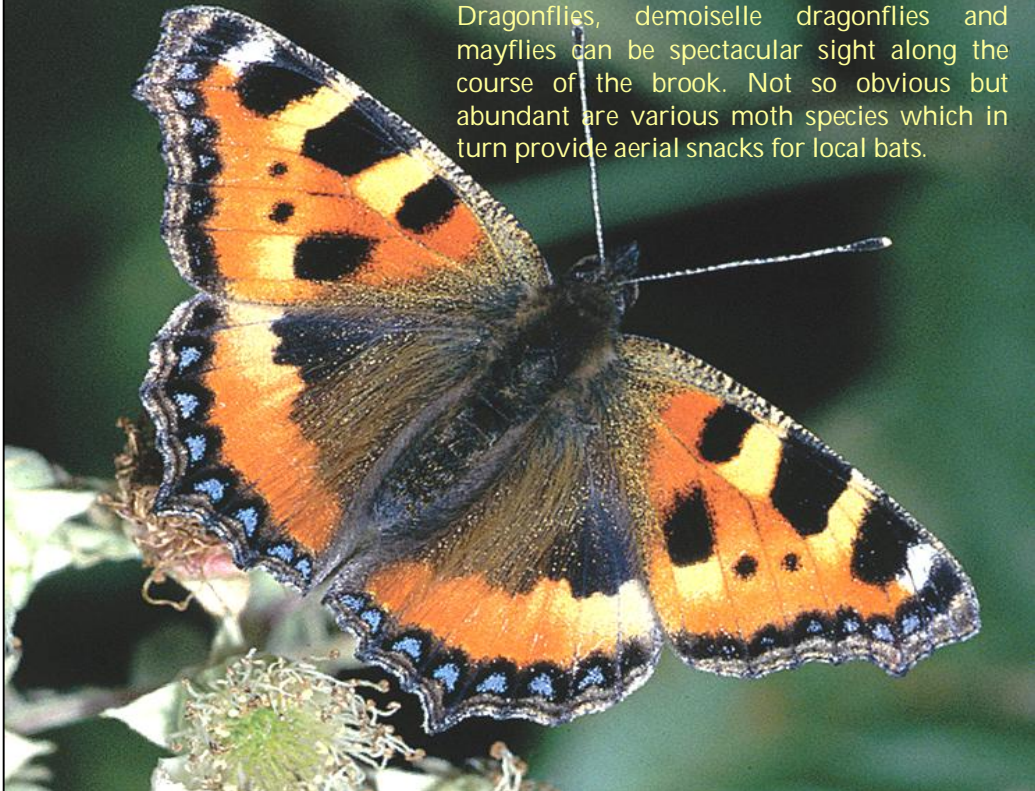


The great array of plant life in the Valley support vast number of invertebrates, moths and butterflies.



For most visitors, the most obvious and beautiful insects are the butterflies in summer. Meadow Brown, Orange Tip and Gatekeepers love the wildflowers and wet meadows.

Dragonflies, demoiselle dragonflies and mayflies can be spectacular sight along the course of the brook. Not so obvious but abundant are various moth species which in turn provide aerial snacks for local bats.



Page- Butterflies of the Valley

Butterflies are a common feature of the park in the summer and a section about butterflies and other insects was considered to be important. This topic was also added to increase attractiveness to the park. The pictures used in the page are from the Birmingham City Council and from Marian Baxter.

The Historical buildings of the Valley



New Hall Mill

New Hall Mill is a two and a half storey high building of the 18th century. It is a significant local example of Birmingham's industrial heritage. The Mill and the Valley are integrally linked, particularly through its water management.

Ford Keepers Cottage

John Vesey, a native of Sutton Coldfield and a great benefactor to the Town had built 51 stone houses in Sutton Coldfield between 1520 and 1540. Originally called Ford keepers Cottage, it was reputedly built as a lodge for the guide or keeper to escort people over the adjacent brook.



New Hall Mill, a Grade 2 listed building and is one of the only two water mills still surviving in the Birmingham area. The Mill and its meadow field are privately owned and managed by the New Hall Water Mill Preservation Trust. The Mill is surrounded by the New Hall Valley and is only open to the general public on specific Open Days, or by prior arrangement. To get more information visit the New Hall Mill website www.newhallmill.org.

New Shipton

The barn at New Shipton was built in the 15th century. It is constructed on a framework of crucks, pairs of large curving timbers. Tree ring dating has shown that the timbers are from a tree cut down in 1425.

Page- The Historical Buildings of the valley

This page was created to concentrate more about the historical buildings of the Valley. This could have been a great marketing asset however the buildings are privately owned and emphasising them too much might attract too many people leading to an invasion of privacy. Thus the buildings are part of the Valley and are important to mention. The information and the pictures were received from Marian Baxter.

Wincelle

The 15th century Wincelle originally stood on the eastern side of Wiggins Hill Road, at Wiggins Hill, about three miles away. It was dismantled and rebuilt in the Valley in 1910. The work was to order of Mr. Wilkinson who owned New Hall. Hearsay has it that the move was made to suit the convenience of a friend of Mr. Wilkinson's wife. However the first tenant was a Mr Lorrimer.



Warren House Farm

Another of the Vesey Cottages, Warren House has been extended and modified but the original parts can still be seen. The name Warren implies that it was based on a rabbit pasture, and deeds of 1595 associate a conygree (or rabbit farm) of 12 acres with New Hall.

New Hall

The original New Hall and moat surrounding it dates back to the 13th century. The Estate has had various owners over the years and was even used as a boys school for a short time. Today New Hall is an award winning hotel, and is the oldest inhabited moated manor house in England. It is set within the New Hall Valley. For more information about New Hall Hotel visit hotel's website www.newhalluk.com



Page- The Historical Buildings of the valley

Two pages were dedicated to this topic so that all the buildings are mentioned.

A park close to you

The New Hall Valley Park is a park close to its surrounding community. The park has two playgrounds and a picnic area. New Hall Valley welcomes individuals and families to enjoy wildlife near their neighbourhood. The paths and tracks offer great opportunities for outdoor activities such as cycling.

Cycling in the Park

The New Hall Valley Country Park cycle paths form part of the North Birmingham Cycling and Walking Route and the park offers great opportunities for cycling. Birmingham City Council aims to create a connected cycle route that would start from the Birmingham and Fazeley canal, through Kingstanding and Sutton Park and New Hall Valley, and then returning to the canal.

The pathways in the Valley are firm and in good condition. New Hall Valley is part of a recently successful lottery bid with Sustrans (the sustainable transport charity). This project will link the cycle way from Sutton Coldfield to the Good Hope hospital, also linking to Pype Hayes Park. This aims to create a cycling and walking routes which connect people to their local area and help them to make choices to travel by bike or foot. For more information visit www.sustransconnect2.org.uk



Page- Park close to you

This page was created to increase the awareness of the services and activities available in the park. Pathways for walking and cycling are important part of the Park and its purpose for the community, also the Sustrans project was mentioned. This page was done in co-operation with Graham Lennard. The pictures are from the New Hall Valley.

The New Hall Valley Country Park Steering Group

The New Hall Valley Country Park Steering Group is a group which oversee the management and use of the park and forms links between various community and conservation organisations, and the City Council who manage the park. The Group protects and conserves the natural resources of the park, and promotes awareness of it to the public. The members of the Steering Group are Local Councillors, Ward Support Officers, Council Officials and local community members, who have, since the Park's inauguration, been instrumental in the creation of a wetland board walk, tree planting and general maintenance.



The Ranger service

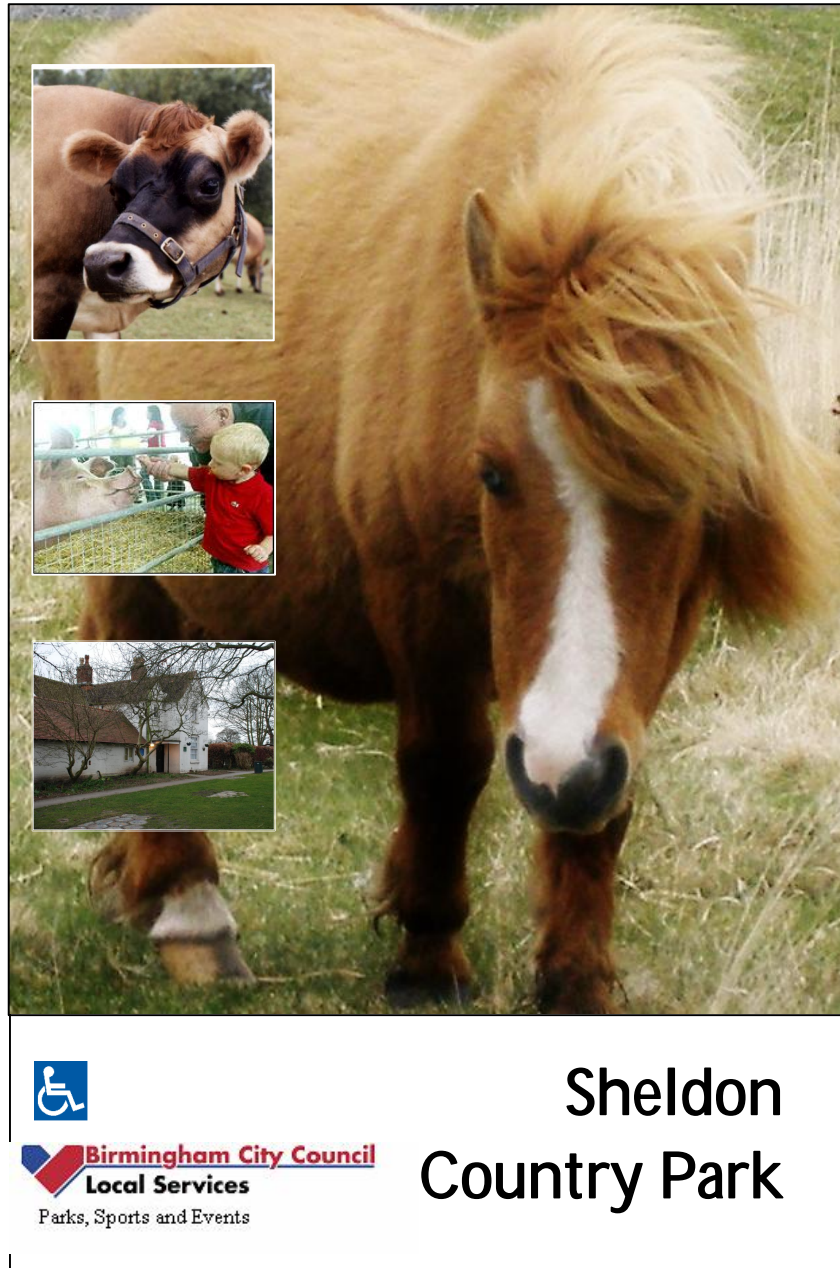


Wardens in the New Hall Valley help to look after the site. Nature Conservation is an important part of their work, which includes planting trees, looking after woodland, recording wildlife and monitoring habits. The job that a Warden might have to go through during the day might include marking trees which require conservation work, felling birch, rebuilding wooden bridges, litter picking, and drawing up a plan to manage habitats of the valley.

Page- Park close to you

Two pages are dedicated to emphasise the value of the Council as a service provider. Information about the friends group of the park and about the ranger service was included.

APPENDIX 2. SHELDON COUNTRY PARK BOOKLET



Cover page- Sheldon Country Park

The Sheldon Country Park is attracting families with children and the choice of images used was made from the point of view. Pictures of animals and children, and the old Rectory Farm were added to serve this purpose. Pictures are from the marketing department of the Council, the BBC and Dr. Stefan Bodnar. Birmingham City Council logo needed to be added as well as an accessibility sign.



Introduction to the Park

Sheldon Country Park covers an area of 260 acres , which comprises open grassland, wetlands, old hedgerows and some mature woodland and the park is situated on the very edge of Birmingham. Agriculture and conservation go hand in hand at Sheldon Country Park and it is a haven for wildlife.

The Sheldon Country Park Ranger Service is based at Old Rectory Farm, a 17th Century dairy farm, which is situated on the main entrance to the park. The Rectory Farm is a small working demonstration farm that uses traditional methods to manage its stock. It has herds of Pedigree animals including pigs, horses, goats, ducks, chickens and geese. There is also a small children's play area within the farm.

The park has three football pitches, a Walk 2000 route and a cycle path, as well as many meadows and hedgerows for visitors to explore.

Page- Introduction

The introduction to the Sheldon Country Park presents the park and what it offers to the public. The text sources from the Council and is used as an official introduction of the park. The picture captions the wildlife of the Park and was provided from Dr. Stefan Bodnar.

The Old Rectory Farm



The Old Rectory Farm as an historical building originates back to the 17th Century. However it was during the 19th Century that the site was developed into a farm that extended as far as the Coventry Road. More recently the farmhouse was home to Mr. McGregor, the City Forester and it was mainly due to his efforts that there is such an interesting variety of trees around the farm.

The Old Rectory Farm has now been completely restored operating as a demonstration farm, showing today's public traditional methods of agriculture and giving them a feel for 19th Century rural life.

A variety of farm animals including Jersey cattle, pigs, ducks, chickens, goats and geese can be found on the grounds. The farm is open to the public and there are also facilities for families with a children's playground and various picnic areas on the site. As well as this Old Rectory Farm has a unique charm with staff and volunteers that are very welcoming to all visitors, from all parts of the community. The farm is open to visitors every day of the year and admission and parking are free



Page- The Old Rectory Farm

A page for the introduction and history of the Old Rectory Farm in the Sheldon Country Park was created to provide more information about the farm and increase its attractiveness. The text was gathered from various sources and the images were received from the Council and from the BBC.

Animals at the farm

The Rectory Farm houses lovely farm animals including cows, pigs, goats, ponies and geese. The farm animals are very friendly and want to tell you about country life.



Lovely Jersey Cows

One of the loveliest animals in the Rectory farm is the Jersey Cow. Jersey Cows are quite small ranging from only 360 to 540kg. They have a kind and very curious nature and are effective milking cows. In the Rectory Farm you can meet Jersey Cows either in the fields or inside the farm. In all there are about 20 Jersey cows in the Rectory Farm.

Curious Pigs

There are six very lovely and active pigs in the Rectory Farm. The pigs of the farm are friendly and very inquisitive.



Page- Animals at the farm

This page was designed to attract families with children. The text aims to give an image of friendly farm animals which welcome the public to visit them. The pictures are from the Council and from Dr. Stefan Bodnar.



Charming Goats

Goats in the Rectory Farm are charming. Goats are intelligent and inquiring animals that are quick to learn both good and bad.

Cute Ponies

Ponies are charming animals of the Rectory Farm. They are intelligent and friendly animals. Ponies are sensitive and you can often tell what the pony is thinking or feeling by the look on their face or the way they hold their bodies.



Birds of a Feather

In the Rectory Farm you can see chickens and geese. The birds of a feather are a lovely addition to the Rectory Farm's everyday life and are often seen in flocks.

Page- Animals at the farm

Two pages were dedicated to the farm animals.

Wildlife at the Park



The grasslands, streams and small woodland copses of Sheldon Country Park including the Hatchford Golf Course provide many niches for animals to live.

You may be lucky and see a fox, which is a common species in the Park, feeding on small mammals such as the field vole. You are most likely to see these animals in the claws of a kestrel, for which these form a large proportion of their diet, or you could have a look at where they live. Just part the long grass and you will see numerous tunnels running in all directions, often with chewed grass stems and droppings at intervals.

One of the rarest animals of the Country Park is the water vole 'Ratty' of 'Wind in the Willows'. Usually you only catch the briefest of glimpses of one, before they 'plop' into the water and vanish from view. These charming little creatures have become increasingly rare in the Countryside, but Birmingham remains a real stronghold for them.



Page- Wildlife at the Park

The text for the wildlife at the park was done in co-operation with Dr. Stefan Bodnar. The text includes substantial information about the wildlife in the park and introduced the common species in the park. The images were provided by Dr. Stefan Bodnar.



Meadow life of the Park




Other than the mammal and bird life, the hedgerows, copses and meadows provide places for many insects, especially butterflies and day flying moths. It is not unusual at the right time of year to see clouds of species such as the appropriately named 'Chimney Sweeper' along with others such as the Burnet Companion and Mother Shipton moth. The summer sees an influx of colourful butterflies such as the red admiral amongst the gatekeepers and meadow browns. One of the most beautiful features of the Sheldon Country Park is its wildflower meadow fields. In the summer the Park is rich with typical English wildflowers. The meadows provide an excellent ground for many lovely flowers that bloom in the Park.



Page- Meadow life in the Park

This page was created to increase the attractiveness of the park and to tell about the meadow life of the park. The images are of the New Hall Valley but since they are common English wildflowers it is acceptable to use them in this page as well.



The Historic Park


The history of the Sheldon Country Park dates back to the prehistoric times and the land has been used by man for centuries.

The country park contains remains of human management from prehistoric times onwards. The oldest site so far discovered is a prehistoric burnt mound on the Westley Brook. It is visible as a layer of heat-shattered stones in the stream bank. Over 40 burnt mounds have so far been found in Birmingham. Some of them have been dated by radiocarbon to the middle of the Bronze Age, about 1500-1000 BC, and they are thought to be the debris either from cooking using heated stones to boil water or from sweat or sauna bathing using heated stones to create steam. The heat-shattered stones at Sheldon overlie alluvium which is the result of erosion probably following tree clearance for agriculture.

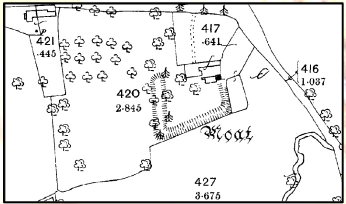
Rectory Farm was originally surrounded by a moat. Although the existing building is 17th and 18th century in date, the moat was probably constructed in the 13th century and would originally have surrounded timber-framed buildings. Moated homesteads were numerous in Birmingham and there was another just outside the Country Park on Church Road. Moats were constructed as status symbols rather than for defence.

There are two areas of ridge and furrow in the Country Park, which are probably the remains of medieval cultivation. The ground was ridged up to help drainage and the ridges sometimes correspond to strips in an open field. There was a watermill on the Hatchford Brook in what is now the golf course but there are now no traces of this. A Second World War pillbox stood on the edge of the golf course, overlooking the airport, but was unfortunately destroyed a few years ago to make way for new development.

Historic stones dating back to 1500-1000 B.C



Map of the Moat at Sheldon Country Park



Page- The Historic Park

Like many other parks in Birmingham also Sheldon has a rich history dating back to the Bronze Age. This section was added to attract a wider marketing audience and increase information available about the site. The text was made in co-operation with Dr. Mike Hoddar.

Events in the Park



The Sheldon Country Park holds a variety of events throughout the year. The park's rangers hold events such as guided tours of the farm, monthly rambles and crafts, for example how to build a bird box. The biggest event in the park is the Country Side Festival.

Countryside Festival

Every year in July Sheldon Country Park holds Countryside Festival which offers a variety of rural treats. The Festival started as traditional agricultural show which now has been extended to provide lots of other attractions. The Festival usually gathers a crowd of 20,000 people. In co-operation with The National Farmers Union the Festival includes pigs, cows and chickens to be displayed and a country crafts fair. For the few past years the Festival has included sheepdog display, eagle and vulture shows and performing mongrels. Also full-size lifeboat, miniature railway, funfair with giant inflatable, donkey rides, bonsai displays and a beer tent have been a feature of the Festival. Countryside Festival is a great family day out with a variety of activities and shows that encourage everyone to get to know about the English countryside.



Page- Events in the Park

The page was created to inform the public about the events in the park and to attract visitors as well as increasing the value of the service. Country side festival is one of the biggest events in park throughout Birmingham and the event is not marketed to a level it should. That is why a section is dedicated to it. The pictures are from BBC.

A park close to you

The Sheldon Country Park is a park close to its surrounding community and the people of Birmingham. The Sheldon Country Park welcomes everyone to enjoy rural and wildlife near their neighbourhood.



Great Outdoor opportunities

The Sheldon Country Park offers great opportunities for outdoor activities. The Park's cycle route is part of the East Birmingham cycle route. The cycle route can be entered from Marston Green Railway Station and Bell Lane. The pathways in the Park are in firm and good condition and the Park offers great opportunities for cycling.

The Sheldon Country Park has great opportunities for walking. It is part of the Walk 2000 routes which aims to promote walking for health in Birmingham. The Sheldon Country Park has line walks and formal pathways and the Community Health has identified a 2 kilometer walking route within the site.

The park also has three football pitches and a play area for children.

Page- A park close to you

As in the booklet for the New Hall Valley a section is created to inform the public about activities available in the park. Information about the opportunities for outdoor activities and about the play areas in the park was considered important to add. The pictures are from both parks.

Learning with the animals

The ranger service in the Sheldon Country Park aims to provide activities, events and information to engage the community with nature and encourage appreciation of the environment.

Sheldon Country Park plays an important role in the local community. As well as providing a great day out at the farm for visitors, the farm is also a place where children can learn about the animals. Children can learn where animal's food comes from and about farming practices. The country Park has a range of events and activities in offer. There are opportunities for people from all walks of life to get 'hands-on' with the animals through volunteering at the farm.

Sheldon Country Park is running courses in animal care and gardening through City College, providing adult support learning for people with disabilities or learning difficulties.

For further details contact:
The Sheldon Country Park Ranger Service.
Tel 0121 742 0226 or email Sheldon.country.park@birmingham.gov.uk



Page- Learning with the Animals

This section was added to inform the public about the work the park is doing with people with disabilities. It was considered to be important to tell about the courses arranged and about the role of the park in the local community. This page was also added to improve the Council's image as a service provider. The pictures were provided from Dr. Stefan Bodnar.