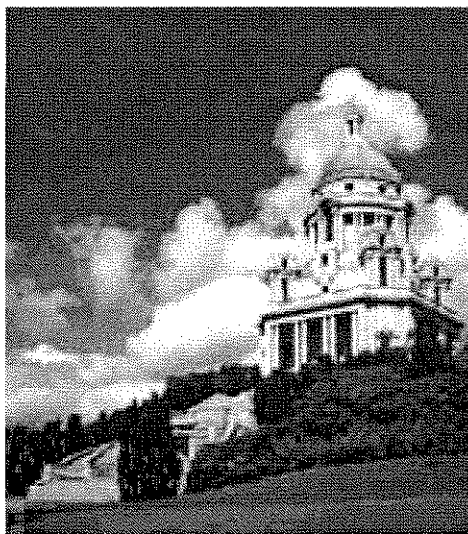


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**DRAFT PARK  
DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY  
2007 to 2011  
(including review of 2006)**

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# 1 WILLIAMSON PARK – AN INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

2003/4 was the first year of Williamson Parks' new business plan. Since then it has been rolled forward on an annual basis. The intention of the document is twofold. Firstly to set out the Company's vision and objectives for the next 5 years and secondly, to provide an update on the progress made to date.

Before the plan was launched back in 2003/4, the Park was already judged a success. It was popular with visitors and held in deep affection by local residents. However, little forward planning had been undertaken and there was no strategy in place for future developments.

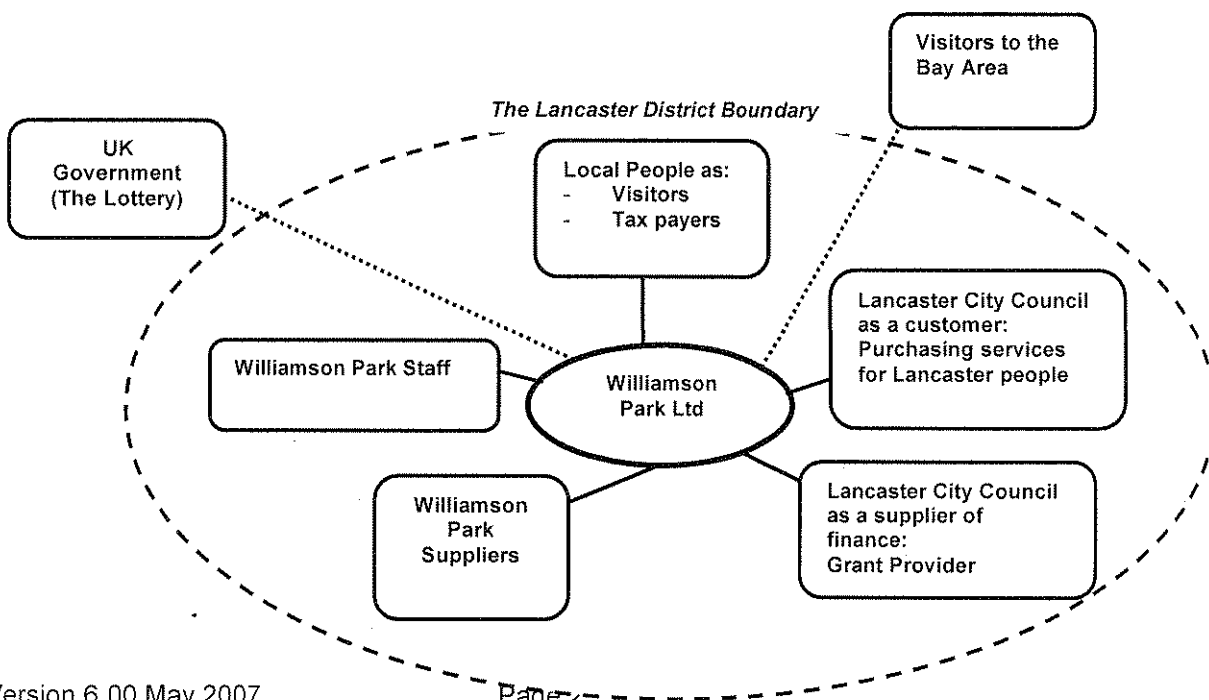
As a consequence, the Company prepared the 5 year Park Development Strategy in 2003 setting out plans for the immediate future. Much has been achieved since then despite continuous pressure to deliver the plans priorities within a balanced budget. A brief summary of the progress against the strategy is summarised in the paragraphs below.

## 1.2 The Purpose of the Park

James Williamson originally established the Park for the health and recreation of the people of Lancaster with the responsibility for the management and operation of the Park vested in the City Council. However, as the Park's popularity has grown, the role of the Park has been broadened to include visitors from outside the area and it is now seen as a major attraction for both local residents and those visiting the district.

## 1.3 Stakeholder Analysis

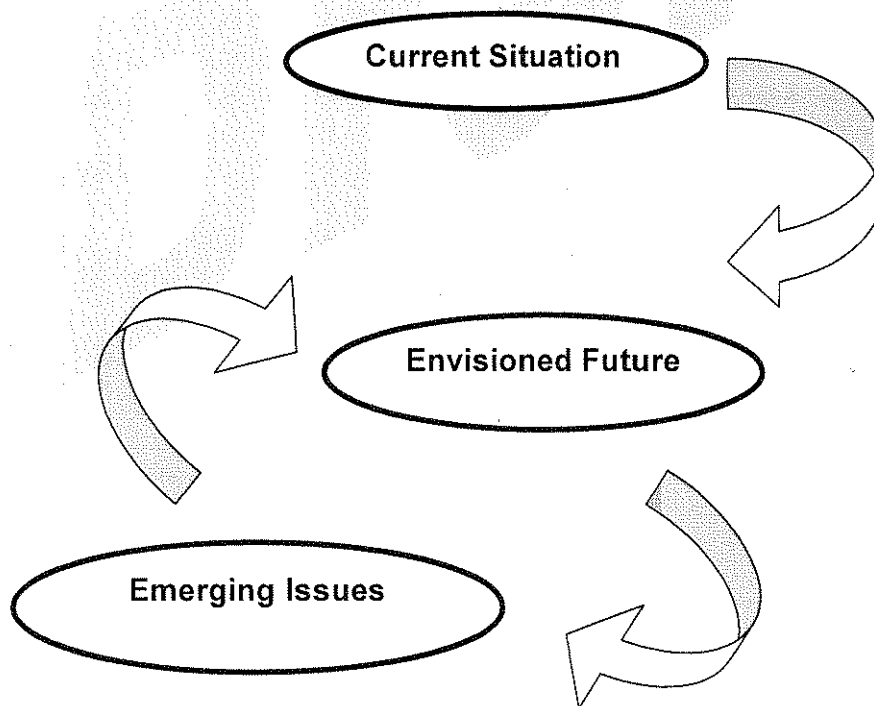
The strategy is designed to take account of the set of Williamson Park's stakeholders who are illustrated in the map below.



#### 1.4 Document Plan

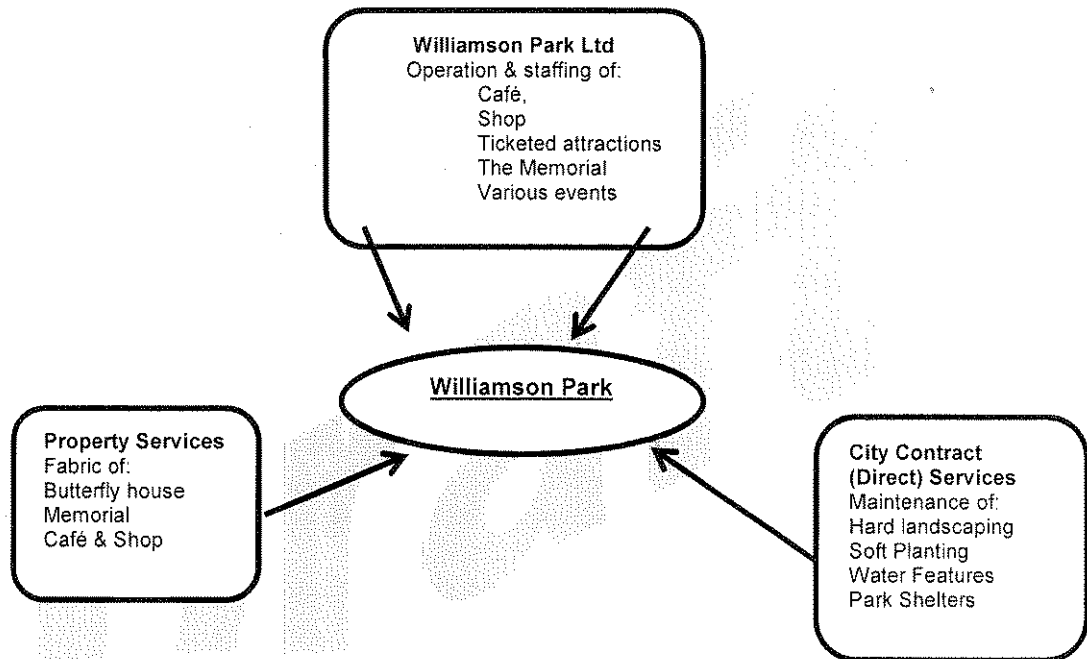
This document is laid out as follows:

- It takes as its' starting point, the situation as it was in 2003/4.
- It then sets out a vision of the intended position of the company by 2011.
- It then lays out the strategy as the route to achieve the vision.
- It then goes onto discuss the original proposition made regarding work methods and the progress to date. In addition, discussion takes place about issues that have emerged and the enhancements and modifications to the vision that have taken place.



## 1.5 The Situation in Early 2003

Different Services in the Council had responsibilities in looking after the whole of Williamson Park. The company, Williamson Park Ltd, was responsible only for the running and internal decoration of the shop, café and ticketed attractions. This lack of focus on appearance often resulted in the Park failing to look its best. For instance a tarpaulin had covered the café roof for nearly four years while borders and planting areas had fallen into sad disrepair.



An illustration of the diverse nature of the running of Williamson Park in 2003

Both Property Services and City Contract (Direct) Services [CC(D)S] had been unable to carry out the work for which they were responsible due to financial constraints and competing priorities. In an attempt to address this, Williamson Park Ltd took the initiative to gradually undertake more and more additional responsibilities and fund it through their own income. Specific examples of this were –

- Interior and exterior painting of the Pavilion, the Memorial, the Park shelters, the Park furniture, Wyresdale Road toilet block and the street lighting
- Maintenance of the lake and reservoir
- Maintenance of the CCTV system
- Changing all breakable glass to polycarbonate sheeting
- General maintenance of all doors, windows, plumbing and electrical installations

As a consequence, a business case was submitted to the Council, which argued that consolidation of the various Council Services' budgets into a block grant was the only effective way of financing the aspirations set out in the Park's Development Strategy.

Council agreed to this at its meeting in March 2003 which saw the budgets previously held by Property Services and CC(D)S consolidated into the general grant subsidy payable annually to the Company. This practice has continued to date with the level of grant considered each year as part of the Council's budget process.

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## 2 VISION FOR THE FUTURE

### 2.1 Position As It Was

Research established that Williamson Park Ltd has one enormous resource that was capable of increasing both financial income and public interest. The resource is the company's close association with the Parkland itself. Over the past thirty years, benign neglect had resulted in the Park being reduced to a shadow of its former self. The Parks' strong lean skeleton of spectacular planting and hard landscaping had grown indistinct and difficult to see. Where what were once herbaceous borders were briar patches, where once there were mature specimen trees were empty spaces.

Over the same period, the public's interest in gardening and horticulture had developed enormously and this provided the stimulus and spur to turn around the neglect and revive the Park. To achieve this, effort was focussed on a vision to establish the Park as a centre of Horticultural excellence. From this vision emerged the current strategy to take the organisation from where it was, to the position it needs to be.

- 2.2 Arising from the review of the position set out above, the Company developed and approved the following vision to act as the catalyst to rejuvenate the Park.

#### **THE VISION**

**Williamson Park is to be a centre of horticultural excellence that will attract visitors from all over the world.**

### 3 THE STRATEGY

#### 3.1 Content of Strategy

To achieve the vision, the Park established a strategy based on the support of a small dedicated team of similar minded people whose sole aim was to restore and develop the Park. It is not deemed necessary to employ armies of gardeners and maintenance people, but by mixing in-house skill with outsourced labour, a phased solution could be produced over a period of five years.

To achieve this, Williamson Park sought and was awarded control of the budgets allocated to CC(D)S and Property Services for the maintenance of Williamson Park and its workforce increased accordingly. The strategy that underpins the vision is set out below.

#### **STRATEGY SUMMARY.**

- The drive to achieve the vision will be motivated by the Williamson Park Board.
- The detailed horticultural work to establish the Park as a centre of horticultural excellence will be carried out by the Company's in-house team through the delivery of the Horticultural Site Management Plan with outsourcing of work where appropriate.
- The Park's management will ensure that money is effectively spent on the Park with opportunities developed wherever possible to increase the revenue generating potential of the Park's infrastructure and assets.
- The Company will strive to incrementally develop the Park's facilities for the benefit of its visitors with an emphasis on sustainability and education.
- To Park's Management will engage closely with the Park's users and supporters to help shape the Park's future.



## **4 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

### **4.1 Company Staffing Levels**

In order to carry out the required work, it was agreed to increase the in-house staffing levels to the establishment as set out in the attached Appendix B.

This level of staffing has now been built into the 2007/8 budget and is consistent with the manpower required to deliver the Horticultural Site Management Plan.

The establishment was also increased during 2006/7 to include the post of Deputy Parks manager with the brief to develop a series of attractions within the Park to extend the visitor season and raise additional income.

### **4.2 Grass cutting**

The large areas of grass in the Park require a range of grass cutting machinery. It would have been impractical for the company to purchase its own machinery due to issues of storage and maintenance.

The short-term solution was that CC(D)S undertake all major mowing and that Park staff deal with key location areas that require consistent attention to detail.

In the medium term, it is proposed to market test all grass cutting work with a view to demonstrate value for money. This has yet to be undertaken to any significant degree and the company has continued to contract grass cutting to CC(D)S.

What has happened though, is that efficiencies have been achieved and savings made by re-planning the grass cutting schedules to reflect the needs of the Park rather than having to fit in with the rotas of the CC(D)S grass cutting teams. This has been extremely effective and the benefits are clear for any visitor to see.

### **4.3 Tree Work**

Williamson Park has a large collection of mature specimen and feature trees. Consequently, arboriculture work is a substantial part of the maintenance regime within the Park.

Williamson Park Ltd has invested in developing its arboricultural capabilities. A two-man team has been trained to the level where they can work on small and medium sized trees. It was proposed to leverage this capability by offering the Park as a venue to training agencies that are running arboricultural courses. However, work on very large trees cannot be undertaken in-house and CC(D)S continue to provide this service.

Specific improvements that have been completed in the last 12 months include the creation of:-

- an Arboretum Walk
- a Tree Fern feature
- an Acer Arc
- a Rhododendron project in partnership with Muncaster Castle
- a Birch grove

#### **4.4 Municipal Flowerbed Planting**

Flowerbed work requires large gangs of workers who can descend on an area and plant it out in a very short space of time. The new staffing structure allows the Park to undertake this when most effective in line with the new Site Management Plan.

New planting schedules have meant that work on the flowerbeds has been reduced by 50%, with work originally being concentrated on the Wyresdale Road entrance for maximum effect. The whole concept of municipal planting is moving over in favour of other types of planting and cultivation that are discussed later in this document and set out in the Horticultural Site Management Plan.

#### **4.5 Major Clearance of Existing Herbaceous Areas**

Due to neglect, most of the Parks' feature borders were in a very poor state. In order to deal with this issue quickly and effectively, the borders have been portioned off, and any heavy reclamation work undertaken by CC(D)S as a one-off piece of work. The Park's own team is now in control of replanting and maintaining the herbaceous border areas and significant progress has been made in this area over the last 12 months.

Most of the major clearance and cutting back has now taken place. As the years of neglect have been rolled back, the historical concepts behind the original planting schemes in the park have become clear. The Park has a skeleton of spectacular rock faces. The original scheme worked in sympathy with this topography using strong shrub planting with feature trees. The herbaceous borders that had previously become overgrown have now been cleared and provide a focal point for visitors.

Currently therefore, the original idea of substantial herbaceous borders has been revised to take advantage of this position. As the rocks are being revealed, other ideas are being developed with new planting plans that introduce both spring and autumn interest to provide year round, seasonal displays thus extending the visitor season.

#### **4.6 Gardening**

The areas that received early attention were those along the main roadway through the Park from Quernmore Road to Wyresdale Road entrances. These were chosen for their high profile location within the Park.

- Both of the main entrances and the outside of the walls leading to them were overgrown. Having removed the overgrowth and the formal flowerbeds at the Quernmore Road entrance, a softer, more natural design has been introduced that incorporates some creative features.
- The grass borders have been pushed back to the woodland edge thus exposing the existing dramatic rock features.
- New feature trees have been planted to replace dead and damaged specimens, and a Japanese Island has been created around the fairy steps and seat.
- The Wyresdale Road entrance required general cutting back and tidying. The work is now completed.
- The formal beds seen on the approach from the Wyresdale Road car park have been improved to create a spectacular statement for visitors that entices people into the park.

#### **4.7 Infrastructure**

As the clearance work outlined above has taken place, it has allowed the various paths and tracks within the Park to be clearly defined and repairs undertaken. In particular the resurfacing of the Fenham Carr walkways has brought significant improvements to its accessibility in all weathers.

Improvements to the lighting along the main spinal paths have been improved and further improvements are planned.

#### **4.8 The Lake**

Previously in a state of dereliction, the Lake is now regularly cleaned out and the fountain has been repaired to good working order. Furthermore, this is now used as a prime location for some of the park's events season.

#### **4.9 Structures and Shelters**

The consolidation of budgets has permitted dedicated resources to be directed into the repair and maintenance of the Park's shelters. Further work however is planned for the Butterfly House.

Renovation work has also been undertaken on the two park lodges enabling a more realistic rent to be charged. However, these still present problems for the park's management and the long term future of the lodges needs further review.

#### **4.10 Play Areas**

The establishment of the "Friends of Williamson Park" has been a major success in the developing improved facilities in the Park. The "Friends" has attracted other

funding sources not available to the Company to develop key facilities within the Park that the company couldn't readily afford to develop them. In particular, the work of the "Friends" has recently resulted in the new provision of an under 7's play area on the former putting green site. This has been greatly appreciated and widely acclaimed by visitors to the Park.

Plans are also in place to acquire further pieces of play equipment for this area and to develop a new improved assault course play area for 8 to 14 year olds on the site of the former play area.

#### **4.11 Repair & Maintenance**

Over the last few years, extensive improvements and repairs to buildings have been undertaken. In particular, this has seen the replacement of the Butterfly House boiler, catering and kitchen equipment in the Café, the replacement of the toilet block adjacent to the Memorial, and improved drainage and replacement of the septic tank at the Wyresdale Road toilet block.

Following a number of thefts and arson attacks within the Park, the Company has improved its network of CCTV camera coverage and further improvements are planned for 2007/8.

## FUTURE PROJECTS

5.1 Although much has been achieved to date, there are still a number of key projects that need to be completed to achieve the vision and strategic priorities. These can be split into the following themes.

- Minor works within the existing Parks Development Strategy
- Major works to enhance the Parks Development Strategy

### 5.2 Minor Works

In particular, the following minor projects have been identified within the period of the Plan.

- **refurbish existing play area into a Children's Assault Course Play Area for 8 –14 year olds**

The playground was installed in 1987 and has had heavy use from locals' and visitors' children. The "Friends of Williamson Park" are instrumental in attracting funding for this new project to go ahead.

- **further refurbishment of toilet blocks**

In particular, the Wyresdale Road toilets need refurbishment. It had been hoped to renovate and improve the block in 2006 but resources set aside for this work had to be used to replace the drains and septic tank.

- **replace Butterfly House columns**

A number of the columns now need attention but cannot be financed from within existing repair and maintenance budgets

- **additional lighting**

The existing lighting on the roadways needs extending. Estimated costs are approximately £20,000.00

- **the four corner fountains on the perimeter of the Memorial**

Repair work for these is estimated at £6,000

- **extension to CCTV network**

£8,000 has been allocated in 2007/8 by the City Council to extend the present network of CCTV cameras following incidents of theft and arson in the Park

- **further improvements to The Dell**

to carry out further works to improve the site as a venue for events

- **Illuminated Woodland Walk**

this would create a feature walk in the Arboretum where 50 trees would be illuminated by low energy lighting (solar powered where possible) . the project would also add to the security of the Park, offer an opportunity for evening guided tours and mark the Centenary of the Park.

### 5.3 Major Works

In addition to the above but not included in the original strategy, are two specific projects that need further consideration before committing resources. They are:

- **renewal and extension of existing café/shop,zoo, and offices**

Should the increase in visitor numbers continue to grow, both the café and the shop will prove inadequate for their intended purpose. Studies of Royal Horticultural Society sites have shown that a strong café operation can provide a much more significant income stream than the park is currently enjoying. With this in mind, the company has agreed to carry out a feasibility study to establish how existing facilities can be improved to maximise revenue generating potential. Provisional plans have been commissioned and initial estimates show that the capital cost would be in excess of £2m. A bid for grant support has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for grant monies to assist in preparing a detailed business case that could be used to submit a full bid for the development. The outcome of this first bid is awaited.

The new facility is seen as crucial in the park being able to develop its income generating potential. At present, the park has no conference or function rooms and consequently has to turn business away. The new plans would see the development of:-

- a function room that could cater for up to 100 people,
- a meeting and seminar room to provide improved educational facilities
- an enhanced retail shop outlet
- improved café and kitchen facilities
- a foyer that could act as an exhibition hall
- the linking of the existing buildings to the Butterfly house
- improved car parking and service access points.
- an extended and refurbished small mammal and animal enclosure

- **redevelopment of the reservoir**

At present, the reservoir is excluded from visitors to the park and is being used as a plant and tree nursery. There is an obvious potential to develop this site into an additional visitor attraction although no work has been commissioned to assess the options available. This is seen as a long term objective and probably outside of this plan's timescale.

If the Company is to progress either of these projects, significant resources will be required and feasibility studies/business cases needed before committing the Park and its partners to any future expenditure.

#### **5.4 Park Centenary**

In addition to the above, it is the beginning of the Park's Centenary celebrations. Work started on the Park in 1907 and finished in 1909. The company has established a small team to organise events and attractions to celebrate the Centenary. At present, this is at its early stages in development and will be progressed in the near future.

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## 6 FUNDING THE STRATEGY

### 6.1 Reducing the financial burden that the Park represents on the City Council.

Williamson Park was originally funded through a number of budgets. These were managed on the parks' behalf by CC(D)S, Property Services and Williamson Park Ltd. A key proposal of the strategy was that the overall burden of funding to the park from the council would decrease by centralising the funding and making efficiencies. This has now taken place and the efficiencies generated has resulted in improvements to the park without the need to request additional revenue support from the council.

### 6.2 Creating New Income Streams

To further reduce the burden on the Council; the method by which the Park generates income has been reviewed. Not surprisingly, the current visitor numbers are greatest over the period of the school summer holidays. Therefore the Company continues to review income generating opportunities based on the following :-

**Firstly**, ways to persuade people who enjoy the facilities - without visiting either the ticketed attractions or the café - to contribute towards the Parks' upkeep.

**Secondly**, to maximise the income potential of its existing assets to increase the return on current investment.

**Thirdly**, examine existing partnerships and alliances to ensure the Parks' share of the return is equitable.

**Finally**, consider options to extend the season as far as possible, and continue to attract high spending visitors at the quieter times of the year.

### 6.3 Car parking charges

Charging for car parking was introduced in 2003 as an equitable solution to the dilemma of persuading people to support the Park. Tickets originally contributed towards either refreshments in the café, or entrance to the Butterfly House. Low cost season tickets for dog walkers and St Martins' staff were introduced to resolve the concerns of most frequent visitors.

The introduction of parking charges has been a success and to date has exceeded expectations. However, there are indications that visitors don't always use this subsidy whilst visiting the park and the arrangements have now been stopped to improve the return on café sales.



#### **6.4 Increasing Return on Assets**

- An investment in the Dell auditorium has been undertaken to allow the Company to let out the space for concerts and shows. Income would come not only from the hire fee, but also the sale of refreshments.
- Refurbishment of the two lodges has been undertaken but both struggle to yield a commercial rent. The effort of maintaining and letting the lodges is a distraction from the daily operation of the Park and this raises the question if the Park should be in the business of being a landlord
- Whilst the Butterfly House is included in the horticultural strategy, the Zoo has no horticultural connections. The Zoo is now reaching the position where it needs a major investment of funds if the Zoo licence is to be retained. If the lottery bid were successful then these funds would be available; however if it were not, the Company would need to consider whether it should withdraw this facility.
- A partnership with a local supplier of ornamental fish has been negotiated that should reduce the costs of acquiring specimens for the Butterfly House and generate a rental stream.
- The Park has now developed a flourishing Wedding business that generates a significant income stream. To maximise other potential income associated with this, the development of a function room is seen as crucial.

#### **6.5 Renegotiating Arrangement with the Dukes**

Currently the Dukes Playhouse occupies the peak earning period for shows in the Park during the summer. The fee they pay is less than a full commercial rent. Due to the Dukes presence, Williamson Park is prevented from hiring out the Memorial for functions or organising its own events, but the promenade season does bring many visitors to the Park. Consequently, a balance needs to be drawn between the benefits of the Dukes promenade season and the income potential from other lettings. An agreement with the Dukes has therefore been negotiated with improved concessions to the Park as a satisfactory conclusion.

#### **6.6 Extending the Season**

By focussing the horticultural effort into Autumnal colour and Spring interest it is hoped that the visitor season will be extended, thus increasing the income derived from car parking and the traditional operation. It will take another two years before the new planting schemes take full effect, and therefore this situation will be monitored in the future.

## 6.7 City Council Support

In the event of any major financial shortfall to achieve the priorities identified above, the Company has an opportunity to submit growth bids to the City Council as part of their annual budget exercise. Any major developments can only be undertaken in conjunction with the Council, as the company's landlord, and close workings relations are maintained at all times.

## 6.8 Conclusion

The implementation of the rolling, 5 year strategy has resulted in Williamson Park Ltd establishing a much more structured and commercial approach to its business. So far, both the financial and development aspects are on track, and exceeding the original expectations with many improvements made within the Park. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the weather is crucial to the income generation of the company and any poor spell could significantly affect the viability of each year's operational and financial performance.

More importantly though, the outcome of the Lottery bid to develop the existing visitor facilities is seen as crucial if the Park is to move forward to the next stage of its development and achieve its long term vision. The outcome of the first stage bid is eagerly awaited.

## 5-Year Revenue Budget Forecast

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>					
Employees	276	306	315	325	335
Transport	1	1	1	1	2
Premises	86	74	77	80	84
Supplies and Services	145	133	135	140	145
Horticultural	21	27	35	37	40
Improvements	6	6	10	10	10
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>616</b>
<b>INCOME</b>					
Income	361	381	400	420	441
<b>NET SUBSIDY REQUIRED</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>FINANCED FROM:</b>					
LCC Grants	163	166	169	173	176
Balances	11	-	4	-	(1)
	174	166	173	173	175
Contribution from/to Balances	11	-	-	-	(1)

## Capital Budget

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
CCTV	--	11	--	--	--
Playground	32	20	50	--	--
Building Improvements	--	10	--	--	--
Toilets	18	--	20	--	--
Lighting & Illuminated Walkway	--	--	20	35	--
	<b>50</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>--</b>
<b>FINANCED BY:</b>					
LCC Grant	18	8	30	30	--
Williamson Park	8	8	10	--	--
Lottery	15	10	25	--	--
Other Contributions	9	15	25	5	--
	<b>50</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>--</b>

