

“Strategically addressing the impact of climate change inevitably means resourcing our parks, green and blue spaces in their critical role to protect people and nature.”

**Judy Ling Wong CBE**

# GOOD PARKS FOR LONDON 2021

Parks and Climate Change



**Parks for  
London**

Sponsored by



**GL Hearn**  
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# Foreword

We are living in extraordinary times, with not just one, but three big critical challenges—the climate emergency, living with a pandemic, and Black Lives Matter. Embracing equality, diversity, and inclusion is vital if we are to create a collaborative framework to find solutions for the problems of an interdependent world. Parks, green and blue spaces by their very nature provide opportunities to address these challenges, and this edition of Good Parks for London focuses on climate change.

London rightly takes immense pride as one of the most positively multicultural cities in the world. Its parks, gardens, and other green and blue spaces add up to 49.5% against the scenario of global urbanisation, and we have the largest urban forest in the world.

Green and blue infrastructure make a phenomenal contribution to making cities more liveable. The shade and cooling provided by canopy cover is critical to mitigating the urban heat island effect; air quality is improved with the removal of particulates by plants; and research continues to expand on the significant links between the natural environment, the built environment and health and wellbeing.

These spaces help to counter the impact of localised flooding, caused by climate change. There are fine examples of actions to extend the web of sustainable urban drainage systems, and Parks Services across London boroughs have looked hard at how certain areas within their grounds may allow temporary flooding and temporary stormwater storage by design. There are new opportunities to expand climate related actions through restoration: Headstone Manor Park in Harrow uncovered a section of river to alleviate flooding risks; Beckenham Place Park in Lewisham converted its public golf course back into parkland and restored a former lake into a water catchment; and there are plans to reforest large areas.

Practical interventions to combat the impact of climate change combine with planning to serendipitously create new pleasurable activities for people. Such substantial actions demonstrate the strength of partnerships between the local authorities, the Environment Agency, the Greater London Authority, friends' groups, and other stakeholders.

Alongside the contribution to ameliorate climate change impacts, the value of parks, green and blue spaces are being pushed up the agenda, as providers of a range of fundamental people-centred services. The psychological benefits of green spaces are evident and given prominence during the lockdowns. Parks are havens, giving much needed solace to Londoners.

Parks are for people, and the provision of recreational joy is a big theme. It ranges from the beauty and excitement of seasonal bedding based on horticultural excellence, the experience of the perfection of form of specimen trees in a way that is never seen in wild settings, to purposefully managed areas to enable contact with wildness. It is where generations of local people have walked, played, and picnicked under the shade of huge trees that are like old family friends. A multicultural presence is normalised as people relax and encounter each other within a local setting of communal belonging. These aspects underpin the solace that people experience, countering the negative consequences of uncertain times.

Realising the potential social impact of an expanded range of activities on mental and physical health, various parks have purposefully re-positioned themselves as multifunctional green spaces. Many are allocating areas for physical activity, putting in trails for running and walking, plus equipment for exercise. Some parks have worked towards the availability of high quality and diverse ranges of dining opportunities to enhance people's propensity to linger longer in a beautiful place, sometimes formulating these as social enterprises to raise money to sustain their activities in collaboration with local volunteers. All parks are teaching parks, where understanding and inspiration that is part and parcel of park life

enable park-centred communities, nine million strong, to be a force for climate action. The invaluable role of informal education is set within the programmes of activities, often using the stimulation of the arts to deepen communication and build motivation to act. There are bio-blitzes, bird-box building, pond dipping, beekeeping, and partnerships with specialist environmental organisations to enable young and old to learn about the threats posed by climate change to our biodiversity, building an expanding army of eco-warriors. All of us, overwhelmed by the scale of change, have much to gain and to give. Parks are democratic places with the power to support people through hard times, change lives, build communal cohesion and switch on actions that matter. Every action counts.

There is now momentum for us to push for consistent and enhanced funding to enable parks to fulfil their potential roles in a time of great change and profound societal need.

Parks are doing a wonderful job. However, through working more closely together at diverse levels and given the right consistent resources, they can achieve even more. I cannot wait.

## Judy Ling Wong CBE

Honorary President  
Black Environment Network  
[judy@ben-network.org.uk](mailto:judy@ben-network.org.uk)



# Introduction

Good Parks for London is an annual report, now in its fifth year, compiled by Parks for London and sponsored by GL Hearn. It assesses participating London boroughs' parks services from April 2020 to March 2021 against the ten Good Parks criteria to enable comparison between them.

It also gives recognition for the great work that is happening across London and the improvements made, it helps improve performance and makes practices more visible and open to scrutiny.

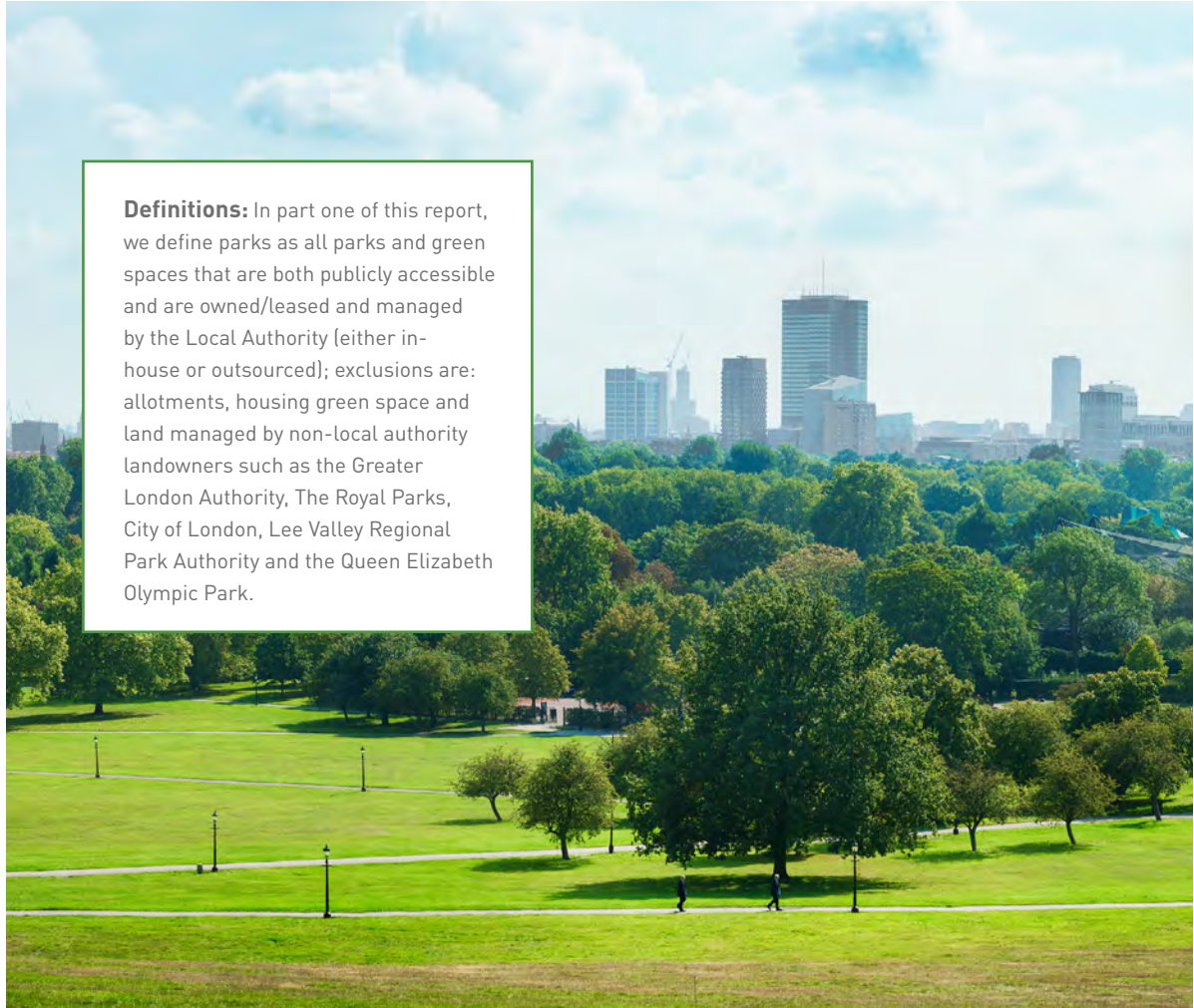
**Part one** of the report shows how the 30 participating boroughs compare against ten Good Parks criteria, detailed on page 10. The results are presented through maps and a summary benchmarking table, which reveals the top performing boroughs and those that can improve, along with short articles from boroughs that are performing well under each criterion.

**Part two** of the report features examples of good practice and case studies from land managers and organisations with an interest in managing London's parks.

**Part three** of the report focuses on the exemplary work done in London's parks to prepare for and mitigate climate change.

## Acknowledgements

Parks for London would like to thank GL Hearn for their continued support in sponsoring the production of the report and the Cross River Partnership for hosting the report launch. We would also like to thank all the London boroughs and land managers that have participated in this year's report and provided case studies, as well as the organisations that helped by providing additional data for part one.



**Definitions:** In part one of this report, we define parks as all parks and green spaces that are both publicly accessible and are owned/leased and managed by the Local Authority (either in-house or outsourced); exclusions are: allotments, housing green space and land managed by non-local authority landowners such as the Greater London Authority, The Royal Parks, City of London, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.





# From the Chief Executive

Have you noticed how London's green spaces have been recovering from greater wear and tear caused by increased use during the pandemic? The resilience of nature is awe inspiring and the application of skilled landscape management practices has supported this recovery. However, the longer-term impact of climate change on our world is of a different magnitude and at times can feel overwhelming. Poor air quality and the extremes of flooding and drought are now seen and felt in our neighbourhoods, yet our parks and other green infrastructure can help provide solutions to these big challenges.

So, it comes as no surprise that we have dedicated this year's edition of Good Parks for London to parks and climate change.

Of particular relevance to climate change among the Good Parks criteria are collaboration, nature, and sustainability, and this year the report has incorporated more case studies to encourage and inspire council services to invest in green infrastructure. It's great to see that 85% of boroughs have improved their overall scores compared to last year. We congratulate all boroughs that have improved their services, especially under such difficult circumstances, in particular Barking & Dagenham, Hackney, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow and Redbridge.

As a charity serving those that own and manage publicly accessible green space, Parks for London will capture knowledge and good practice and share this through our digital [resources hub](#) as well the [Good Parks for London reports](#). Thanks to the support of the Greater London Authority, we are increasing our capacity to provide greater support to London boroughs and other land managers as a [Centre for Excellence](#).

As well as thanking all those that work hard to keep our green spaces in good health, we thank the outgoing cohort of Portfolio Holders who have defended park revenue budgets during their current term of office. Next May, Londoners will vote at their local council elections and we will work to support the new cohort of Councillors to maximise the multiple benefits of green spaces not only in mitigating climate change but supporting the health and wellbeing of Londoners.

Just as nature has the amazing ability to adapt to change, we need to ensure that London's green infrastructure is supported and managed by an adaptable, skilled, dynamic, and diverse workforce to meet the challenges posed by climate change and to seek ways to encourage park users to adopt behaviours which support green space habitats. All our actions make a difference no matter how small.

**Tony Leach**  
Chief Executive  
Parks for London



# Thoughts from our sponsor

GL Hearn is pleased to continue sponsorship of the Good Parks for London report for a fifth consecutive year. Having joined the business at the start of the year, I am delighted to be writing this introduction. The report, our support of Parks for London, and the great work of all those involved is an important thread which runs through the heart of the work that we do at GL Hearn, and through our communities; acting as a lynchpin for other charities to thrive off.

The work we do across our National Planning team at GL Hearn in supporting our clients to realise positive planning outcomes, is essential for their local communities and creating places people want to be a part of. From planning new spaces to focusing on the future of existing ones, we support clients to deliver better spaces and to protect habitats through their approach to planning and sustainable development.

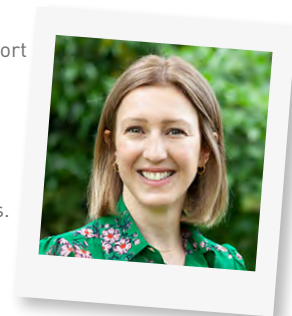
Off the back of a global pandemic (and more lockdowns than I care to recall) the chance to celebrate the great parks and green and blue spaces which bring London to life is a thrill for me. Many of us were so reliant on our local park during COVID-19, it is phenomenal the positive affect that outdoor space has on our physical and mental wellbeing. This year's theme of climate

change could not be more relevant. The call to action for us all is to take personal responsibility for the day to day changes we can make to help protect our environments locally.

Reading the report, I have been truly inspired by the great work going on across London, which creates a world-class park offering for residents, workers, and visitors alike. The success of the parks is built on the passion, commitment, and hours of those who give up their free time, be it on planting, managing conservation projects, and community events. When I am out and about as a park goer, taking some time away from my desk or enjoying the playground with my kids, it is often easy to overlook the amazing work that goes on behind the scenes to protect the habitats across our city, and activities designed to encourage people to access and enjoy parks and green spaces.

I hope you enjoy reading the report and are equally inspired by its contents. Huge congratulations to all involved in creating, maintaining and protecting our brilliant parks and green spaces.

**Joanne Dennis-Jones**  
National Head of Planning  
GL Hearn



# Part one

## Notes for scoring the criteria

**1. PUBLIC SATISFACTION** levels with parks (satisfied or above) are taken from borough-wide resident's public satisfaction surveys or similar independent surveys, less than two years old, in addition to having an action plan in place to address issues raised by the survey results.

**2. AWARDS FOR QUALITY** is assessed by the results of two independently run award schemes: Green Flag (GF) and London in Bloom (LiB). The score is made up of the proportion of parks that have gained GF Awards combined with LiB awards for large park, small park, common, walled garden of the year, heritage parks & gardens, cemetery, and churchyard.

**3. COLLABORATION** is assessed by evidence of cross boundary/borough land management; delivery of parks services through internal collaborations; partnerships with other boroughs, the voluntary sector, and other bodies; working with river catchment partnerships/ improvement area group or working on Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS); and support for the London Tree Offers Association, London Parks Benchmarking Group and Parks for London.

**4. EVENTS** is assessed by boroughs having an events policy in place; provision of a range and number of community and commercial events in parks; whether income generated is ring-fenced for the parks service; and if a minimum proportion of waste must be recycled by event organisers.

**5. HEALTH, FITNESS AND WELLBEING** is assessed by the number of parks used for social prescribing; percentage of parks with outdoor gyms and those with programmed activities; having in place campaigns, outreach or concessions to promote greater participation; using the Health Parks Toolkit; implementing health funding for parks; supporting community food growing areas in parks; provision of free drinking water (fountains, cafés and public buildings); and initiatives to improve and enhance access and inclusion.

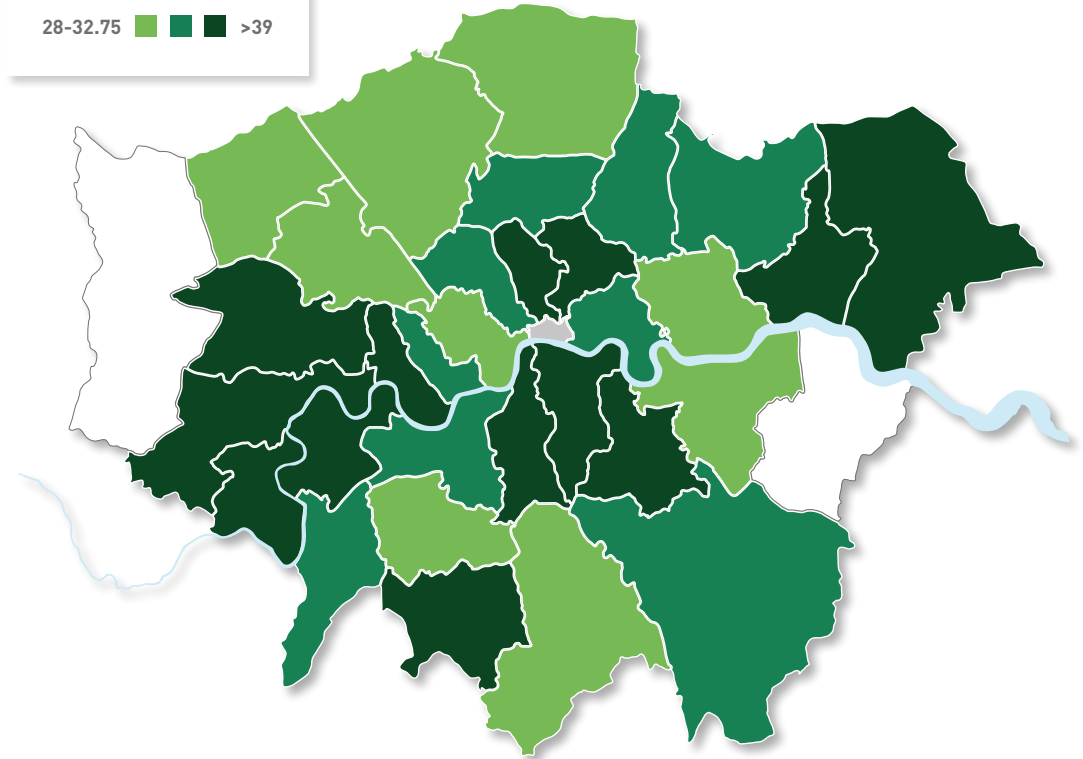
**6. SUPPORTING NATURE** is assessed by having a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) or similar in place, the percentage of parks that have management plans which include BAP objectives; the percentage of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in positive conservation management; LiB awards for conservation; supporting the Greenspace Information for Greater London (or similar); delivering biodiversity outreach; and actions to make parks more climate resilient.

**7. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT** is assessed by gaining Community Green Flag Awards; number of park friends' groups/resident groups as a percentage of parks; having a borough-wide friends' forum; actively supporting friends' groups; use of the Health Parks Toolkit by friends' groups; levels of volunteer hours; and supporting GoParksLondon.

**8. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT** is assessed by the number of park apprentices and trainees as a percentage of total workforce; approaches to improving equality, diversity, and inclusion in the workforce; provision of staff development and training at all levels; and delivering learning opportunities in parks.

### Overall scores

28-32.75 ■ ■ ■ >39



**9. SUSTAINABILITY** is assessed by green fleet as a percentage of total fleet and using accredited fuel-efficient route planning; battery-operated equipment as a percentage of total hand-held equipment; recycling paper/plastic & green waste; having an integrated weed management policy and plans in place; actions to reduce carbon footprint; and actions to reduce water consumption.

**10. STRATEGIC PLANNING** is assessed by the borough having an up-to-date open space or green infrastructure strategy and action plan in place; having a costed asset management plan and system in place; undertaken a scrutiny review of parks services in the last ten years; Fields in Trust Deed of Covenants to protect green spaces; and an action plan to deal with Heritage at Risk (landscapes or structures).

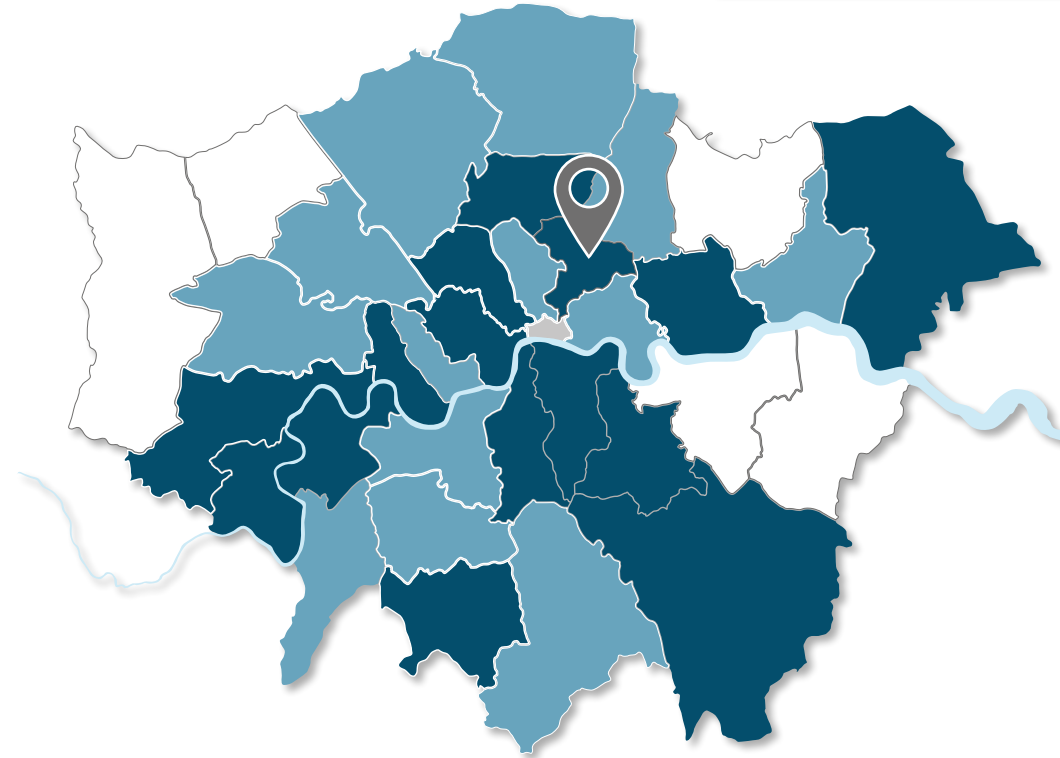
The criteria are assessed/reviewed annually by participating boroughs. Data used to produce maps and calculate overall scores has been collected from boroughs and partner organisations.



# 1. Public satisfaction with parks

## Public satisfaction

No data      Top score



**Hackney** has one of the largest expanses of parks and green space in inner-London with 58 sites totalling 282 hectares, ranging from major sites such as Hackney Marshes, Clissold Park and Abney Park to small gardens such as Hoxton Square and Church Street Gardens, and a recent consultation showed how much these spaces are appreciated by their residents.

The Council has long recognised the impact of quality parks and green spaces on the achievement of its vision and objectives and has made improving them a priority with over £25 million of investment since 2010.

In 2019, it was agreed that a new strategy was needed to guide the work of the parks and green spaces service over the next ten years. To inform the new parks and green spaces strategy, Hackney engaged with a wide range of residents, staff, stakeholders, and local communities to hear their views. They collected feedback from 967 people via an online or phone survey, focus groups, polls, and other online methods; 96% of which stated that they like or love Hackney parks and green spaces. One online survey participant said, "green spaces have always been important,

but especially after the pandemic; they have provided not only a physical, but also mental refuge for many local residents."

Hackney's locals have helped to shape the main themes of the new parks and green spaces strategy

and the 30 commitments within it, which include working to make the spaces more welcoming and environmentally sustainable over the next ten years. You can read the full strategy at: <https://hackney.gov.uk/parks-strategy>.

*"Parks are great also because they bring diverse cultural and age groups together, and people whose lives would otherwise never cross can mix and mingle"*

Participant of the migrant refugee, and asylum-seeking women focus group.



Engagement session, Shoreditch Park







Currently, the Parks & Leisure team are part-way through a significant capital programme (in the region of £20 million to £30 million) which includes repairing historic bridges; installing more Changing Places facilities; improvements to play, sports and landscape facilities funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy; more outdoor gyms and play areas; refurbishing the paddling pool offer; reviewing and upgrading the parks property portfolio, plus working with the Regeneration team to upgrade four parks.

Further, the team is working with the Flood Defence team and external partners to plan and deliver natural flood management schemes and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems as well as creating a new park on the site of under-used playing pitches.

Haringey is preparing its new 15-year parks & greenspaces strategy starting from 2022, which includes: an overall strategy and action plan; an asset management plan; a biodiversity action plan; a community engagement and volunteering plan; a funding plan; parks policies; service standards; a trees & woodland plan; a watercourses & flood plan and a workforce development plan. The service is also currently restructuring and adding

capacity across several teams to further improve the quality offer to residents.

Partnership working with other council departments, with friends' groups, the conservation volunteers, other stakeholders, and external partners is a key feature of Haringey's Parks & Leisure team's approach and has no doubt contributed to its high score.



# 3. Collaboration

Sutton has always placed great emphasis on working in partnership to deliver great parks and open spaces, whether at a local level with friends' and residents' groups, or stakeholders at a regional level such as the London Wildlife Trust and the Downslands Partnership, or national partners such as the Environment Agency and the Tree Council.

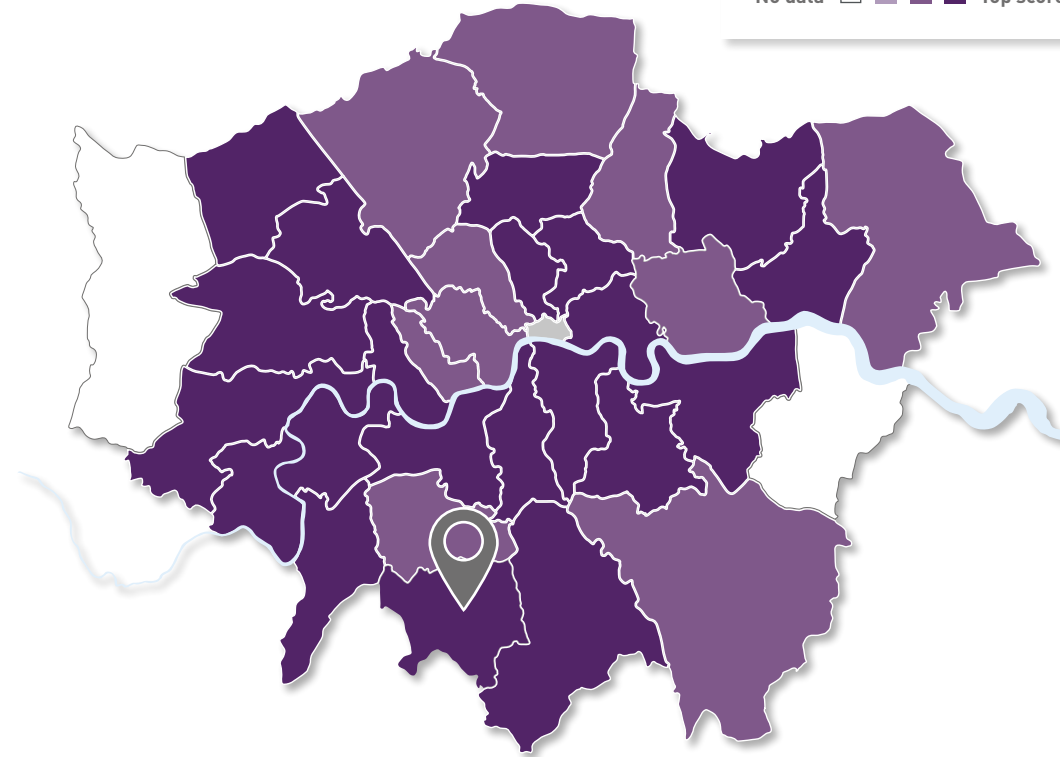
Sutton's residents rightly expect high quality services, and it is essential for Sutton to get good value for the money it spends. This is achieved through collaborative work with other boroughs across a broad range of internal services such as human resources, finance, and highways, as well as joint procurement of services such as parks maintenance, cemetery management, street cleaning and waste management. This enables Sutton to better capitalise on funding opportunities, share expertise, and together with its collaborators create economies of scale which allow Sutton and its partners to think and act bigger and becoming more than the sum of its parts.

Great parks and green spaces aren't just about delivering large-scale projects but also understanding and meeting the needs of local people. Working with local groups and people

such as residents' groups, friends' groups, nature conservation volunteers, archaeologists, Rotary Clubs, and Tree Wardens means different perspectives can be heard, helping the Council to better understand the communities it serves and giving local people the opportunity to be involved in and shape their parks.

### Collaboration

No data     Top score



Tree wardens, Beddington Park

*"We are so grateful for the incredible effort that our local communities put into supporting their parks and open spaces, as well as the important partnerships that we forge, and this is what makes Sutton such a great place to live, work and raise a family."*

**Councillor Manuel Abellan**  
Deputy Leader and Chair of Environment and Neighbourhoods Committee









All Saints Church, Blackheath

Commercial events bring about opportunities for added benefits. The OnBlackheath Festival has contributed thousands of pounds which, in consultation with the Blackheath Joint Working Party, has resulted in the addition of extra litter bins, storyboard signs, tree planting, flower planters, soil survey, and nature walk leaflets. Lewisham's Funfair at Blackheath provided last year's impressive Christmas tree for the park, and since the start of 2002 Race for Life has raised an impressive £11 million for life-saving research. The famous free fireworks display at Blackheath managed by Lewisham's event team draws in the largest attendance of any event in the borough.

Lewisham encourages local communities to use their parks by waiving the venue hire fee for community, charity, and school events. Smaller regular community events in Blackheath include a local primary school annual fun run for children and families; the community Christmas light switch on event organised by the Blackheath Society where local schools and residents perform Christmas carols; the free community kite festival, where the Kent Kite Flyer team, as well as local enthusiasts, parade a colourful variety of kites, all complemented by music performed by the children from the local Grinling Gibbons Primary School steel pans band.



Kite festival, Blackheath



OnBlackheath Festival





# 5. Health, fitness and wellbeing

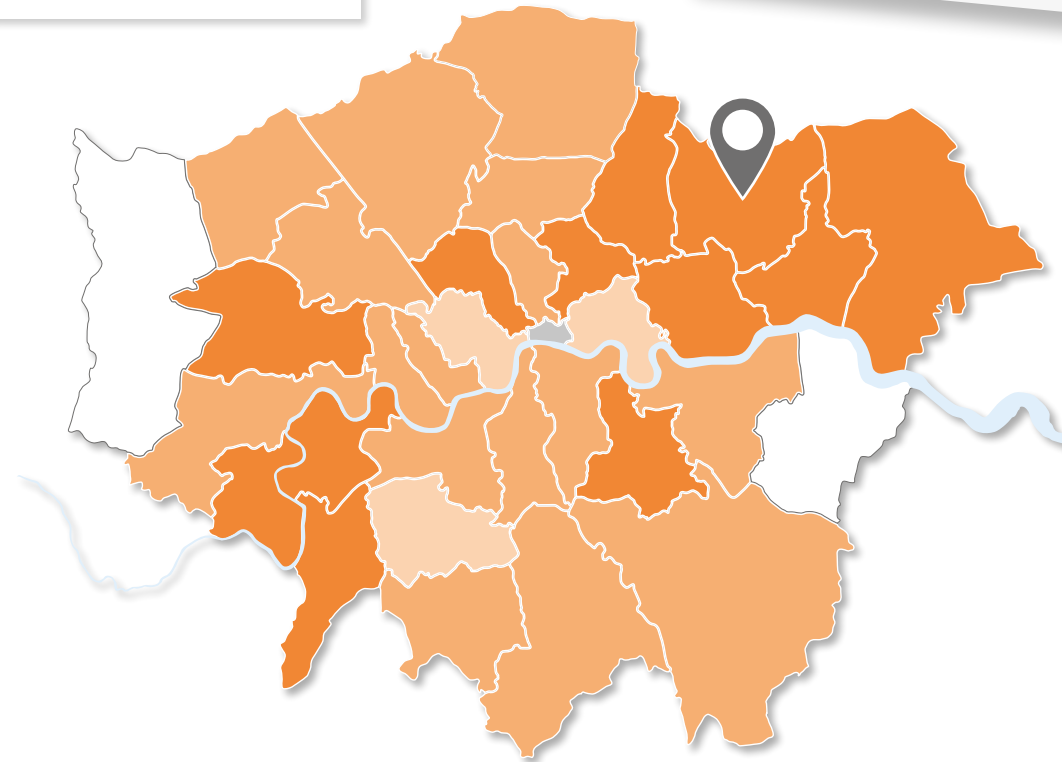
Vision Redbridge Culture & Leisure is rightly proud of the health and wellbeing programmes it has been developing in its parks and green spaces, such as walking for health, a range of free weekly routes that are open to all and led by qualified walk leaders. The walks have proven to be very popular among the older generation and those with mobility issues. Redbridge also offers an inclusion walk that focuses on supporting adults with dementia and Alzheimer's to ensure they can not only enjoy time in the borough's beautiful parks, but be active in a safe and caring environment.

The Last Man Stands cricket league is another hugely popular activity, particularly amongst Redbridge's Asian population, with players travelling all over East London and beyond to be part of the league each week. In one season, more than 30 registered teams play over 215 games.

Redbridge has also been delivering a multi-sport session in one of its Green Flag parks for children who are eligible for free school meals. Strong relationships have been built with the children's families through the Fit, Fed and Read scheme, and this extra session provides further provision

## Health, fitness & wellbeing

No data     Top score



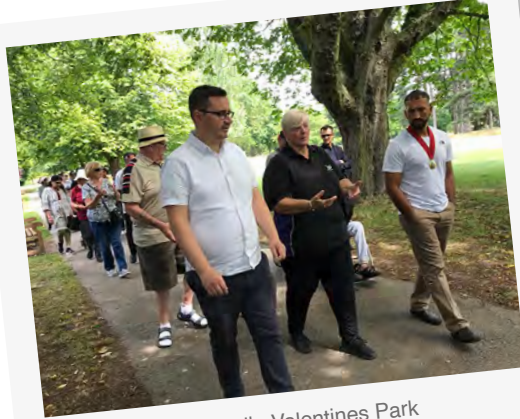
Children's multi-sport session, Valentines Park

for vulnerable families and encourages them to be active as well as showcasing what local green spaces have to offer.

Redbridge residents are encouraged to make the most of their 11 outdoor gyms and a [promotional video](#) has been created to ensure the equipment is used in a safe way.

Redbridge's partners are committed to working together to expand its outdoor provision. Working with the Council's Smarter Travel team, they have supported the launch of Street Tag, a free smartphone app that offers rewards for being active. Launching the Street Tag app during the pandemic was timely and placing the virtual tags in parks was a useful way of motivating use of valuable open spaces for physical and mental health benefits, whilst allowing users to remain socially distanced. Three cycling training hubs have been launched, providing cycling opportunities to thousands of residents, loaning them bikes and teaching them the basics of riding a bicycle and progressing from beginner to competent road rider.





Lead walk, Valentines Park

*"Being able to set up **cycle hubs** in the parks has allowed our team to broaden the cycle training offer and break down barriers to participation in cycling"*

**Andy Casson**

Active and Sustainable Travel Team Leader

*"Walking for health is a small part of my leisure time with a big impact on my overall life. I am proud of the commitment from the group and our community coming together to exercise regularly."*

**Amarjit Sign**

Walk Leader



Mobility walk, Valentines Park



Children's multi-sport session, Valentines Park









*“Together with our friends’ groups, environmental champions, corporate companies, school groups and other youth organisations, we work with GS360 to increase a greater sense of ownership for the borough’s nature recovery efforts, facilitating a borough movement.”*

**Councillor Samia Chaudhary (above right)**  
Cabinet Member for Leisure

Bee banks have been developed in different locations, and local community activities specific to bees has helped to promote and educate the local community on the importance of bees and maintaining their habitat for them to thrive. The Council is positive that the scheme will maintain a healthy involvement of around 150 children and up to 50 volunteers.

Through Hounslow’s ten-year commitment to plant a tree for each new-born in the borough, some 4,500 trees, including pollinator-supporting species, were planted last year. New wildflower

meadows have been created and more are planned this year with the engagement of friends of parks groups, volunteers, and residents in seeding wildflowers for bees and other invertebrates.

Community groups are proactively working for a greener Hounslow, achieving several London in Bloom awards. Hounslow collaborates with several organisations to offer its residents opportunities to get involved in conservation tasks, activities, and events, and The Conservation Volunteers organise bird, bat, and hedgehog box-making for families.

Hounslow adopts a circular economy approach for its parks; re-using old car park surfacing material

to make new gravel paths and using Ecogrid, made from recycled plastic rather than tarmac, as the new car park surface in one of its parks. They are also exploring using recycled material for park infrastructure.



Bedfont Lakes Conservation Volunteers creating a dead hedge, Bedfont Lakes Country Park



Volunteers enhancing bee banks, Bedfont Lakes Country Park





# 7. Community involvement

Community and stakeholder involvement in **Lambeth's** parks underpins the Council's work in managing its parks and open spaces, whether carrying out works in parks, fundraising, or acting as a critical friend.

The work undertaken with community and stakeholder groups is supported by the Lambeth Parks Forum, who meet with senior officers on a quarterly basis. The forum is a platform for attendees to stay updated on live matters and projects in parks and open spaces, as well as to feed back to the wider Lambeth parks community on good news stories and topics where support or advice is needed. Dr Ann Kingsbury, Chair of the Lambeth Parks Forum said, "We really value the open working relationship we have with Lambeth Council and their officers—we all have the joint aim of improving Lambeth's parks and open spaces."

The Council now has three active Partnership Boards with a fourth about to launch. These Boards bring together councillors, officers, representatives from park stakeholder groups, and those from the wider community including schools, tenant and resident associations, local groups such as youth organisations and sports providers. The partnership board structure has been successful in



Residents and friends creating bat and bird boxes, and bug hotels, Brockwell Park

strengthening relationships, developing trust, and improving decision-making.

Without the support of the local community Lambeth would not have seen a steady increase in its Green Flag and London in Bloom awards—a trend they are keen to continue and replicate by working with colleagues on housing estates.

Not wanting to rest on their laurels, Lambeth aims to create a tree warden scheme, in which it is hoped that parks stakeholder groups will play a key role in developing over the coming years.



Brockwell Park



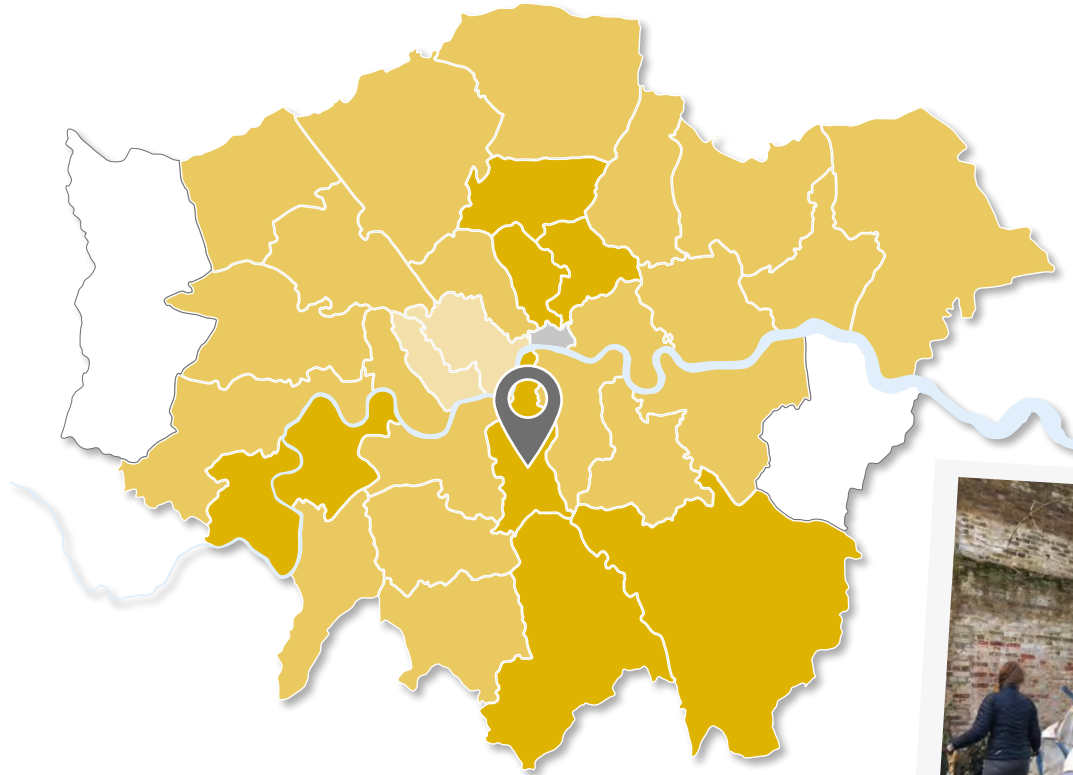


*"We are proud of the massive contribution the community makes to the management and improvement of Lambeth's parks and open spaces. Their support is vital to our ambitious plans to improve our parks and deliver what people want; this is borne out by our recent resident survey where 47% of respondents said the best thing about Lambeth was its parks and open spaces."*

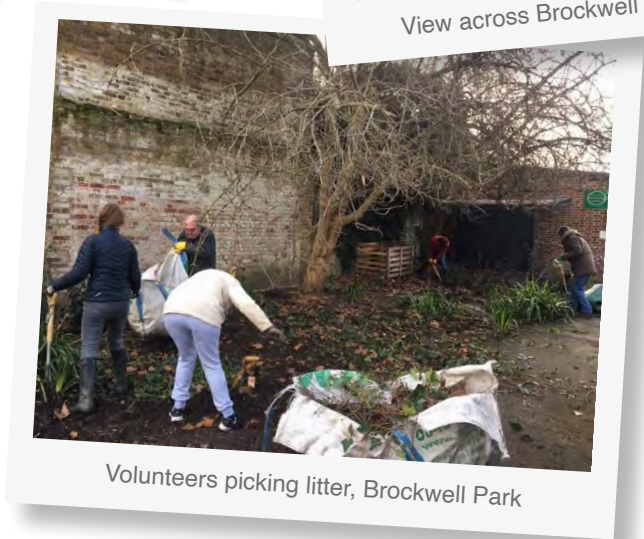
**Councillor Sonia Winifred**  
Cabinet Member for Equalities and Culture

### Community involvement

No data     Top score



View across Brockwell Park



Volunteers picking litter, Brockwell Park





## 8. Skills development

Ensuring a high quality, skilled and motivated workforce has never been more important in the park industry than now. The Mayor of London's Greenspace Commission reported that the 'green space sector is facing a crisis with a loss of staff capacity, skills and expertise. This is worsened by a lack of career progression and professional recognition, difficulty in gaining transferable skills, poor workforce diversity and the fact that it is currently a relatively self-contained sector.' **Islington's** parks service agrees with the findings of the report and is taking steps to address these issues and challenges.

The service is already running a successful apprenticeship programme with eight apprentices employed across the parks service at any one time. These two-year apprenticeships are within the park ranger, gardening, and nature conservation teams. Utilising the Apprenticeship Levy, Islington also offer apprenticeships to existing members of staff who are looking to develop their skills and careers. Currently, four gardening staff are completing apprenticeships at level 2 (Horticulture) and level 3 (Horticulture Supervisor) with Capel Manor College.

The service also reflected on its lack of diversity (gender and ethnicity), especially at the senior management level. The parks service needed to ensure that the barriers to progression within the team were broken down where possible. To achieve this, they have created a new management development programme which offers five staff (from all areas of the service) an opportunity to receive focused coaching, training, and mentoring over a two-year period. All members of staff were encouraged to apply, particularly from under represented groups. The successful applicants (four women and one man) are benefiting from a personalised development programme which will enhance their strategic perspective, self-awareness, skills, knowledge, and competence to progress into management or more senior level roles.

Bringing young people into the industry is also important and the Government Kickstart Scheme has provided an opportunity for young people to gain experience in various parks service posts. Islington has advertised seven roles across its service, and it is hoped that these posts can be used as feeder posts for the apprentice or even full-time posts.

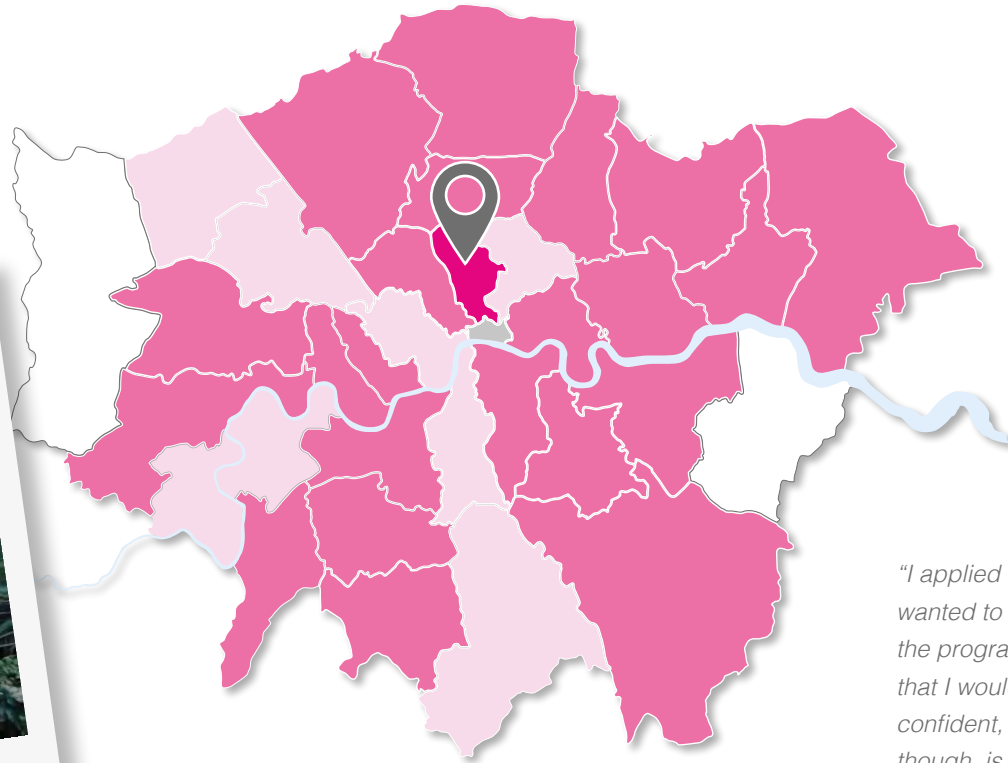


Nature Conservation Apprentice leading a community volunteer day at the Ecology Centre, Gillespie Park



Skills development

No data     Top score



Apprentices maintaining planting, Gillespie Park



Apprentice ranger helping present Islington in Bloom certificates to community gardeners

*"I applied for the management development programme because I wanted to step outside of my comfort zone and develop new skills and the programme has been great for that so far. It's given me exposure that I wouldn't otherwise have had, and it's helping me to feel more confident, professionally. One of the best things about the programme though, is having a mentor who you can sound things out to and learn from. It's an incredible opportunity and one that I don't think comes around very often."*

**Lara Ellington-Brown**  
Parks Project Manager





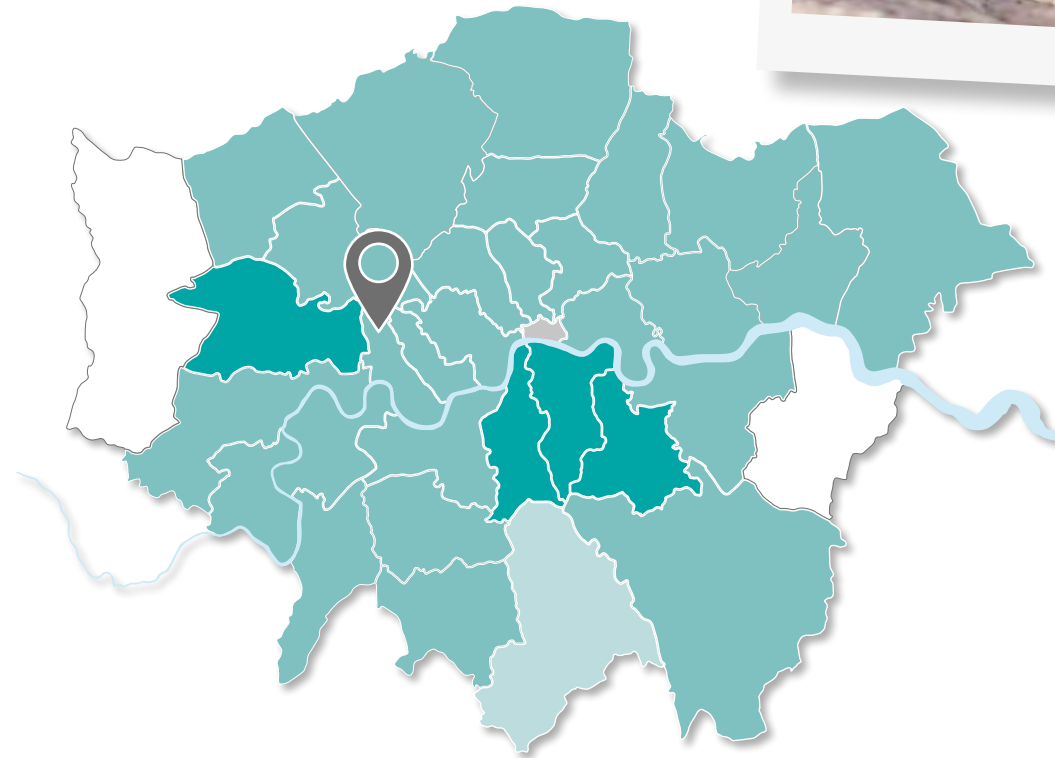
# 9. Sustainability

**Sustainability**

No data     Top score



**Hammersmith and Fulham** recognise the vital role tree planting plays in creating habitats for a wide range of species, increasing biodiversity, helping with the urban cooling effect, and capturing carbon. To overcome some of the challenges of planting trees in an urban setting the Council began working with residents and Earthwatch Europe in late 2020 to identify a site in the borough to create London's first Tiny Forest with the sponsorship of local company Fever-Tree.



The selected site was a former bowling green in Hammersmith Park which had been inaccessible following the demolition of its pavilion. In early 2021 to regenerate this piece of derelict park land covering 200 square metres, 600 trees were planted using the Miyawaki method. This densely packed forest of 16 native species including oak, holly, and hawthorn, is growing rapidly and will provide a range of canopy heights—from shrub vegetation to trees—and ecological habitats.

The valuable role of parks in mental and physical wellbeing has been emphasised during the pandemic. Not only can the Tiny Forest provide a nature-rich habitat to support wildlife but the Council also hopes it will act as a natural anchor for informal recreation and relaxation and provide the social and environmental support required especially in urban environments. The forest hosts a small outdoor classroom which can be used by charities and school groups now that pandemic restrictions are relaxed.



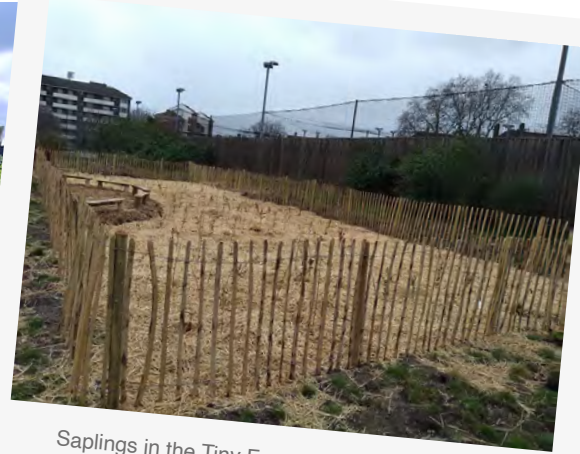
Educational board in the Tiny Forest, Hammersmith Park







Vegetative growth in the Tiny Forest, Hammersmith Park



Saplings in the Tiny Forest, Hammersmith Park



The forest is monitored and maintained by the Tree Keeper team made up of volunteers, in which Fever-Tree play an active role. Additionally, there are periodic community science days held at the site, where locals can get involved by collecting data through citizen science.

These events provide an opportunity to engage with residents of all ages and reconnect them with nature, as well as provide motivation for positive action towards nature protection. The forest is also capable of enriching biodiversity, attracting over 500 animal and plant species within the first three years, and improving air quality. This nature-based solution will provide much needed sustainable support towards climate resilience in urban areas.

*“This project is a great example of how a tiny change has the potential to make a huge difference. I hope this new green space will provide a vital refuge for both people in the community and nature.”*

**Councillor Sharon Holder**  
Cabinet Member for Strategy





# 10. Strategic planning

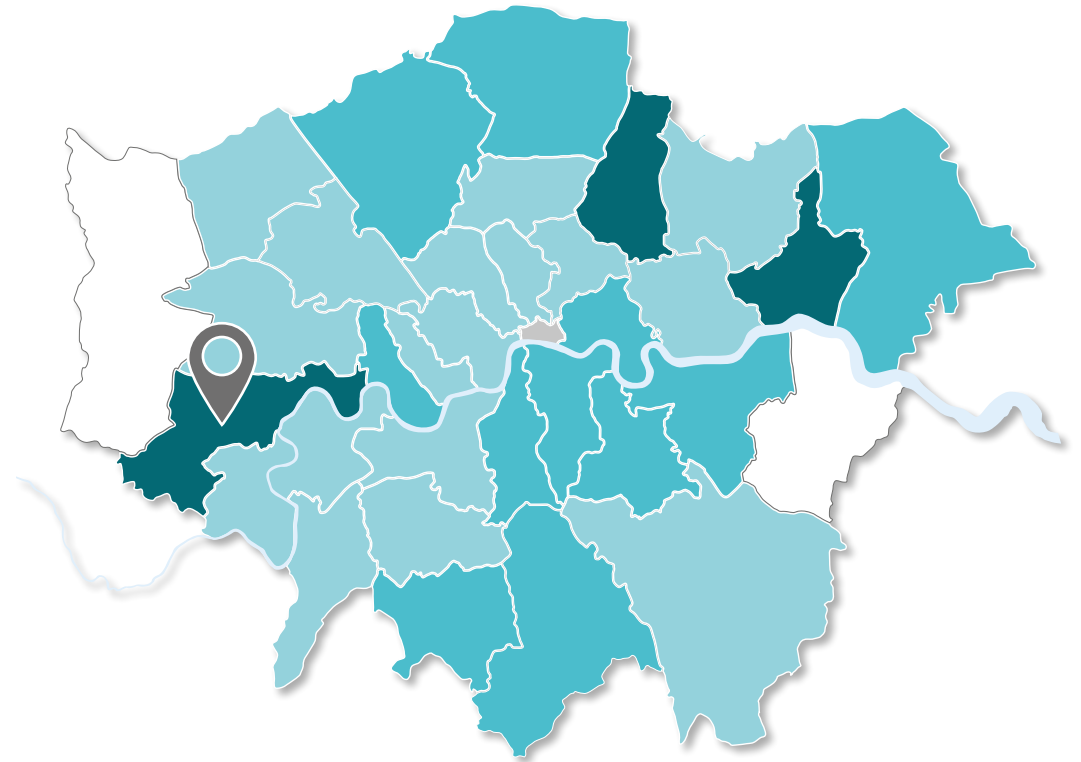
## Strategic planning

No data     Top score

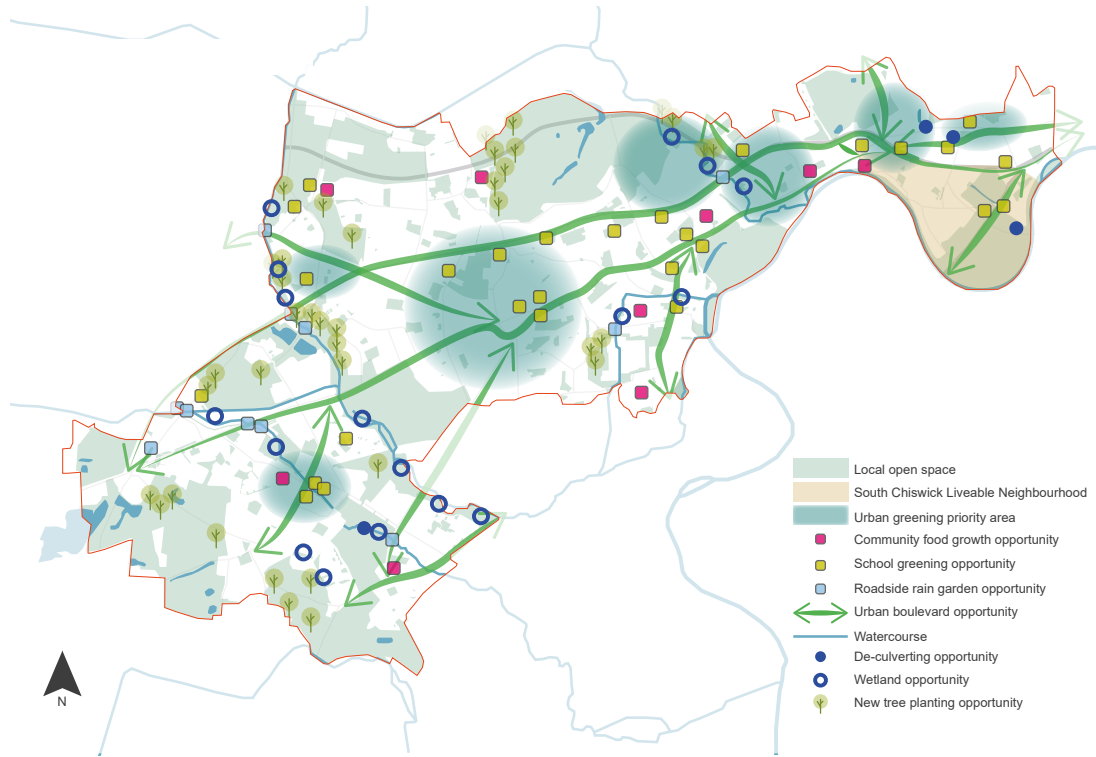
**Hounslow** is working to address several global challenges at a local level, including climate change and significant health, social and economic crises, magnified as a result of the pandemic. The development of a green and blue infrastructure (GBI) strategy between 2020 and 2021 has helped Hounslow to shape a strong strategic approach that will support the borough's recovery from the pandemic and help create resilient, healthy, and sustainable communities.

The GBI strategy will support and help to deliver multiple, interconnected workstreams and projects associated with Hounslow's Local Plan, transport strategy, greener borough framework, green recovery and climate emergency and parks. These policies align Hounslow to common goals beyond its boundaries, giving way to cross-borough partnerships and multidisciplinary teams.

The strategy includes an action plan for each theme, as well as a funding strategy, and is linked to the Council's infrastructure delivery plan where capital developments have been costed, as well as other key Council plans and London strategies.







During the strategy’s consultation there was strong endorsement that parks and open spaces should be a key area of focus, with 86.4% of respondents convinced that the green spaces are natural capital and assets that contribute to a greener Hounslow and a wider green recovery.

Quality management and operational management also form a key part of Hounslow’s GBI strategy.

The Council has increased its Green Flag recognised sites since taking the parks services back in-house under the control of the Local Authority trading company, GreenSpace 360. There has also been a review of infrastructure that led to specific growth bids for playgrounds, cemeteries, signage and a specific asset management plans for Green Flag sites.

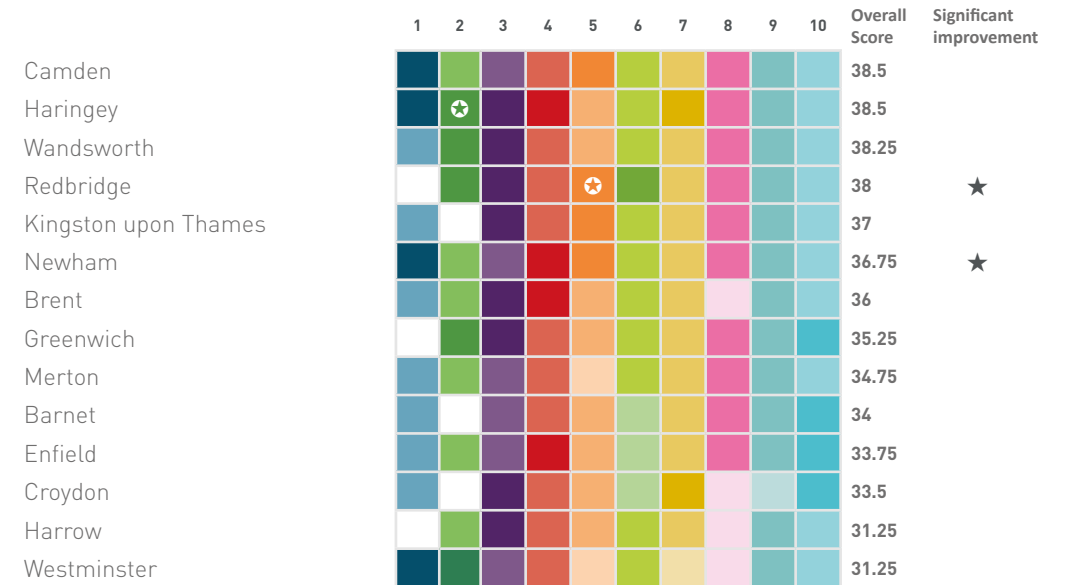
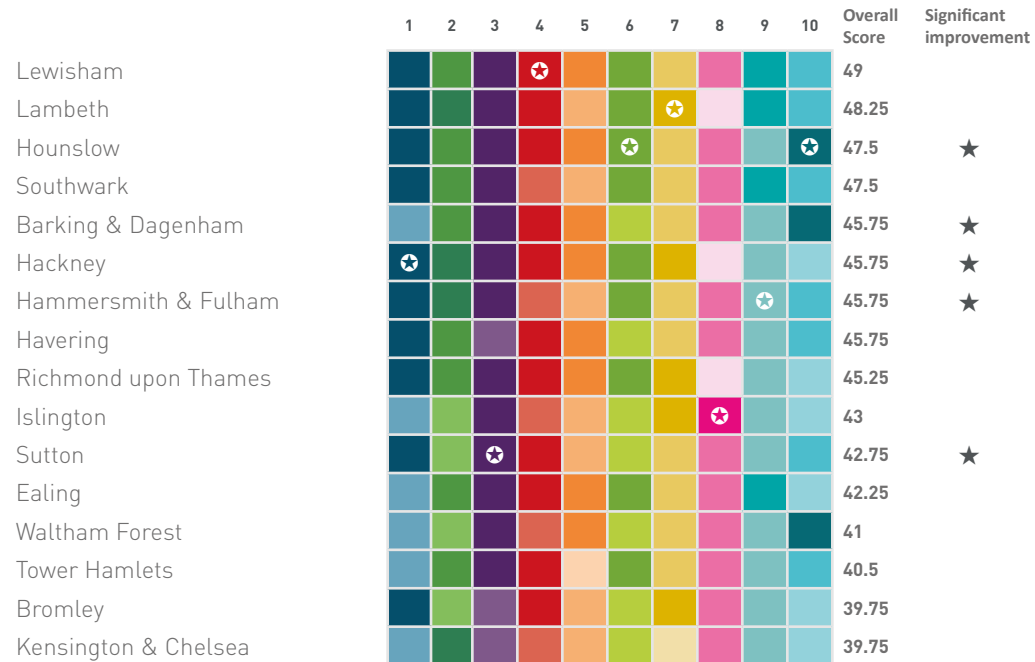
*“Our strategic approach in protecting and improving our parks and open spaces has never been stronger. Parks are playing a key role not only as community assets but also as part of the solution in our efforts against climate change and green recovery. Therefore, the Council is investing substantially in our parks, supporting their role in making communities healthier and more resilient”*

**Councillor Samia Chaudhary (below right)**

Cabinet Member for Leisure



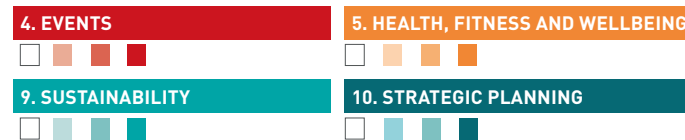
# Overall scores



The City of London Gardens (CoL) has not been included in these scores as the data does not represent a comparable data set and cannot refer to the wider portfolio of work undertaken by the substantial portfolio of CoL Open Spaces run as charities outside the physical boundary of the Square Mile.

A blank square indicates that a borough has either not submitted data for a criterion or the data is not available or a score has not been achieved. Featured case studies are marked with a 🌱, and a ★ represents a significantly improved score on the prior year.

Higher scores are represented by darker shading of colour.

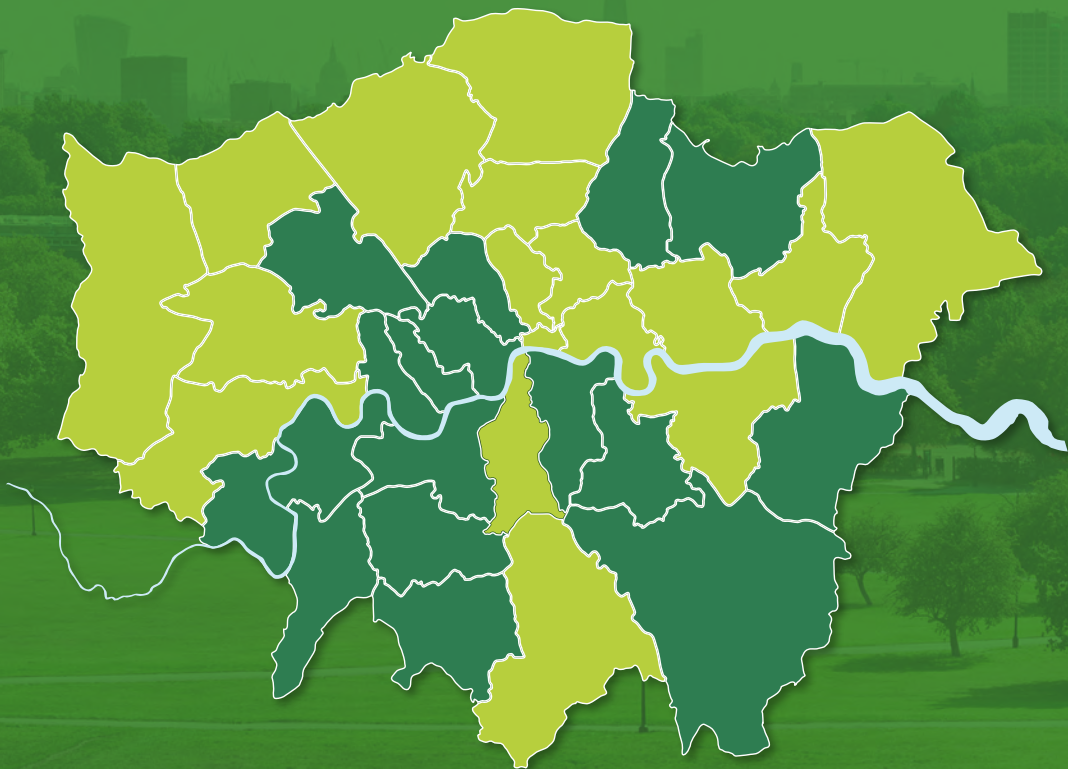




Park  
maintenance  
providers

- In-house
- Outsourced

Parks in London are either managed in-house  
or outsourced to contractors



## Part two

Read on for more case studies of exceptional projects across London led by boroughs and other land managers.

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## Case studies

# Richmond

## improves accessibility to its parks

The Friendly Parks for All project aims to improve opportunities for residents to enjoy and benefit from the natural environment by improving access to parks for people who face barriers to visiting them. In 2020–2021, the project focused on park users who were blind or had visual impairments, and their carers, to understand how access could be improved for them.



### THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames has 5,680 people who suffer from visual impairment and 285 people who are blind. Many also have an additional disability. Additionally, according to the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) 2019 and 2020 Sight Loss Data Tool, 120 children (aged 0–25) in the borough are blind or partially sighted and 59 of these have additional educational needs.

### CONSULTATION

A formal borough-wide consultation with this group and desk-based research revealed barriers that needed addressing. Since then Richmond has been working with a small group of park users to gain further insight into their needs.

Through reaching out to 21 blind or visually impaired people, the Council learnt that 80% of respondents visited parks regularly and most were accompanied by a sighted person. All mentioned that they enjoyed the natural environment, the variety of trees and flowers, being in an open space, opportunities for sports and exercise, the variety of equipment on offer, and liked level, well-maintained and defined pathways and benches.



Kneller Gardens Café

Those the Council reached out to identified a number of barriers to visiting parks, which included problems with parks infrastructure such as paths and steps, badly maintained slippery paths that are not swept, potholes and foxholes, and uncleared dangerous rubbish, all of which could be resolved through enhanced parks maintenance. Other barriers identified by respondents included getting to the park (31%), lack of parking near the park (23%), inappropriate equipment (23%), and lack of disabled toilets in parks.

Respondents said that accessibility could be further improved for people through improvements to parks infrastructure including tactile signage, appropriate maps and signs (deemed important by 54% of respondents), seating suitable to people with limited mobility, and the development of good and appropriate information about the parks and facilities.





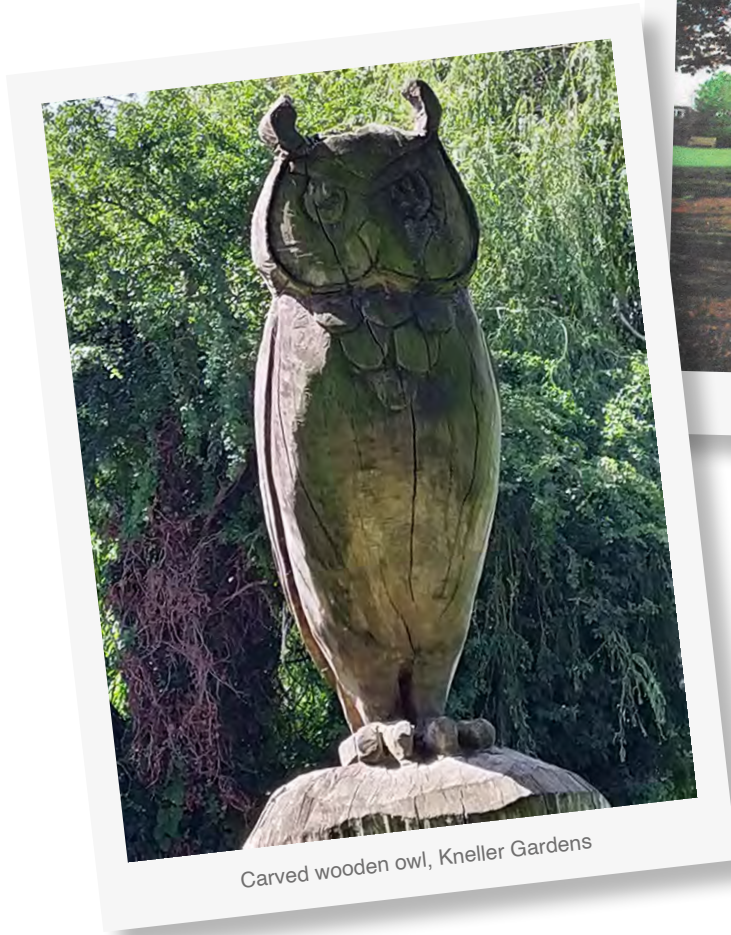
Case studies

**DEVELOPING THE MODEL**

Work for this group of park users is currently focused in Kneller Gardens, Twickenham but learning will be incorporated into the other four existing Friendly Parks and across the borough where appropriate.

The model aims to better park infrastructure for this group: by providing regularly placed benches, including some with higher seats for people with hip problems; removing trip hazards in the area around the bench; creating a path network suitable for people who are blind or visually impaired; making parks infrastructure such as bollard tops or cycle hoops more visible; and removing slip hazards on paths regularly. Following advice, the ramp access to the disabled toilet is being improved and will include tactile and braille signage.

An access guide has been written for each of the Friendly Parks so that there is information available for new visitors to the park before they arrive, detailing transport options, layout of the park, facilities and any possible barriers.



Carved wooden owl, Kneller Gardens



Proposed stone sculpture

**USING THE SENSES**

The project is also developing the sensory infrastructure for the park. A park user sculpture competition was held to design a sculpture suitable for people who are blind or visually impaired. The team is working with a stone carver to include the sculpture in the space, and it will include sensory planting, tactile wording and braille. There is a [sensory trail](#) and [tree trail](#) around the park that can be downloaded by park users from the parks website and the team is considering different ways of making this more accessible to people who are blind.

From the consultation it was identified that this user group most valued the opportunity to

experience nature and wildlife in parks. However, some users experienced sensory overload in busier areas of the park, so wheelchair parking will be made available next to a bench in a quiet riverside area to enable park users to feel close to nature and encourage reflection.

Further insight from the consultation showed that the user group value the opportunity to take part in park activities suitable for them. It is hoped that this will happen in the near future once the building work to create an accessible indoor community space or café in the park is completed.





Case studies

# Southwark's Redevelopment of Dickens Square

Back in 2014, Southwark Council committed to over £1 million in capital investment to regenerate Dickens Square Park and adjacent spaces as part of a wider package of improvements in green spaces around Elephant and Castle. Working with passionate and committed local stakeholders, the Council held a series of community co-design workshops over several years to deliver a final design that included new entrances and pathways and a playground.

To create a more welcoming, attractive, and accessible park, Dickens Square Road was closed and integrated into the park, and the entrances along Harper Road and Brockham Street were transformed to form an open and seamless connection to the neighbourhood. At these entry points, old brick walls were torn down, improving visibility around the park, and allowing passive surveillance from nearby streets and residences, reducing opportunities for anti-social activity.

New entrances and pathways lead visitors into feature areas such as the Butterfly Walk. The project also completely revitalised the play area, introducing new furniture, play and sports equipment. The old adventure playground building was removed, creating sightlines across the park, and the rubble was used in creating landforms in the expanded public playground.



Wildflowers around the new Anne Keane playground



Ribbon cutting by Councillor Catherine Rose, Cabinet Member for Transport, Parks and Sport, Chaucer Ward Councillors Hellen Dennis and Sirajul Islam, Dickens' Fields

Working with the landscape architects, LDA Design, and the main contractor, Tilhill Forestry, Southwark was able to deliver a coherent, well-designed park of high quality that meets the needs of residents and visitors alike. The parks team has received overwhelmingly positive feedback since the opening of Dickens' Fields, describing the project as a 'transformation', and an 'absolute triumph'.



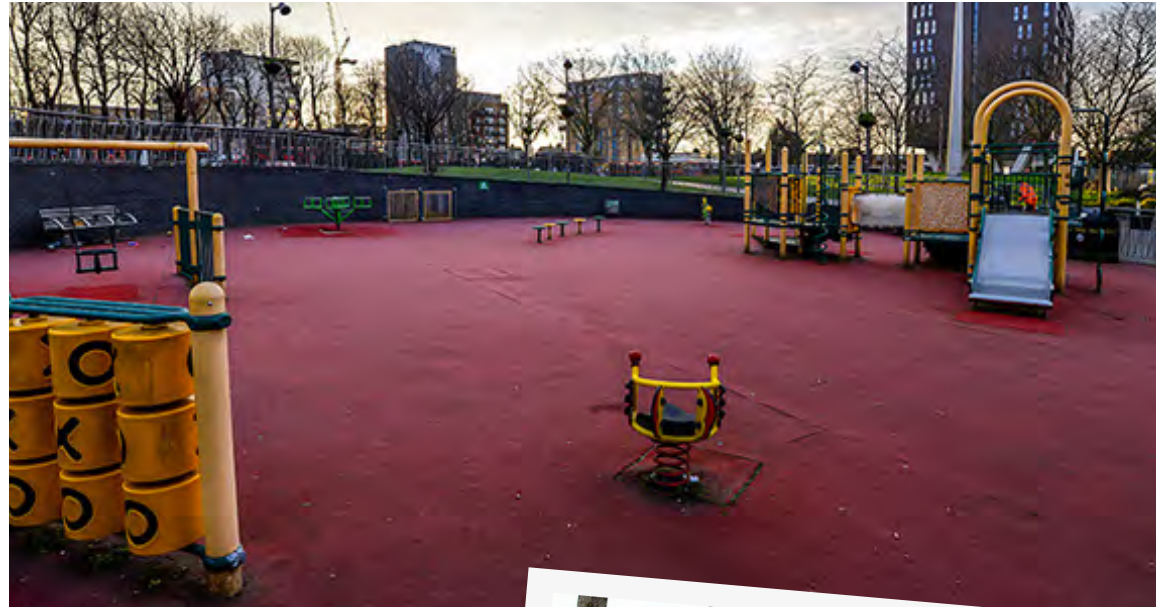


Case studies

# Waltham Forest's Play Safe Champions scheme

During the pandemic and resulting lockdowns, Waltham Forest developed the Play Safe Champions scheme to help manage increased use of the Borough's parks and specifically the playgrounds. The scheme comprised of 13 council officers who were deployed to cover 21 high profile parks and play spaces, during the busiest hours, between 11:00 am to 3:30 pm, throughout the week.

Access to playgrounds and outdoor gym, following the first lockdown, gave rise to concerns from residents that playgrounds were congregation points of large numbers of people that could potentially increase the spread of Covid-19.



*"We knew that many families who were asked to lockdown did not have access to gardens or outside space. For so many reasons, not least physical and mental health and well-being, it was essential that all families had the opportunity get outside and burn off energy safely, whilst they got some fresh air. I'm in no doubt the opportunity the Play Safe Champions provided, was just as important for the parents and carers, as well as babies, toddlers, children and young people!"*

**Councillor Clyde Loakes**  
Deputy Leader



Champions deployed at parks

The Play Safe Champions, funded by Public Health, were devised as part of the Council's Covid response and commitment to keep playgrounds open and safely managed. The Champions offered a much-needed reassuring presence to provide clear information and guidance on how to play safely; promote the Council's key messages; increase compliance by reminding people of social distancing requirements; and offer practical support to families such as providing free reusable face masks.

The initiative raised a lot of interest from the national media as an innovative way of deploying non-essential staff during the pandemic. Diverting this resource to a dedicated service allowed traditional park staff to continue their daily routines.

The service was well received by the by playground users—young and old—and the Champions received high praise and positive feedback.

The initiative was stood down when lockdown restrictions were completely lifted, though given the success of the scheme it could be implemented if restrictions are put in place again.



## Case studies

## City of London Corporation's cattle grazing project

In Epping Forest, cattle roam across the large ancient plains and through the dense thickets of ancient pollards to glades, slades and heaths. These interwoven habitats make up Epping Forest's diverse wood-pasture landscape for which grazing is vital to its survival.

Distinctive to Epping Forest grasslands are plant species that are finely adapted to grazing and are often spiny or unpalatable or have seeds that require dispersal through the guts of the grazers, such as the petty whin, spiny restharrow, pepper saxifrage and lousewort and cross-leaved heath.

In other areas, the hooves of grazing animals create gaps for fallen seeds to germinate, benefitting the low-growing species characteristic

of pasture, including, bird's-foot trefoil, tormentil, and heath bedstraw.

Cattle grazing also promotes populations of species of flies, beetles, and butterflies. On the drier acid grasslands, bare ground is critical for solitary bees and wasps, many of which are now very rare due to declining grazed grassland.

Historically, cattle were free roaming across Epping Forest but have been contained since 2011 using pioneering invisible fencing technology. As the first to use this technology in the UK, the grazing project at the Forest has continued to innovate in its use, including the transition in 2020 to GPS-based collars with the assistance of a grant with Rare Breed Survival Trust.

The GPS collar technology enables adaptive management of grazing animals using virtual boundaries which can be modified through a mobile app. Its application allows managers to track animals, receive real time alerts and create heat maps of animal movements.



Free roaming cattle, Epping Forest. Credit: City of London





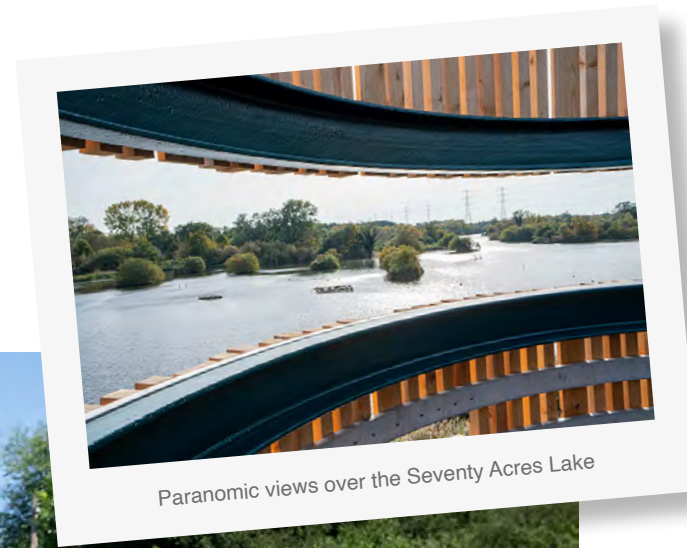
## Case studies

# Lee Valley Regional Park Authority builds a Wildlife Discovery Centre

The 1,000-acre River Lee Country Park is at the heart of the 26-mile-long Lee Valley Regional Park which stretches from the banks of the Thames, through East and North London to Essex and Hertfordshire. The country park was officially opened on the 25th anniversary year of Lee Valley Regional Park's founding by Prince Phillip in 1992. It has seen the regeneration of a landscape much changed through historic gravel extraction and landfill operations. Wetland habitats resulting from the sand and gravel extraction have become a nationally important place for wildlife, notably wintering birds such as bittern, gadwall, and shoveler. Recognising its significance for biodiversity, the site was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1995, and along with three other sites became part of the Lee Valley Special Protection Area and a Ramsar Site in 2000.



Families exploring one of the many trails, River Lee Country Park



Paranomic views over the Seventy Acres Lake

River Lee Country Park is a popular visitor destination with over 2.4 million visits last year from people locally and from further afield. A network of accessible paths which wind their way through the park lead visitors around, riverside trails, a sculpture trail, dog agility area, disc golf course or onto one of the numerous wildlife watching hides dotted around the lakes.

Fishers Green is a popular gateway to the country park and just a short walk from Seventy Acres Lake with its exuberant common tern and gull colony in summer and extensive reedbed habitat where overwintering bittern reside, obliging birdwatchers and photographers with unprecedented close-up views. There has been a bird hide overlooking the lake here for many years, which has been renovated and reconfigured with an adjoining information point, but it was no longer fit for purpose.

In April 2020, just as lockdown hit, the Authority started construction on an ambitious new Wildlife Discovery Centre to provide the park with a fantastic new facility and hub for wildlife watching. The building has been designed with wildlife in mind, incorporating bird and bat boxes, biodiverse roofs and invertebrate refuges into the structure and is accompanied by enhancements to the reedbed habitat and the construction of a new Kingfisher nest bank.





Case studies

The new Wildlife Discovery Centre, River Lee Country Park



Bat boxes built around the Wildlife Discovery Centre

The centre provides a state-of-the-art wildlife watching experience in the Bittern Hide, panoramic views over the lake from a 5-metre-tall tower and an interactive discovery room with wildlife cameras providing up close views of the wildlife to engage visitors, enthuse children about nature, and provide an opportunity for everyone to learn about the history of the area and its importance for wildlife.

The Wildlife Discovery Centre has a roster of 50 volunteers, some of whom have been with the park for many years, to welcome visitors. The support of volunteers is extremely important across all sectors of the regional park, particularly in the open spaces. Despite the restrictions of

the pandemic, 650 volunteers still contributed over 10,000 hours of time last year. Their work is wide ranging—from undertaking ecological surveys, livestock checking, litter picking, practical conservation work to helping at events. The Regional Park has a Volunteers Officer to oversee volunteering and has held the Investing in Volunteers award since 2008.

During the challenging times of the pandemic, volunteering has enabled many volunteers to reconnect after lockdowns, not only with the wider volunteer network but with nature and open spaces, helping to reduce stress and improve their mental health and wellbeing. The work of the volunteers is recognised through a rewards scheme across the Lee Valley venues, as well as long service awards and Volunteer of the Year awards announced at the annual party. However, for most it is the camaraderie, personal fulfilment, and a sense of giving something back that motivates them.





## Case studies

# Capel Manor College's Scottish wildcat conservation efforts

[Capel Manor College](#) is London's only specialist environmental college, offering a diverse range of full and part-time courses in further and higher education for young people and adults, while embracing and promoting inclusivity in land-based careers.

Capel Manor has six campuses which cover over 200 acres of land. These sites include two zoos, a city farm, an organic working farm and two animal collections, housing over 1,500 live animals. As part of their studies, students have the unique opportunity to obtain real-world experience and help take care of the College's estates and commercial businesses.

The College plays a vital role in pushing the green agenda for the capital through education and equipping the next generation of land-based sector workers with the skills and knowledge needed to help preserve and protect London's wildlife, parks, and green spaces.

Capel Manor College

Capel Manor College contributes to conservation by producing surveys to monitor local wildlife; actively choosing greener tools to work with and encouraging students to take part in eco trips both in the UK and abroad to give their time to projects that need support.

As part of this vital work, the College's Animal Management department is working with students to protect the rarest and most threatened mammal in the UK, the Scottish wildcat.

### WHAT IS THE SCOTTISH WILDCAT?

The Scottish wildcat (*Felis silvestris silvestris*) is a European wildcat subspecies that is found in the Scottish Highlands. Historically they lived across Britain but are now on the brink of extinction and found only in parts of Scotland.

In 2007, they became listed as a priority species under the [UK Biodiversity Action Plan](#), and protected under UK and European law and the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species \[CITES\]](#).



A Scottish wildcat, Capel Manor College Zoo

### WHY ARE SCOTTISH WILDCATS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES?

In 2018, the [IUCN Species Survival Commission \[SSC\]](#)'s Cat Specialist Group—a science-based network of more than 9,000 volunteer experts from almost every country of the world—carried out an independent review of the conservation status of the Scottish wildcat. Due to hybridisation, disease and accidental persecution, the Group concluded there was no longer a viable wildcat population living wild in Scotland. Captive breeding and working towards 'safe release sites' are now the only hope for this critically endangered species' survival.

### CAPEL MANOR COLLEGE'S ROLE IN PRESERVING THE SCOTTISH WILDCAT

In 2017, the College worked with the studbook holder and the charity [Saving Wildcats](#) to welcome its first-ever Scottish wildcats, Nevis, and Monroe,

to its zoo based at its Enfield Campus in North London. These cats are both ambassadors for their species and play a vital role in educating future keepers and conservationists.

This year, the College will be growing its capacity to keep more wildcats at its animal collection on its Mottingham Campus which will enable a wider audience to see this rare British species and be educated on the importance of conserving them.

Alongside other dedicated researchers, Dr Nikolaos Karantanis, lecturer at Capel Manor College, is leading the way to ensure the fate of the European wildcat—the only wild feline in Greece—does not succumb to the dismal fate that has been seen with other local wildcat populations across Europe and the UK.

[Wildcat Project Greece](#) aims to contribute to understanding the ecology and conservation of wildcats by tracking them in the field. This will be done by collecting data using cameras, radio marking and methods of biomarkers to understand these elusive creatures and is essential when ensuring their survival.

To find out more about studying at Capel Manor College, visit [capel.ac.uk](http://capel.ac.uk).



Case studies

# Habitats & Heritage



Green Hubs project at Hailsham Close, Kingston



Volunteer greening up the town centre, Richmond

## NOT STAYING IN LANE: COLLABORATION AND MERGING FOR IMPACT

There are a host of well-documented benefits to organisations collaborating—from improving awareness, sharing, and learning new skills, fostering innovation and gaining larger reach to building resilience and sharing risk. Why then, given these, are formal mergers between organisations seen in such a negative light?

If our organisations remain dedicated to the change we wish to see in the world, can we afford to keep considering mergers as an option of last resort, or should we be reframing them as a tool for ultimate collaboration and greater impact?

When the trustees and senior leadership teams of the South West London Environment Network and Environment Trust first sat down to consider a merger between the two charities in mid-2019,

the potential for greater impact on the built and natural heritage, parks and green spaces, communities and climate of south and west London was clear.

The South West London Environment Network and predecessor organisations had been actively supporting community-led environmental action in south west London for nearly two decades. Their work focused on preserving and protecting parks and green spaces, supporting biodiversity, and encouraging sustainability and energy efficiency through empowering residents, communities, and voluntary groups to act.

Established in 1984, Environment Trust were focused on nature conservation, heritage preservation and education. They undertook practical nature conservation, restoration of historic buildings at risk, horticulture, education, and history projects. Their business, corporate and youth volunteering programmes connected a wider range of people to the parks and green spaces on their doorstep.

The merger created a transformational opportunity for both organisations to integrate, improve and expand service delivery, and significantly increase impact. At the same time, it eliminated confusion for the public and funders arising from having two similar organisations working in the same geographical area. It has increased sustainability and long-term resilience through realising efficiencies—for example through sharing office space, finance, and systems costs. It was far from plain sailing, especially given the backdrop of the pandemic and having to integrate two separate staff and trustee teams whilst remote working. However, almost one year since the merger and the launch of Habitats & Heritage, we are starting to see a multitude of benefits.

With public discourse around the sixth mass extinction, evidence continuing to be published around the health and wellbeing benefits of accessing parks and green spaces born out of the increased use of local green spaces during lockdowns, the public have been becoming increasingly conscious about the environment and enhancing and protecting green spaces. This

has seen a rise in people looking to get involved in green spaces, which has intensified the need to build more engaged and empowered communities that are prepared to act at a local level.

The charity's youth volunteering programme with Duke of Edinburgh students has been connected to other work empowering friends of parks groups. We can now provide boots on the ground to help undertake practical nature conservation and gardening activities, in addition to supporting communications, fundraising, project management and governance.

South and West London has a rich and intertwined natural and historical heritage. Indeed, satellite views show the predominance of green space and waterways—many connected to small or large heritage sites. A satellite's-eye view also demonstrates the tantalising possibility of connecting green space and creating wildlife corridors. The charity's Green Hubs project seeks to connect these fragmented landscapes through the creation of community-led biodiversity stepping stones between larger fragmented green spaces using underutilised spaces, such as roadside verges, high street planters, and wayside gardens. This also enables communities and wildlife to thrive through improved biodiversity, connection, and wellbeing.

**Colin Cooper**  
Chief Executive Officer at Habitats & Heritage





# Part three

The impacts of climate change are far-reaching, sparing neither wildlife habitat nor human development, and are especially felt in large, urbanised cities like London. We are seeing fluctuations in climatic conditions that result in heatwaves, droughts, floods, poor air quality negatively impacting our health, increased risk of pests and diseases and a range of other problems.

Our parks and green spaces are not immune to these extreme changes, despite being a key component in alleviating them and combating climate change, by helping to store carbon, improve air quality, provide shade and cooling, reduce surface run off, and provide vital habitats for wildlife in an urban setting.

This makes the work being done by London's landowners and managers in adapting our parks and green spaces to be more climate resilient and better utilised to mitigate climate change even more vital.

Over the last few decades, many parks have re-landscaped areas subject to drought into dry

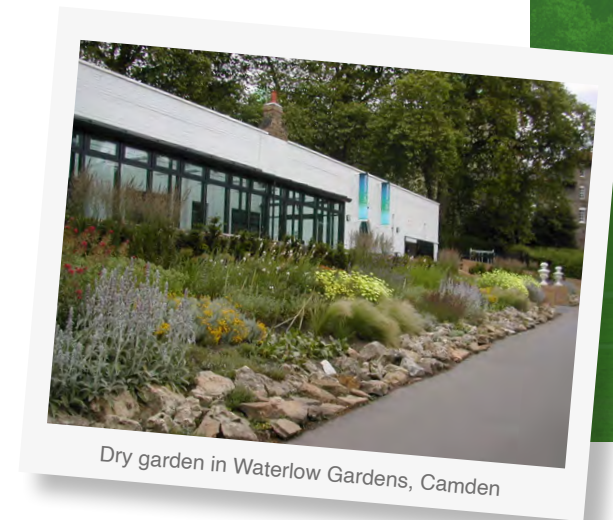
gardens and conversely areas prone to flooding have been planted with flood tolerant species. By working with nature, rather than against it, operational practices have changed to create more naturalistic planting, such as allowing grass areas to grow long, flower and seed, or interplanting turf with flowering natives to create meadows, which increase food for pollinating insects.

Some parks have stopped the use of peat and even bedding plants in favour of more sustainable perennial plantings. The practice of watering turf is now restricted to smaller areas like cricket squares and bowling greens to conserve water. Where extreme weather conditions such as storms bring trees down, it has become more common to make them safe but to leave them in situ to support wildlife and provide incidental play.

Read on for a selection of case studies on climate change action in parks across London. These will be made available on our website [Resources Hub](#), showcasing a growing number of diverse interventions and innovations that are worthy of replication. If you know of other projects that would be suitable for sharing as case studies, please [contact us](#).

## Case studies on climate change action

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## Case studies

# Barking & Dagenham's Forest of Thanks

The London Borough of Barking & Dagenham started a ground-breaking, innovative, and ambitious climate response and environmental project in late 2020 to thank those who dealt with the immediate effects of the pandemic, whilst addressing the longer-term, but equally urgent, climate emergency.

In November 2020, the Council planted a Forest of Thanks at Parsloes Park in Dagenham to celebrate those who went above and beyond in the response to the pandemic. This includes local NHS staff, keyworkers, and all of those who continued to work during the pandemic and kept the community safe. Almost 28,000 new native trees and shrubs were planted across a hectare-wide site using the Miyawaki to create the largest Miyawaki project to date in Europe.

**Barking &  
Dagenham**



Tree saplings

Images on p37–38 Credit: Gareth Winn

Barking & Dagenham's corporate plan 2020–22 set out an ambition to become the green capital of the capital, playing their part in addressing the climate crisis through carbon reduction and increasing the sustainability of the environment. The forest helps address their strategic priority to provide a green local environment and make a significant impact toward the Council's climate commitment.

The Council wanted to create a new community forest of scale in an urban area to pioneer, understand and learn more about the Miyawaki method; significantly increase the biodiversity in Parsloes Park and the local area; create a natural space that was both positive for the climate and local environment (but also aesthetically pleasing and accessible for the local community); and develop a planting concept and way of working that might easily be replicated across the UK.

Working with community and corporate partners, and planned over a six-month period, the project culminated in this incredible ambition being made a reality over a two-week period in November 2020, introducing 24 native tree and shrub species to the local area.

Utilising the Miyawaki method, Barking & Dagenham hope to establish a forest up to 30 times more dense than conventional tree planting. These forests grow 10 times faster than a regular forest, are chemical and fertiliser free, and become self-sustaining from as early as the third year after planting. As a result, the environmental benefits of the forest will be achieved faster, sequestering more carbon per square metre than traditional planting as well as supporting and enhancing local biodiversity.

It is expected that just four years after planting, the forest would have; absorbed 24,000 kg of carbon (up to 30 times better absorption compared to other tree-planting schemes); improved biodiversity; processed 1.5 million litres of rain; improved air quality by reducing polluting floating particulates by up to 10%; and seen up to 30 times better noise reduction than other tree-planting schemes.





## Case studies

Key to the success of the project was the adoption of a collaborative approach among key partners across the public, private and charity sectors, who are keen to replicate this model with other Local Authorities. The project was funded by a mix of investment from the Council and private investment in the form of tree saplings kindly sourced and donated by The Conservation Volunteers and their partners NatWest. Other partners including SUGI and Thames Chase Community Forest were invaluable in providing expertise on the Miyawaki planting method, developing the planting scheme design, and supporting the tree planting with volunteers.

The response from the local community continues to be overwhelmingly positive. The Council was mindful that this was a significant project of scale taking place in a very popular park, and so worked hard to inform residents about what was happening, why they were doing this, and how they might get involved.

Despite pandemic restrictions putting a damper on any direct engagement with residents during the tree planting period in November 2020, a further 2,000 trees for the forest, along with 6,000 more for other parts of Parsloes Park, will be planted by residents in early 2022 should restrictions allow, enabling engagement with the community and ensuring residents truly feel part of the project.



Development of the Forest of Thanks, Parsloes Park



Case studies

# Harrow turns Headstone Manor Park into a model for flood risk management

Following a major multi-year project to restore Headstone Manor Museum, Harrow Council made a successful bid to the Parks for People funding stream through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery Community Fund.

This bid was for a long-term scheme to restore and rejuvenate Headstone Manor Park to Green Flag status and tackle problems of flooding and pollution in the Yeading Brook.

As well as securing the Parks for People grant, funding was also received from Harrow Council, The Mayor of London's Green Capital grant, and Thames Water Smarter Water Catchment Fund.

As part of this project, 120 metres of the Yeading Brook was de-culverted and realigned to reduce flood risk and improve wildlife habitat. A 9,000-square-metre wetland was created to manage flood risk and tackle pollution through a network of sedimentation ponds and reed beds. This substantially reduced pollution from road run-off, misconnections, and sewage overflows into the Yeading Brook and the moat which surrounds the Grade 1 Listed Manor House.

The surrounding park was substantially remodelled with 4,000 metres of footpaths created or restored, including a circular route for walking, and exercising and seven new bridges installed over the new watercourses. On the re-profiled bank of the Yeading Brook a picnic area and refurbished children's play area were created.



Aerial view of new wetland, Headstone Manor Park



The 14th Century moat, Headstone Manor Park



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Case studies



The de-culverted Yeading Brook,  
Headstone Manor Park

Images on p39–40 Credit: cincera.co.uk

A new orchard was planted adjacent to the manor house with 166 heritage fruit trees and 50 more trees planted in the park, along with 1,700 native tree whips.

The project also included an activity plan for the community and funded an Outdoor Learning Officer working in conjunction with Harrow Council, the Friends of Headstone Manor, and other partners to deliver a wide range of activities and events for visitors of all ages across the park and in the purpose-built outdoor learning area.

Two family-friendly leaflets were produced to help families enjoy the park. The [Wild Fun leaflet](#) encourages play, discovery, and creativity and a [Wayfinder Trails leaflet](#) guides visitors around the site along two trails, highlighting the park's natural and historic heritage supplemented by interpretation boards, information lecterns, and way-finder posts on the routes.

Alongside this project, a 20,000-cubic-metre flood alleviation scheme was created funded by Thames Water, the Environment Agency, and Thames



The new wetland reed bed, Headstone Manor Park

Regional Flood Coastal Committee. The work involved the excavation of 49,000 cubic metres of soil, of which 34,000 cubic metres were used to level and landscape the park, with the remaining 15,000 cubic metres utilised to landscape other parks and open spaces within the Borough.

Headstone Manor Park has once again become the central point of many community initiatives and volunteer events following the official opening on 10 September 2021.



Case studies

# The Royal Parks preparing parks for climate change impacts

## RICHMOND PARK AND BUSHY PARK POND RESTORATION

Nearly two years ago The Royal Parks undertook a series of pond restoration projects in Richmond and Bushy Parks to improve the resilience of these habitats in the face of climate change. These ponds include the Hampton Hill Pond and Fisher's Pond in Bushy Park, and the Ham Gate Pond and Gallows Pond in Richmond Park.

Following two years of dry conditions involving summer droughts, ponds across the parks were drying more rapidly and earlier in the summer than usual. This had significant implications for amphibians including rare great crested newts (*Triturus cristates*) and invertebrates which rely on ponds for the completion of their lifecycles.

Several ponds in both parks were desilted and deepened, and in some cases relined, aiming to improve water retention in the parks throughout the year, reduce downstream flooding during periods of high rainfall, allow for greater soil water recharge and improve the resilience of wider park habitats to drought (such as veteran trees and acid grassland). Desilting also creates enhanced marginal habitats for biodiversity.

Leaf litter and associated nutrients were also removed from the ponds to improve the water quality, along with invasive species such as New Zealand pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) to further restore and improve the resilience of these habitats.



Desilted Fisher's Pond, Bushy Park



The new swale, Hyde Park

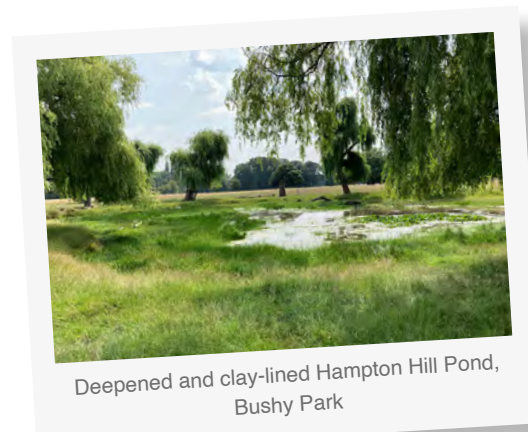
## HYDE PARK GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2019–2020, The Royal Parks completed two green infrastructure projects to help improve Hyde Park's resilience to climate change through habitat creation, flood control, as well as providing other benefits such as filtering out air pollution and improving access to nature for park visitors.

A swale was constructed in partnership with Transport for London in the north of Hyde Park, forming a sustainable drainage system. This takes surface water runoff from North Carriage Drive during periods of high rainfall, reducing surface flooding and discharge into the drainage system. The swale design includes a series of weirs to slow the flow of the water and create a series of pools, allowing the water to slowly infiltrate into the soils. The swale also contains gravels, sands, and vegetation to help filter out pollution in the water. The swale has been planted and sown with

a range of native wildflowers, creating a range of habitats to boost biodiversity, from wildflower-rich grasslands on the bank tops and surrounding the swale, damp grassland on the swale banks, and pond and pond edge habitats at the base, accommodating varying water levels in response to weather conditions.

In addition, a newly constructed catering hub in the Hyde Park Nursery includes a living roof. This extensive brown roof has a shallow substrate and is sown with a wildflower seed mix suitable for a roof's drier conditions. This feature provides a relatively undisturbed wildlife habitat within a busy urban park, whilst also helping to filter air pollution. The vegetation and substrate also retain water during periods of rainfall, regulating the amount of water reaching the drainage system and helping reduce downstream impacts.



Deepened and clay-lined Hampton Hill Pond, Bushy Park





## Case studies

# Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park's climate emergency response

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park knits a vibrant area of East London into a modern urban destination. Its presence and ongoing regeneration and development has redefined the historically industrial and creative heartlands of Stratford and Hackney Wick into an exciting and sustainable place to live, work, study, play and visit.

Sustainability was a key element of the London 2012 Olympic Games, and it remains a key driving force for the area's regeneration which has been handled by the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), a mayoral body that contributes to the Mayor of London's climate emergency response action plan. LLDC's progress and performance against its [sustainability objectives](#) is reported annually.



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Over the last year, the LLDC reviewed its climate emergency response to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park's current and future challenges, and opportunities posed by climate change.

Reflecting key areas of priority regarding carbon and climate change, the LLDC developed a trio of evidence bases put together in close consultation with its internal and relevant external stakeholders to give context and propose action relating to:

- the built environment—why, and how to build developments aligned with a 1.5°C future
- zero carbon mobility—how to better connect people, places, and things on and around the Park
- climate change adaptation and resilience—considering the practicalities of managing the stresses and shocks related to climate change

Wildflowers around ArcelorMittal Orbit





## Case studies



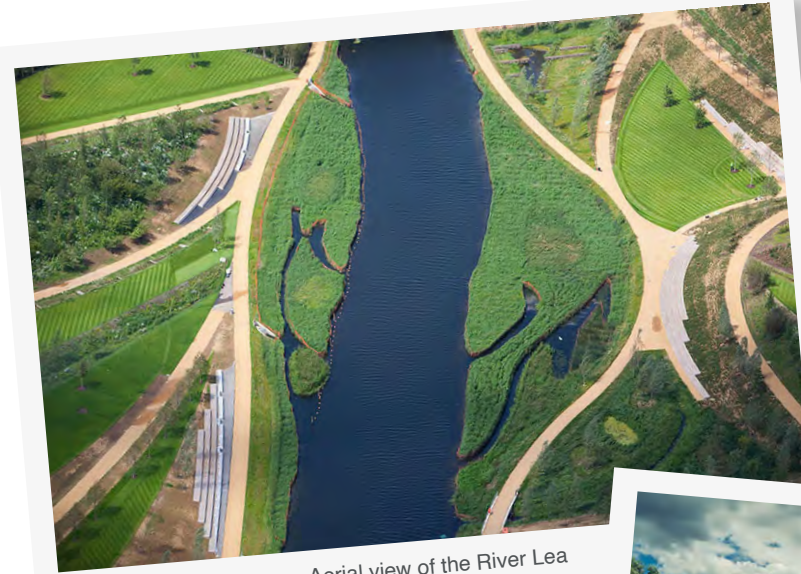
Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Few organisations are short of ideas as to how they can improve their sustainability credentials but considering the cost and benefit of these actions is often as far as many projects get.

To support the proposed actions at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, LLDC's management has approved the use of shadow carbon pricing to better consider the true cost of (or value of not) emitting a tonne of carbon. This allows the

question *how are we going to pay for it?* to be seen in the context that when it comes to climate change—as is for most things—prevention is better and much less expensive than cure.

Realising LLDC's sustainability ambitions will require new ways of looking at existing and emerging challenges. The Park has a developing reputation as a place for inclusive innovation, and many of the solutions to the climate emergency



Aerial view of the River Lea

will require the testing and deployment of these technologies. With a strong academic and business research and development community, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park employs its local stakeholders to support the innovation required for the transition to a low carbon economy.

Find out more about LLDC's sustainability objectives on their website. <https://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/our-story/how-we-work/sustainability>



Trails along banks of the River Lea





## Case studies

# Glendale

## strengthens London's climate resilience

As a green services company, Glendale is acutely aware of the need to protect the environment and adopt ways to combat climate change. This has become a priority for many clients and Glendale is proud to be involved in a variety of projects, supporting client objectives to achieve climate resilience.

### RECYCLING

Over the last 12 months, one key area of focus for Glendale and its clients has been recycling waste. Glendale is strategically placed to support client aims to reduce waste to landfill and find ways to recycle more of the waste collected on their behalf.

One such example is on the grounds maintenance contract Glendale has with London Borough of Lewisham. The partnership between Glendale and Lewisham has adapted over 20 years and recently targets were set to increase the level of recycled waste by 10% year on year over a period of three

years. To deliver this they developed a staff training programme that enables teams to identify recyclable items, understand the importance of reducing waste to landfill, lead a change in attitudes of the community towards recycling, and highlight the benefits to their local community and the planet.

Glendale provides recyclable sacks to enable segregation of waste and has set up an integrated approach with Lewisham's recycling department for collections. This has been expanded to working with friends of parks groups, producing posters for litter bins that raise awareness of recycling and asking park users to take recyclable waste home for recycling in their household recycling bins.

Glendale has taken further steps to separate waste collected across the contract, for example, installing concrete and rubble specific skips at the contract depot which allows this type of waste to be reused in the construction industry. Glendale sends all mixed waste to the South East London Combined Heat & Power energy recovery facility where incineration of the waste generates power and ensures that no material goes to landfill.

### FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

A key consequence of climate change that has become more prominent over the last few years is flood risk in urban areas due to increasingly frequent heavy downpours. Glendale has been proud to work in partnership with Enfield Council on an ambitious scheme to protect communities from flooding by installing and maintaining rain gardens around the city.

Rain gardens are a type of a Sustainable Drainage System that capture rainfall before it enters the piped network and either releases it slowly into the network or allows it to infiltrate into the ground. They help improve surface water management and protect against floods whilst also opening opportunities to introduce a variety of sustainable planting schemes that are climate-resistant, can improve air quality, attract local biodiversity, are pollinator friendly, and improve aesthetics for residents and visitors.

These small pockets of greenery also provide a sense of calm in the hustle and bustle of city life. Glendale currently maintains 70 rain gardens that have been installed, and more are being built each month, protecting many thousands of residents from the threat of potential flooding.



Planting designed by Enfield Council's  
landscape engineer



# Thanks to our supporters

Parks for London is grateful for the voluntary annual partnership contributions from London's local authorities and other organisations with an interest in supporting and developing London's green infrastructure, received in 2020–2021.

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Charity number: 1156063

Designed by Nicola Cockerell

Parks for London is an independent charity and provides the leading strategic and representative voice for the green space sector in London. We have been recently chosen by the Greater London Authority to become a Centre for Excellence to champion and support London's publicly accessible green infrastructure, ensuring that our parks and green spaces continue to thrive to create a sustainable world city with green infrastructure at its heart, supporting Londoners and the wider environment.

#### Find out more about us:

 [www.parksforlondon.org.uk](http://www.parksforlondon.org.uk)

 [ParksforLondon](https://www.linkedin.com/company/parksforlondon)

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#### Errors and omissions

This 2021 edition of Good Parks for London covers the financial year 2020–2021. Considerable time and effort has gone into consultation, data collection and verification. If you think you have found any errors or omissions, please let us know.

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