



Environment and Climate Change Committee

9th June 2022

Title	Developing a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy
Report of	Chair – Environment and Climate Change Committee
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	No
Enclosures	None
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Summary

This report seeks the approval of the Environment and Climate Change Committee to develop a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy in line with the new administration's commitments.

The report highlights a range of items which have been progressed under the Council's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2016-2026) and the need to protect, maintain and improve our green infrastructure to ensure that it meets the current and future needs of residents, whilst also delivering on the Council's wider aspirations in relation to biodiversity and climate change.

Officers Recommendations

1. That the Committee notes items progressed under the current Parks & Open Spaces Strategy (2016-2026).

2. The Committee delegates authority to the Executive Director (Adults & Health) to commence the development of a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy with a future progress update to be reported to the Environment and Climate Change Committee.

3. The Committee confirm the suspension of the Quality/Value assessment designations within the existing Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, until such time as the evidence base has been updated and a new Policy is in place.

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 The Council's Parks and Open Space Strategy (2016-2026) (POSS) was adopted by Environment Committee in 2016. The ten-year strategy was formed to support a vision for parks and open spaces linked to the delivery of social, community, health, economic and environmental outcomes.
- 1.2 The future delivery of the new administration's priorities, along with a range of other factors since the adoption of the POSS signal the requirement to create a new policy for Barnet which provides an updated evidence base and reflects changes brought about by policy development, the coronavirus pandemic, completion of investment schemes and new legislative changes.
- 1.3 This report provides a summary overview of each of these areas and asks for Committee to endorse the creation and development of a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.
- 1.4 Key Information:
- 28% of the Borough is green and open space.
 - There are circa 200 parks and open spaces.
 - This includes formal and informal green spaces, allotments, cemeteries, 9 Nature Reserve.
 - A total open space area of over 850 hectares, owned and managed by the Council.
 - There are 9 designated Local Nature Reserves (LNR) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located at West Hendon Playing Fields / Welsh Harp, Brent Reservoir.
 - There are 65 formal children's play areas and 15 outdoor gyms located within parks.
 - Over £1.25m invested in completing upgraded play areas from 2016 to date

Policy Development

- 1.5 The existing Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (POSS) was developed in 2015/16, since its inception there are national, regional and local policies which have since expired and/or been updated. At a local level this includes but is not limited to;
- Local Plan (draft)
 - Long Term Transport Strategy (2020-2041)
 - Growth Strategy (2020-2030)
 - Infrastructure Delivery Plan
 - Fit & Active Barnet Framework (2022-2026)
 - Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2021-2025)
 - Sustainability Framework (draft)

- Community Participation Strategy (draft)
- Playing Pitch Strategy (2017, draft update 2022)

The Council plays an important role in protecting open spaces, playing fields and outdoor sports facilities within our ownership and this is reflected in robust planning policies to protect or mitigate against the loss of open spaces and to ensure there is sufficient open space / playing field provision. Where open spaces are not owned by the Council, protection and/or enhancement is referred to within the Local Plan which outlines policy requirements and mitigations. This supports the new Administration's commitment to ensure protection of the Greenbelt and Metropolitan Open Space.

Playing Pitch Strategy

- 1.6 Barnet has a detailed Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS, 2017) which includes a supply and demand assessment of playing pitch facilities in accordance with Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance. The PPS and assessment report provide a clear picture of the balance between the local supply of and demand for, playing pitches and other outdoor sports facilities. This information is used to inform planning decisions which relate to the protection, provision and enhancement of outdoor pitches in Barnet. It is a key policy document which supplements the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.
- 1.7 As part of completing the PPS assessment, stakeholder engagement is undertaken with local sports Clubs, sports partners, National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) and Sport England which provides a formal review and consent to the final draft Strategy. In 2021, the Council commissioned a review of the PPS with a final draft due for completion by July 2022. The updated analysis will take into consideration completed development, investment and planning applications received by the Local Planning Authority. The PPS 2022 version will replace the previous Strategy (2017) and will be used as an updated evidence base to inform future decisions for outdoor sport and recreation.

Parks and Open Spaces

- 1.8 A considerable amount of research has been undertaken over the past decade into the value of parks and open spaces and the contribution that they make to the success of cities, suburbs, urban environments and the quality of life for communities. In developing the POSS Strategy consultation was carried out with local residents and key stakeholders to find out how they use Barnet's parks and open spaces and what their priorities are.

In addition to consultation, an assessment was undertaken across all parks and open spaces which reviewed the existing quality of provision across the Borough. The analysis considered a range of components which were modelled on the Green Flag Standard (2004) and also took into account key areas of regeneration and expected future increases in population.

The analysis presented an adequate range of accessible parks but uneven picture of quality and condition. The administration has pledged to remove the existing designations. Until such time that a new Strategy has been produced, Committee are requested to confirm the suspension the Quality/Value assessment designations within

the existing Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, until such time as the evidence base has been updated and a new Policy is in place.

- 1.9 There are no statutory standards for the quality, quantity and accessibility of open space provision. The principal provider of parks quality assessment in the UK is the Green Flag Award. This approach is relevant to the major parks and open spaces, which provide 'above standard' facilities and is not appropriate for assessing every open space type as each individual location varies in scale, type and facilities. The assessment of parks includes consideration of the economic, environmental and social influences in order to represent the significant contribution that good quality parks can make to the development of sustainable communities and community cohesion. Any future analysis will also seek to make sure everyone has access to green space, working towards zero neighbourhoods deprived of green spaces.
- 1.10 The Council will explore options working alongside the Barnet Greenspaces Network to review the UK Green Flag Accreditation for Barnet in support of delivering new commitments.

Capital Investment

- 1.11 The Council will invest in parks and open spaces in addition to the delivery of a range of investment projects over the last six years. These include simple refurbishments of play areas, creating woodlands and tiny forests, improving access and transforming spaces.
- 1.12 The POSS and PPS identified the need to develop three 'sports hub' sites within the borough, which would provide a geographical spread of enhanced sports facilities.. Working with a range of stakeholders, community groups and through extensive public consultation, the service has progressed in the design, development and implementation of these proposals, in addition to other strategic investment masterplan proposals as described below.

Service Masterplans

- Childs Hill Park – complete (2021/22)
- Victoria Park – commenced with some elements complete (2020/21)

Sports Hub Masterplans

- Copthall and Mill Hill Open Spaces Masterplan - Masterplan approved (2019/20)
- West Hendon Playing Fields Masterplan – Outline Business Case approved (2021/22)
- Barnet Playing Fields / King George V Masterplan – Masterplan approved (2019/20)

Regeneration Masterplans

- Montrose Playing Fields & Silkstream Valley Park – complete (2020/21)
- Colindale Park Masterplan – complete (2021/22)
- Rushgrove Park Masterplan – awaiting Planning decision (June 2022)
- Heybourne Park Masterplan – design development (2022/23)
- Clitterhouse Playing Fields (Brent Cross South) – planning submission due (2022/23)
- Claremont Park (Brent Cross South) – complete (2022/23)

- 1.13 In addition to the plans above, officers have also delivered on a series of parks improvements funded via Section 106 and Area Committee funded projects. The total combined value of this investment is £3.1M. The service has also been successful in securing external funding from The London Marathon Trust, Sport England at a total value of £110,000. The Council also remains in dialogue with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and the Football Foundation in relation to the submission of future funding applications to deliver court and pitch improvements.
- 1.14 The service proposals to deliver a future parks investment programme, to support further improvements including improved play equipment, sports court refurbishments and parks infrastructure will be funded via Strategic CIL at a total value of £3.75m and officers will work in partnership with local 'Friends Of' groups and the community to develop and deliver proposals.

Covid 19 Pandemic

- 1.15 Demand for public parks massively increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and has refocused attention on the role they play in society to support both our mental health and physical wellbeing.
- 1.16 Throughout the pandemic many residents reconnected and discovered greenspaces. Barnet parks offered opportunities for much needed respite, exercise, fresh air and to meet people safely. However, the pandemic had an impact on the service, such as;
- The loss of external sources of income (such as sports bookings, events, asset lettings).
 - Operational pressures – litter and environmental crime.
 - Community – increased attendances, leading to a greater demand on services.
 - Maintenance – contractor delays have been incurred as a result of market conditions.
- 1.17 Whilst the service responded to challenges arising from the pandemic, it has also presented an opportunity to trial new approaches with regard to sports bookings, community events, agile working and operational resilience.

Working with the community

- 1.18 Ensuring the Boroughs green spaces are managed and maintained cost effectively and using sustainable practices, is also vital. The Barnet Greenspaces Network is as an independent group comprising of approximately 40 'Friends Of' groups with the aim of protecting, promoting and improving public green space across the Borough. The Forum meets quarterly for member networking, site visits and to share best practice and works with the Council to understand operational matters and areas for joint working such as reducing litter in parks.
- 1.19 During the pandemic the Council worked closely with dedicated volunteers in 'Friends of Groups' across the Borough and with the local community to co-ordinate litter clearance efforts across several parks and open spaces. Officers will work more closely in partnership with 'Friends Of' groups and explore new ways in which the community can support the future management of greenspaces.

- 1.20 The service will continue to work in partnership with the Barnet Greenspaces Network to explore and develop the proposals identified in their manifesto (Barnet Greenspaces Network Manifesto 2022), reporting progress to Committee as part of an annual update.

Welsh Harp

- 1.21 The Council are working with the Canals and Rivers Trust (CRT) and the London Borough of Brent to create a 'Joint Vision' for the future of the Welsh Harp Reservoir. Funded by the London Borough of Barnet and the GLA, the Joint Vision will reflect local views on how the Welsh Harp can be improved, what local people would like to see the Welsh Harp become and possible sources of funding to make the changes. Initial consultation was undertaken by CRT independent consultants in late 2021, with full public consultation planned for summer 2022. A final draft Joint Vision and Action Plan is due for completion by September 2022.
- 1.22 Officers will continue to work in partnership with stakeholders to deliver the Labour Administration's priorities towards protection and enhancement of the Welsh Harp. This will be co-ordinated through the Welsh Harp Joint Consultative Committee and any other associated forums as required.

Park ranger service

- 1.23 In response to the increased attendances and operational pressures throughout the pandemic, the Council appointed ParkGuard to deliver a pilot parks patrol service. The pilot focused on key objectives to engage with residents, inform of any relative information (such as booking processes) and support enforcement operations. Parkguard worked closely with a range of Council services (Greenspaces, Streetscene and Community Safety) to gather intelligence which could be used to inform deployment, understand parks usage/issues and support community enforcement operations.
- 1.24 The service will commence an options appraisal to deliver the Administration's commitment to introduce a dedicated park ranger service for the Borough. In the meantime, the service is engaged with Parkguard to support enhanced operations for Summer 2022.

Biodiversity & the Natural Environment

- 1.25 The Administration declared a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency on 24 May 2022. Open spaces form part of a vital biodiversity network, providing habitat for wildlife and bringing the countryside into the heart of the city. Since the adoption of the POSS in 2016, the loss of biodiversity and climate change have become increasingly important issue.
- 1.26 The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan sets out the aspiration to mainstream biodiversity net gain in the planning system and move towards approaches that integrate natural capital benefits. The Government announced it would mandate net gains for biodiversity in the Environment Bill (2019). This outlines a commitment to apply a requirement for Biodiversity net gain of 10% for developers through the planning system. This gain will be measured using a biodiversity metric that has been developed by DEFRA.

- 1.27 These significant changes expand the duty on local authorities from conserving biodiversity to 'conserving and enhancing' biodiversity, and also legislates for the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies to cover the whole of England. Mandatory biodiversity net gain as set out in the Environment Act applies in England only by amending the Town & Country Planning Act (TCPA) and is likely to become law in 2023.
- 1.28 The development of a biodiversity strategy for Barnet, which includes the recruitment of a Biodiversity and Conservation Officer is a priority of the new Administration.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 This report sets out a proposed approach to delivering the Administration's priorities in respect of parks and open spaces, through the creation of a new Strategy. This review will consider future statutory duties relating to Open Spaces relating to biodiversity, climate change, conservation, ecology and the environment.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 That the current Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (2016-2026) remains in situ until its expiry. This would not support the delivery of the new Administration's priorities or new statutory obligations.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Subject to agreement, the Greenspaces and Leisure Service will commence a programme of work to develop a new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy

4.2 This will include but is not limited to:

- Progress to date
- Determining the scope of a future strategy
- Policy Development (including review of vision and objectives)
- The requirements of the Environment Act and other legislative and policy context (National, Regional and Local)
- Supply and distribution of Open Space (including quality /condition)
- Use of open space (amenity, social, cultural and community)
- Management and Governance of Open Space
- Natural Capital Value
- Consultation and Engagement
- Opportunities and Challenges
- Enhancing quality and provision (investment)

4.3 In conjunction with this review, the Greenspaces and Leisure service will progress development of initiatives to support the Administration's priorities, for consideration at future Committees, including;

- Development of a Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Barnet.
- Support the development of a Vision and Action Plan for the Welsh Harp.
- Enhancement of greenspace
- Development of a Park Ranger Service.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

5.2

The development of a new Parks and Open Spaces strategy is a key corporate priority for the council.

5.3 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

5.3.1 The programme of activities listed within Section 4 of this report will be delivered within existing resources, some key tasks may require specialist commissions to support analysis work and policy development.

5.3.2 Any requirement for additional future investment will be considered in the development of detailed proposals assessed through the council's budget setting process

5.4 Legal and Constitutional References

- 5.4.1 Local authorities have several different statutory powers in relation to parks and open spaces, including the Public Health Act 1875 (as amended by the Local Government Act 1972) which gave local authorities discretionary power to purchase and maintain public walks or pleasure grounds and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, which gives wide powers to provide recreational facilities.
- 5.4.2 The Open Spaces Act 1906 provides that local authorities may acquire and hold and administer open space in trust to allow the enjoyment of it by the public and shall maintain and keep the open space in a good and decent state.
- 5.4.3 The Environment Bill received Royal Assent on 9 November 2021, meaning it is now an Act of Parliament. Mandatory biodiversity net gain as set out in the Environment Act applies in England only by amending the Town & Country Planning Act (TCPA) and is likely to become law in 2023.
- 5.4.4 Environment and Climate Change Committee are responsible is responsible for all borough-wide or cross-constituency matters relating to the street scene including, parking, road safety, lighting, street cleaning, transport, waste, waterways, refuse, recycling, allotments, parks, trees, crematoria and mortuary, trading standards and environmental health.

5.5 **Insight**

- 5.5.1 None in the context of this report.

5.6 **Social Value**

- 5.6.1 Barnet was the first London Borough to produce a borough-wide Corporate Natural Capital Account (CNCA) for 200 of its parks and open spaces. The CNCA provides Barnet's council with an evidence base to quantify the economic, social and environmental benefits accruing from its green infrastructure assets.
- 5.6.2 The total value of benefits from our parks over the next 25 years is estimated at £1 billion.

5.7 **Risk Management**

- 5.8 All risks are managed using the risk management procedure, as set out in the Corporate Risk Management Framework. High level risks are reported as part of the Council's quarterly performance regime.

5.9 **Equalities and Diversity**

- 5.9.1 The Equality Act 2010 outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equalities Duty which requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:
 - a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- c. Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

5.7.2 Relevant protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

5.9.2 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day-to-day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design policies and the delivery of services.

5.10 **Corporate Parenting**

5.8.1 Not applicable in the context of this report.

5.11 **Consultation and Engagement**

5.11.1A consultation and engagement plan will be devised to support the Parks and Open Spaces Policy Refresh. This will form part any revised analysis and will be included in a future report to be presented to Committee.

5.12 **Environmental Impact**

To be assessed as part of policy refresh.

6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7. <https://open.barnet.gov.uk/dataset/2zm6e/open-spaces-strategy>

8. <https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s40941/Appendix%20%20Natural%20Capital%20Account%20for%20Barnet.pdf>