



Barnet Youth Zone - Site Option Appraisal

The purpose of this paper is to report an analysis of the suitability of various sites, in and around the London Borough of Barnet, which have been identified as potentially available for construction and operation of a world-class youth facility. Five sites are considered. All were suggested by Barnet Borough Council.

Background

A location for a successful youth facility of this type is obviously likely to be influenced, in part, by various practical issues such as site availability/constraints and economic considerations and there may be no single formula for success. However, based on the successful operation of OnSide's existing Youth Zones (and the unsuccessful operation of badly sited facilities elsewhere), OnSide strongly recommends three major criteria in terms of location.

1. Neutrality

A significant feature of the success of the OnSide Youth Zones is their location in town or city centres. This is considered 'neutral ground' by the large numbers of young people using the facilities. Locating a Youth Zone outside the town or city centre risks it being viewed as 'on someone else's patch', making it potentially popular with young people in the locality but completely inaccessible to others. By contrast a central location does not bring any of the territorial issues that can hinder positive engagement in less central locations. This is a crucial feature and can make the difference between a project's success and failure. It is, of course, necessary to refine the definition of "central" when considering appropriate sites in major cities and London Boroughs but it remains essential to find neutrality in a suitable location.

2. Accessibility

Youth Zones are for all children and young people of a town, city, borough or major district. There is however a focus on engaging disadvantaged young people and it is vital that young people should be able to get there easily by foot and public transport. For example, the Youth Zones in Wigan, Blackburn and Oldham are only a couple of hundred metres from the central bus stations and the majority of participants walk or take the bus. Accessibility also covers issues of safety, in terms of both road safety and conflicting or inappropriate uses on the route or in the vicinity of the proposed Youth Zone site. Accessibility is another important feature and sites need to be considered with a focus on safe pedestrian access and proximity to central public transport stations and/or multiple destination stops.

3. Prominence

The ambition is to build a world-class facility for children and young people. The prominence of the site not only affects participation; by everyone knowing where it is but also makes an important statement to young people that they are valuable members of the community.



Site 1 - Canada Villa (Area 2,550m²)

Canada Villa Youth & Community Centre is a council-run facility, situated in the Mill Hill area of Barnet. It is one of two existing youth hubs in the borough, the other being Finchley Youth Theatre.

The site is located just off Devonshire Road / Pursley Road and is adjacent to Dollis Junior & Infant schools. Despite a recent extension to the building, and a car park to the front of the building which has spaces for around 20 cars, the site is not of sufficient size to accommodate a Youth Zone. There is some green space to the south-west that may allow for expansion, but it is unclear if this is council-owned, or a part of Hendon Golf Club.

In terms of accessibility, the site ranks as '2' on the TfL PTAL (Public Transport Accessibility Level) index. This is a low score, and although there are nearby bus stops, this is probably reflective of the fact that the bus stops serve routes with limited destinations and the nearest tube stop (Mill Hill) is a 30 minute walk away.

In summary, whilst the site's proximity to a reasonably busy road gives it a degree of prominence, we feel that the site isn't large enough to accommodate a Youth Zone and wouldn't be sufficiently accessible, in particular for young people who would be travelling from the more disadvantaged areas of Barnet.

Site 2 - Finchley Youth Theatre (Area 486m²)

Alongside Canada Villa, Finchley Youth Theatre is Barnet Council's other remaining youth hub. It is located on Finchley High Road, on the border between Finchley and Fortis Green areas.

The site is a prominent one, right on the busy High Road, however it is clearly not large enough to accommodate an OnSide Youth Zone.

Although better in terms of accessibility than Canada Villa (it scores 3 on the PTAL index), the site is in the far north of Barnet as a whole and so will be perceived to be even more remote for young people from areas such as Grahame Park than the Canada Villa site.

Due to its location and size, Finchley Youth Theatre is not a viable site for an OnSide Youth Zone.

Site 3 - Grahame Park (Area 5,000+m²)

When getting to know the local area in Barnet better, Grahame Park was regularly cited as an area that was home to young people who are perhaps most in need of the facilities and opportunities offered by a Youth Zone. Although no specific site was ever discussed, the following considerations were taken into account when considering whether or not there was scope for the development of a Youth Zone in Grahame Park itself.



In terms of size, the extent of the community suggests that there would be enough scope for identifying a plot of sufficient size to accommodate a Youth Zone, although large parts of the area have been earmarked for redevelopment over the coming years.

In terms of accessibility, the vast majority of Grahame Park scores either a 1 or a 2 on TfL's PTAL index, with a small section near the precinct scoring 3 due to the link to local bus routes. Other than that, train links are a 25-30 minute walk away.

There are just under 2,000 homes in Grahame Park, and so it is home to a good number of young people, however it is almost certain that the development of a Youth Zone in Grahame Park would be interpreted (and used) as one that is only for young people from that area, not from neighbouring Burnt Oak, Colindale or indeed further afield areas of Barnet. This lack of neutrality would be very damaging to the effectiveness and sustainability of a Youth Zone in that location.

Our conclusion therefore is that Grahame Park itself is not a suitable location for a Youth Zone, however it is home to many young people who would benefit from being able to access such a facility.

Site 4 - Montrose Playing Fields (Area 5,000+m²)

Montrose Park / playing fields is one of 4 parks in the Burnt Oak / Colindale area that are soon to be remodelled as part of the Council's current landscape masterplanning exercise. The potential for locating a Youth Zone as part of the redevelopment and regeneration of the playing fields was suggested by officers from Barnet Council.

The park itself is a very large, open-plan site and is very comfortably large enough to accommodate a Youth Zone without such development making a material reduction in the amenity of the open space. The issue when looking at the park was to understand which part of it would best meet the OnSide criteria with particular focus on which would be the most accessible in terms of links to public transport, the ability to provide for vehicular drop-off and general safe pedestrian access.

In terms of accessibility, the corner of the park that we have identified, just off Montrose Avenue scores 3 on the TfL PTAL index, and indeed it would be higher if there were frequent bus routes along Montrose Avenue. The nearest bus stops however aren't far; just a maximum 10 minute walk on either Edgware Road or Lanacre Avenue (close to Grahame Park). Crucially, Burnt Oak tube station is only a 6 minute walk from the site, and Colindale tube station is 10 minutes away, accessed through the park.

Park settings tend to be seen as neutral territory by young people and this corner of the park is equidistant between Burnt Oak and Colindale and is within walking distance of the heart of the Grahame Park Estate.

In terms of prominence, a location closer to the Edgware Road would perhaps have been preferable, however we are confident that an innovative design and the fact that it will be overlooked by Northern Line underground trains passing between Burnt Oak and Colindale tube stations will give this location a more than adequate visual prominence.



The classification of the park as public open space provides a challenge for development but we are optimistic that both the Borough's planning officers and those at the GLA will appreciate the community benefits of a Youth Zone in that location and see it as involving special circumstances for consideration as appropriate development. There is also an ideal opportunity for a Youth Zone in this location to make some very positive contributions to the Council's aspirations in terms of the wider masterplanning of its parks including:

- Attracting more visitors to the park;
- Encouraging a cross-flow of users between the Youth Zone and the open spaces;
- Providing shared changing facilities; and
- Contributing to the planned improvement of the link with the Silk-Stream park.

The image below demonstrates that it would be possible to develop a Youth Zone in the preferred location relatively tight up against the rail embankment so that it takes up only about 2% of the overall area of Montrose Playing Fields.



By siting the building in this location it will be possible to minimise the land take, reduce intrusion into the open space and have minimal impact on views into and from the park. All this, coupled with a sympathetic design and use of materials that are appropriate for the 'green setting, would contribute to a powerful case for development.

Site 5 - Woodcroft Park (Area 5,000+m²)

Woodcroft Park is situated north of Grahame Park, just to the west of the M1 and to the south of Mill Hill Broadway rail station.



The park itself is comfortably big enough to accommodate a Youth Zone. The newly-built Orion Primary School sits alongside it, and a site towards the Grahame Park Way side of the park would offer simple vehicular access to the Youth Zone.

As with Montrose Park, the site also scores 3 on TfL's PTAL index, largely due to the proximity of Mill Hill Broadway station. It isn't however within comfortable walking distance of a London Underground station, with Burnt Oak being the closest at around 25 minutes walk away.

We believe that the site would be considered as on neutral territory, and it is only slightly further away (in terms of walking distance) from Grahame Park than the Montrose Park site, however we feel that it then becomes too remote for other young people from Burnt Oak / Colindale, and so worry that there would be barriers to access due to distance.

We would not rule out further exploration of the development of an OnSide Youth Zone on this site, however we currently are not considering it as we believe the Montrose Playing Fields site to be a much stronger option.

Scoring matrix

OnSide has scored each site against its key criteria in the below matrix which also includes a score to take into account the size of plot available for development. Scores range from 0 to 5.

| Site | Accessibility | Neutrality | Prominence | Size | Total |
|--------------------------------|---------------|------------|------------|----------|-----------|
| Canada Villa | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 10 |
| Finchley Youth Theatre | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 9 |
| Grahame Park | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 9 |
| Montrose Playing Fields | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 16 |
| Woodcroft Park | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 13 |