

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: The Economy, Housing, and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee

Date: Wednesday 29th March 2023.

Subject: Update on the development of the borough's Parks for the Future Strategy.

Report of: Richard Gill, Senior Parks Manager

Responsible Director: Steve Hollingworth, Assistant Director Leisure, Sport and Culture

SUMMARY

Following the conclusion of the Council's resident-led Parks, Biodiversity and Climate and Ecological emergency Commissions, officers are engaged in the drafting of a Parks for the Future Strategy to develop their recommendations.

The strategy, due to be published in the first quarter of 2024, is a systematic plan of action to achieve specific business goals and will seek to further the Administration's Manifesto 2022 pledge and stated business objective to:

Maintain world class parks, opens spaces and cemeteries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Committee both to note and comment on the report.

Wards Affected: All

H&F Priorities

Future Parks strategy will co-ordinate our service delivery to meet these priorities.

H&F Priorities	How this report aligns to the H&F Priorities
Building shared prosperity	<p>The strategy will help create an inclusive economic climate where the next generation of innovators can thrive by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• maintaining high quality open spaces attractive to new employers and residents• creating and maintaining high quality learning spaces, such as tiny forests and forest schools, used by our children
Creating a compassionate council	<p>The strategy will improve access and availability of open spaces by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• improving access to information about parks e.g. events and sports bookings.• improving opportunities for residents to be involved e.g. creating community gardens used for mental health garden projects.
Doing things with residents, not to them	<p>The strategy will bring people together to build alliances for change, and reform our services to respond to the needs of our communities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• maintaining links and actively engaging with all users, stakeholders and Friends groups• establishing a 'Parks forum' to engage with our diverse communities and co-produce improvements to our parks.• undertaking regular measurement to understand residents' satisfaction and experience of our parks and open spaces.

<p>Being ruthlessly financially efficient</p>	<p>The strategy will improve quality and reduce costs associated with maintenance and repairs by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivering services based on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which maximise the quality of services for the financial investment made. • transforming our services by making use of; resident's views, new technology, new partnerships and innovation in delivery • working to leverage in external funding through funding bids and partnerships
<p>Taking pride in H&F</p>	<p>The strategy takes pride in our borough's parks and open spaces and celebrates who we are to build a happier and more resilient borough by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hosting community events to strengthen partnerships and help grow the arts and creative economy • allowing residents to stay active with the provision of sports and recreation opportunities. • demonstrating safe, welcoming open spaces and increasing the number of Green Flag parks in the borough
<p>Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency</p>	<p>The strategy will create climate aware and wildlife-friendly green spaces which residents can enjoy by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making space for meadows, sustainable surfacing, tiny forests, habitat improvement, native planting and increased tree canopy. • working with colleagues to measure biodiversity net gain and hold new developments accountable.

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Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

Documents already in the public domain that will be useful in the development of the Future Parks Strategy are listed in Appendix 1

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Background: why are we doing this?

1. We need a strategic document that recognises the essential role open space plays in the quality of urban life. Publicly owned parks specifically to ameliorate urban conditions have been built since 1843 (Birkenhead) but only recently are all the benefits of the '*Green Lung*' being universally recognised; Greenery produces oxygen, absorbs carbon dioxide and other pollutants, cools air in the summer and reduces windspeed keeping us warmer in winter. Open space absorbs rainfall to reduce flooding and allows a wide range of habitats for wildlife. Taking exercise in open space and being around nature, specifically trees, has been shown to reduce anxiety and stress improving our physical and mental wellbeing.
2. We need a strategic document that reflects H&F priorities and responds to the changing nature of climate, funding and residents satisfaction with our parks and open spaces. Since our last strategy was published in 2008 much has changed. Not least with new opportunities to present information to our audience. Colourful, well-presented and easily read 'leaflet style' strategies available online could improve engagement with our residents
3. We need a strategic document that explores important issues but also celebrates achievement.
4. The national pandemic of CoVid 19 confirmed the value of open space and the response of the parks team and our contractors was magnificent. Initially when we were asked to close the parks public complaints hit a record high. As the pandemic wore on residents continually told us how they valued the access to open air, green space and daily exercise. Although we don't have access to park user numbers, use increased significantly and difficulties of managing different user groups in popular destinations and increased users in areas of wildlife value had to be managed.

5. 'Green Flag' is a national standard of quality assessment recognising well managed parks and green spaces. The Strategy document in 2008 set out an ambition to achieve six Green Flags in key parks. This was achieved and we now have 20 parks with Green Flags and ambition to add another Green Flag each year. The green flag process has a cost for each park but is a way of showing local people that it's not just the big (flagship) parks that matter.

6. 'Good Parks for London' is an assessment of participating London boroughs against ten criteria which demonstrate strategy and action for; public satisfaction, quality, collaboration, nature, community, skills, events, health sustainability and strategic planning. In 2022 H&F were ranked 5th (out of 29) with a featured case study on quality. This is a demonstratable improvement on our performance in 2017 and 2018, when we were ranked 27th, but we still have room to improve particularly against the criteria of events and community involvement.

7. The Parks Commission have 22 headline recommendations set out which the parks team understand and support. We have made progress on many of these recommendations and will continue to provide support and deliver on these aspirations.

Business Goals

8. Shared business goals for the Parks for the Future Strategy have been drafted to show where we want to be and an initial timeline of actions that will help us get there. Crucial in this will be working with members, officers, stakeholders and residents to co-produce and agree this strategy.
 - **Maintaining high quality parks for the next generation** and attractive to all those who want to invest in our borough now.
 - **Making parks and information about them accessible to all** including both physical and digital improvements.
 - **Listening to the needs of our communities** and co-producing improvement plans for our parks and parks services.
 - **Building alliances for change**, bringing people together to work with representatives of all stakeholders and support change.

- **Take pride in strengthening partnerships** to host community events and create high quality spaces for learning, relaxing, playing and celebrating
- **Encouraging residents to stay active** with the provision of sports and recreation opportunities to improve both physical and mental wellbeing.
- **Creating climate aware, biodiverse green spaces** which residents and wildlife can enjoy.
- **Measuring our performance** to support continued funding, investment and change.

Timetable

9. The drafting of the Parks Strategy for the Future is taking place over a projected 12-month period, starting March 2023, and delivered with distinct workstreams. The focus of this work is in building a coalition of support for a shared vision and goals and engaging with partners in the sector. A member-led governance board, including, Cllr, Sharon Holder (Cabinet Member for the Public Realm) and Cllr Hardcourt (cabinet Member for Climate Change and Ecology) is currently overseeing the work. The work programme will need to be flexible to respond to stakeholders' and members' ideas and views and to ensure our shared goals are met.

Table 1: work programme to develop Future Parks Strategy

Workstreams	Target Date	Outputs
<p>1. Defining the project.</p> <p><i>Agree outputs with member-led governance board</i></p>	<p>28th April 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project plan after feedback on this report including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scoping document including definition of roles of Council departments and partners ○ Engagement plan What conversations still need to be had to check inclusivity and representation

<p>2. Refining the project</p> <p><i>Agree outputs with member-led governance board</i></p>	<p>TBC. Will run concurrent with Stage 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Plan review ensure the new strategy will align other strategies and existing relationships including emerging Cultural Strategy and Sport and Physical Activity Strategy • Review new GLA Guidance not yet available. • Open space audit. A review of the boroughs open space, to be scoped and agreed with members and planning colleagues
<p>3. Developing a shared Future Parks Strategy</p> <p><i>Engage with residents and stakeholders</i></p> <p><i>Agree outputs with member-led governance board</i></p>	<p>1st May 2023</p> <p>1st June 2023</p> <p>1st June 2023</p> <p>1st Oct 2023</p> <p>28th Sept 2023</p> <p>28th Oct 2023</p> <p>26th Jan 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual User satisfaction survey agreed as part of the engagement plan (above) to be conducted Summer 2023. • Themed workshops: To identify residents/stakeholders and actions designed to achieve the identified goals. To be workshoped at conference • Parks Forum. Establish a regular forum led by residents to support and challenge the parks service. • Conference for all residents and stakeholders to be organised by parks forum, facilitated by Council. • Draft Strategy. Project Plan review of shared goals, progress to date (see section 4.0), results of engagement and available resources to deliver service. • Refined GM Contract to reflect resident aspirations and budget. • Refined Parks Management Plans (template) to reflect resident aspirations and budget. Submission of parks plans still in Dec/Jan • Engagement Plan Review • Final Strategy if no significant revisions required to draft strategy. • Action Plan

4. Mobilising the strategy	From 26 th Jan 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks Forum • Annual Action Plan Review • Operating model and governance
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Progress against our business goals to date and *next steps*

Maintaining high quality parks for the next generation.

10. A major part of the strategy must be how we manage our Grounds Maintenance across the portfolio including activities such as grass cutting, cleaning operations and the care of trees and shrubs. Four New contracts for grounds maintenance (GM) starting on the 1st of February 2022. give greater clarity to the separate client bodies responsible for; Parks and Cemeteries, Housing, Wormwood Scrubs and the Council's Trees.

11. All contracts include a commitment to social value, apprenticeships and the inclusion of KPI's. New contract requirements draw on the Parks Commission aspirations to make the contractor more responsible for what they do including; providing park ambassadors, green waste recycling, working with volunteers, conducting residents satisfaction surveys and taking responsibility for depots, biodiversity and helping us achieve Green Flags.

- *We will continue to work with the GM contractors in order to make best use of our resources and ensure the highest quality service possible for all our open spaces.*

12. We have stewardship responsibility for our parks and open spaces, on behalf of the whole community.

- *As new strategy and policy develops including; trees, assets, play and cemeteries we will adapt the GM contract and management plans to reflect new requirements.*

Making parks and information about them accessible to all.

13. A major corporate project to improve the Councils website has been initiated and has included; updates to several parks web pages, an opportunity to collect and interpret residents feedback by survey and an online sports booking system. These are all aspirations of the Parks Commission, and we will continue to work with stakeholders and the IT department to communicate our requirements to them and improve the offer to the public.

- *We will continue to work with digital services to promote content and fully inclusive access to information about our services.*

14. The Parks Capital Programme has continued to deliver improvements to our parks. Several parks have also had new noticeboards installed. These provide a physical welcome to the park and display contact information and park bylaws. A colourful map helps orientate people to the parks facilities and a community notice board allows for local information and feedback.

- *We will continue to resolve issues of physical accessibility within our parks and open spaces including new signage in all key parks and review how coproduction could be used to audit the accessibility of open spaces*

Listening to the needs of our communities.

15. Our plans for the maintenance and development of individual parks are set out in site specific park management plans. These plans are a requirement for a Green Flag award and are revised each year and organised towards that priority.

16. The key feedback mechanism is engagement with established Friends groups who represent the views of users in their local parks. There are currently 30 groups some of which have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place setting out how and why we work with each other. Park management plans are shared with our Friends groups but are not public documents. Recommendations of the Parks Commission included to formalise MOU's with all Friends groups and produce an easily understood public document setting out key maintenance operations, development plans and budgets for each park.

17. The requirement of the GM Contract to conduct an annual park users survey gives us an opportunity to better understand the aspirations of the local community and their experience of our parks. The initial survey carried out in 2022 had to be completed quickly to be part of the submission to Parks for London. Response numbers were low and needs to be significantly improved but the top three priorities were: Trees/planting, Litter/Cleaning and Toilets.

18. Parks are an essential community resource, and we will continue to develop local partnerships to better understand the aspirations of local communities involving them in community events and the decision-making process by:

- *Annual Park users survey*
- *Refresh of MOU's specific to each group's needs.*
- *Make Park management plans (or what we can) available to the public*

Building alliances for change.

19. The parks team works with a number of organisations and different departments within the Council to initiate the changes proposed by our residents' aspirations.

20. The Parks Forum will be a key focus. Established to take on the baton from the Parks Commission and help us improve parks services. The forum will comprise 11 volunteers who represent the residents who use our open spaces. These positions have been recently advertised and we expect the forum to have its first meeting in spring/early summer.

- *We will establish the Parks Forum to ensure it fully represents our communities, if necessary, setting up subgroups with 'hard to reach groups' such as Young People who may not have responded to the request for volunteers.*

21. The Parks/Planning/Property forum is a key internal group which highlights and resolves issues including; Section 106 funding for parks capital improvement projects, heritage at risk, development opportunities and threats, and general planning policy and central government advice for parks and open spaces.

- *We will develop investment plans based on the aspirations in each park management plan which will feed into the capital programme to repair, replace and renew park facilities*

22. Safety is a key concern for residents and the Councils Law Enforcement Team (LET) was set up to patrol our open spaces to tackle environmental crime and antisocial behaviour and build strong relationships with local people.

- *We will listen to and Inform residents and stakeholders of our investment plans*

Taking pride in strengthening partnerships

23. Much of the vitality of our parks and open spaces is activated by public use. Quiet places for passive recreation and contemplation are valued but so are active space where people can buy a coffee, meet friends, play sport or watch their children on the play equipment.

- *We will work with all partners and stakeholders to encourage the use of our parks and open spaces as important centres of relaxation, play, education, celebration, art, heritage and culture.*

24. We have drafted an Asset Strategy for Parks and Open spaces which considers the value of all our park buildings and spaces that can be hired out for activities. The Asset Strategy proposes that many buildings are required for operational use

including depots, changing rooms and toilets. Other buildings are put to good community and commercial use such as cafes, community centres and volunteer accommodation but many are vacant and need to be repurposed. We will work with stakeholders to encourage innovation and social enterprise making better use of our buildings to add increased social, financial and environmental value to our parks.

- *We will Publish Park buildings strategy to maximise financial, social and environmental value of these assets*

25. An Events Policy is being drafted which will set out how and why we should activate our parks for community and commercial events and what benefits arise which can be invested back into our parks.

- *We will work with Events team to establish an Events policy*

Encouraging residents to stay active

26. A Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) is being developed that will inform future needs for supply and demand for sports and will need to be agreed locally, regionally, and with national funding bodies such as Sport England.

- *We will continue to recognise that our parks are crucial for improving health and wellbeing through physical activity, play, relaxation and contemplation.*

27. Since many of our sports facilities including changing rooms, tennis courts and playing pitches are in parks this has implications for the asset strategy and how these facilities are to be used or improved. A recommendation of the Parks Commission was to look at how much of our parks are devoted to sport and what benefits are gained from it

- *We will continue to work with a wide range of partners to improve and develop facilities the required facilities of the PPS.*

Creating climate aware, biodiverse green spaces

28. The parks portfolio contains a diverse and valuable green network for biodiversity. The new GM Contracts include requirements to introduce new biodiversity standards making operations as sustainable as possible, increasing recycling opportunities, reducing the usage of non-renewable resources and minimising the use of pesticides and other chemicals. In addition the contracts allow for capital works and community volunteer projects to create wildlife intervention projects such as additional hedge planting, bulbs, trees, ponds or bird and bat boxes.

- *We will protect and enhance biodiversity and actively promote nature conservation*

29. We also work with the Council's Dedicated Ecology Officer and the Planning Team to introduce projects that benefit climate mitigation and biodiversity opportunity into our Parks Capital Projects Programme. This is likely to include some projects to be funded through nearby development which is unable to provide the required biodiversity net gain on their own site.

- *We will seek opportunities to make room for more areas of importance for biodiversity and nature conservation*

30. For several years we have monitored our performance in terms of; no's of trees planted, area of paving changed to permeable surface and area of long grass introduced. This is useful data, and we will look to report on additional measurable targets such as % increase in Tree cover and Biodiversity net gain which will be compatible to regional goals from the GLA or national bodies such as Natural England.

- *We will report progress against a number of agreed measurables.*

Measuring our performance

31. Our parks and open spaces require investment and nurturing. We will actively seek opportunities to generate income and secure funding for the improvement and regeneration of our parks and open spaces and report our performance to the Council key stakeholders and relevant external agencies. These performance measures will be used to judge the overall success of the strategy and could include:

- Open space Audit
- Numbers of parks covered by Fields in Trust agreements
- Annual residents survey
- KPI's of the GM contracts
- Numbers of Green flags
- Achievements of the Capital Programme
- Biodiversity and Climate change data
- Benefits of events in parks
- Sports use participation
- New partnerships and innovations
- Complaints, claims and compliments
- Parks for London report

Other Implications

32. The report is for information. There are no recommendations so there are no equality implications arising from this report.
33. The report is for information and there are no legal implications arising from this report.
34. H&F will consider and make decisions around the level of investment that is required to deliver the recommendations within the new Future Parks Strategy. This will have an impact on budgets within H&F.
35. The report is for information. There are no recommendations so there are no implications for local business arising from this report.
36. The report is for information. There are no recommendations so there are no commercial implications arising from this report.
37. The report is for information. There are no recommendations so there are no ICT implications arising from this report.
38. The report is for information. There are no recommendations so there are no Risk Management implications arising from this report.

APPENDIX 1

Documents already in the public domain that will be useful in the development of the Future Parks Strategy are listed in Appendix 1

- A) Parks Commission Final Report:
[Appendix A new.pdf \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#)
- B) Biodiversity Commission Final Report:
[biodiversity_commission_final_report_rev4.pdf \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#)
- C) Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Final Report
[LBHF Climate and Ecological Emergency Commission Summary of Findings](#)
- D) 'Rising to the challenges of our time, together'. Labour Manifesto 2022:
<http://democracy.lbhf.gov.uk/documents/s120330/Appendix%201%20-%20HF%20Labour%20Manifesto%202022.pdf>
- E) Hammersmith & Fulham Council Business Objectives 2022/23
- F) Parks for London Report
[Good Parks for London 2022](#)
- G) Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2008-2018
[H&F Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2008-2018 \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#)
- H) Hammersmith & Fulham Local Plan February 2018
[local_plan_2018_web_version.pdf \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#)
- I) The strategies of other local councils e.g.
[Hackney-Parks-and-Green-Spaces-Strategy-2021-2031.pdf - Google Drive](#)
- J) The Emerging Cultural Strategy and Sport and Physical Activity Strategy