city fathers were far-sighted when they put aside the blocks taken up by Central Park so that they remained undeveloped, and this in a place with very high land values. It is now a playground, nature preserve, green lung and sports field rolled into one. I once arrived there after three weeks travelling through the north eastern states, and saw more birds, and more species of birds, in Central Park in one day than I had seen in all the rest of the trip.

In a report on the multiple uses of green networks in urban areas, Barker (1997) reviews their history and relevance to people, their importance to society, their benefits to urban landscapes, nature conservation and air and water quality, and discusses related strategic planning issues. He defines green networks as '... natural, or permanently vegetated, physically connected spaces situated in areas otherwise built up or used for intensive agriculture, industrial purposes or other intrusive human activities. They may include land to which there is no general access, such as private gardens and estates'. (Individual greenspaces are themselves defined by Box and Harrison (1993) as 'Land, water and geological features which have been naturally colonised by plants and animals and which are accessible on foot to large numbers of residents.')

Barker also says that "Green networks with multiple uses and values in urban areas go beyond the early ideas that they are important simply for recreation and for beauty. They also address the needs of wildlife, flood control, improved water quality, outdoor education, community cohesion, local transport and many other urban infrastructure needs.' These and other functions place green networks firmly in the field of sustainable development, indeed they epitomize the integration of economic, environmental and social factors which underpins the concept.

With regard to accessibility to urban greenspaces the Report gives English Nature's recommended standards for providing such access. These standards are being promoted, and variations of them are appearing in planning policy documents, such as the Birmingham Nature Conservation Strategy (Birmingham City Council, 1997) and Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands Region (WMLGA, 2002).

The recommended standards are that:

People living in towns and cities should have:

- An accessible natural greenspace less than 300 metres (in a straight line) from home;
- Statutory Local Nature Reserves provided at a minimum level of 1 hectare per thousand population; and
- At least one accessible 20-hectare site within 2 kilometres of home; one accessible 100-hectare site within 5 kilometres of home; and one accessible 500-hectare site within 10 kilometres of home.

It seems unlikely that many people in British towns and cities enjoy this level of access to open spaces. The standards are designed however to provide a yardstick against which current and future provision can be measured, a rationale for dedicating new, or keeping existing, open spaces in the face of development pressures, and an aspiration for local authorities.

In 2002, a report published on behalf of the London Brownfield Forum (London Wildlife Trust, 2002) pointed out that many supposedly 'derelict' sites are valuable for

biodiversity and provide green open space for many people. In a foreword, the then Chair of English Nature says: 'London's brownfield sites host a wide range of animals and plants, some of them nationally rare and many of them truly characteristic of a cosmopolitan London. This ''unofficial countryside'', now under pressure from development, is as much part of the living London as Hampstead Heath, Richmond Park and Epping Forest.' (He could have added that those three sites are part of the same continuum of open spaces in London as the brownfield sites. These different sorts of open spaces, varying as they do in size, attractiveness, ecological richness and history, are functionally interconnected. Birds which nest in the mature trees of Richmond Park are likely to forage amongst the pioneer plants and tall herbs of more informal open spaces nearby.)

Robert Costanza *et al*. (1997) have attempted to take our understanding of the multiple functions provided by natural ecosystems a stage further by ascribing monetary values to them. Although controversial, their work suggests that for the entire biosphere the value of seventeen ecosystem services (such as waste treatment, pollination, soil formation, and nutrient cycling) is $33 trillion per year. This is largely discounted by conventional market economics which provide a figure for the global gross national product of about $18 trillion per year (this figure was later revised to $25 trillion; Costanza *et al*., 1998). The figures can be debated, but the point is that whatever resources may be devoted to providing and managing urban open spaces are likely to be more than repaid by the values of the functions those open spaces provide.

PLANNING TOOLS FOR NATURE CONSERVATION IN URBAN AREAS

This leads on to a consideration of some of the planning tools at the disposal of those promoting biodiversity in urban areas. If many wildlife-rich places have survived or evolved in towns and cities by default, there is a growing realization that they can be retained and improved by design. Some of the key tools are listed here, space not permitting anything other than a brief mention.

(1) The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): Given expression in the United Kingdom through a structured programme of identifying priority habitats and species, and developing biodiversity action plans (BAPs) – see below.
(2) The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations: European legislation which provides for the designation of sites of European importance: Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). One of the most powerful provisions is Regulation 37, which 'requires every Local Planning Authority to include development plan policies.... which encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna' (Oxford, 2000). These 'features of the landscape' might include hedgerows, rivers, canals, wildlife corridors and networks of green spaces.
(3) Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) (now becoming Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) in England and Wales): Amongst the most significant of