

Background Paper – Needs Assessment – Parks and open spaces

Last updated: 11 June 2013

SUMMARY OF NEEDS:

- Very few areas are outside the 400 metre catchment of a local park; very few areas are outside the 500 metre catchment for sites of nature interest; the majority of the borough is within 1.2 km of a strategic walking route.
- Apart from in the areas of open space deficiency (i.e. more than 400 metre away from a designated public open space), it is considered that no new open space is required.
- Emphasis should be on the protection and enhancement of existing open space, including areas of nature importance.
- Existing walking routes should be protected and enhanced and new links made where opportunities arise.

1. Policy Background

1.1 National

Key policies guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), relevant to parks and open spaces are:

- The contribution to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy is one of the three dimensions of sustainable development (para 7).
- One of the core planning principles is to take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it (para 17). It should be noted that the guidance on Green Belt applies to designated Metropolitan Open Land within London.
- Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required (para 73).
- Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
 - an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
 - the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or

- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss (para 74).
- Local communities through local and neighbourhood plans should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. (para 76). The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:
 - where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
 - where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
 - where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land (para 77).
- The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts (*applies also to Metropolitan Open Land in London*). The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence (para 79). Chapter 9 of the NPPF sets out the policy on Green Belt, including the purposes of Green Belt, criteria for designating and defining new land and consideration of Green Belt boundaries. In addition, para 87 sets out that as with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The construction of a new building in Green Belt is regarded as inappropriate; para 89 sets out exceptions to this.

1.2 Regional

London Plan:

- Policy 7.16 Green Belt: The strongest protection should be given to London's Green Belt, in accordance with national guidance. Inappropriate development should be refused, except in very special circumstances. Development will be supported if it is appropriate and helps secure the objectives of improving the Green Belt as set out in national guidance.
- Policy 7.17 Metropolitan Open Land: The strongest protection should be given to London's Metropolitan Open Land and inappropriate development refused, except in very special circumstances, giving the same level of protection as in the Green Belt. Essential ancillary facilities for appropriate uses will only be acceptable where they maintain the openness of MOL. Para 7.56 also sets out that the policy guidance of PPG 2 (*now superseded by the NPPF*) on Green Belts applies equally to Metropolitan Open Land (MOL).
- Policy 7.18 Protecting local open space and addressing local deficiency: The loss of local protected open spaces must be resisted unless equivalent or better quality provision is made within the local catchment area. Replacement of one type of open space with another is unacceptable unless an up to date needs assessment shows that this would be appropriate.
- Table 7.2 Public open space categorisation: this sets out the categorisation of open space and provides a benchmark for boroughs to assess their own provision for the

different categories of open space found throughout London. These standards can be used to highlight areas of open space deficiency and to facilitate cross-borough planning and management of open space.

- Policy 7.19 Biodiversity and access to nature: protection, enhancement, creation, promotion and management of biodiversity in London.
- Policy 7.21 Trees and woodlands: Trees and woodlands should be protected, maintained, and enhanced, following the guidance of the London Tree and Woodland Framework (or any successor strategy). Existing trees of value should be retained and any loss as the result of development should be replaced following the principle of 'right place, right tree'. Wherever appropriate, the planting of additional trees should be included in new developments, particularly large-canopied species.
- Policy 7.22 Land for food: The Mayor will seek to encourage and support thriving farming and land-based sectors in London, particularly in the Green Belt. Boroughs should protect existing allotments. They should identify other potential spaces that could be used for commercial food production or for community gardening, including for allotments and orchards.
- Policy 7.23 Burial spaces: The Mayor will work with boroughs, cemetery providers and other key stakeholders to protect existing burial spaces and to promote new provision.
- Blue Ribbon Network policies 7.24 – 7.30 are also of relevance in relation to parks and open spaces.

1.3 Local Policy

Core Strategy:

- CP10 Open Land and Parks – requires the protection and enhance of designated open land for biodiversity, sport and recreation and heritage, and for visual reasons.
- CP11 River Thames Corridor – requires the protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment and the unique historic landscape of the River Thames corridor within the Borough, and the special character of the different reaches identified in the Thames Strategy and the Thames Landscape Strategy respected.
- CP12 River Crane Corridor – provision of an attractive open space with improvements to the biodiversity in this strategic corridor.
- CP17 Health and Well-being – this policy promotes a pattern of land use and facilities to encourage walking, cycling, and leisure and recreation and play facilities to provide for a healthy lifestyle for all, including provisions for open and play space within new development as appropriate. In addition, the policy requires the retention of existing health, social care, leisure and recreation provision where these continue to meet or can be adapted to meet residents' needs.

Development Management Plan:

- Policy DM OS 1 Major Developed Site in the Green Belt – this policy is intended to meet the operational requirements for essential water treatment works at this site,

subject to the limitations set out in the policy and in particular the need to maintain the openness of the green belt.

- Policy DM OS 2 Metropolitan Open Land – requires the protection and retention of designated MOL in predominately open use. Appropriate uses include public and private open spaces and playing fields, open recreation and sport, biodiversity including rivers and bodies of water and open community uses including allotments and cemeteries.
- Policy DM OS 3 Other Open Land of Townscape Importance – this policy requires the protection and enhance of designated OOLTI in open use. The policy acknowledges that there may be exceptional cases where appropriate development is acceptable, subject to it being linked to the functional use of OOLTI, or a replacement/minor extension of an existing built facility, and provided it does not harm the character and openness of the open land.
- Policy DM OS 4 Historic Parks, Gardens and Landscapes – parks and gardens as well as landscapes of special historic interest included in the Register compiled by English Heritage will be protected and enhanced.
- Policy DM OS 5 Biodiversity and new development – all new development will be expected to preserve and where possible enhance existing habitats including river corridors and biodiversity features, including trees. New biodiversity features and habitats will be required in all schemes, where possible.
- Policy DM OS 6 Public Open Space – this policy requires the protection and enhancement of designated POS and it encourages improvements to the openness and character, including access for all. Larger new developments will be expected to include open space provision within the scheme.
- Policy DM OS 7 Children’s and Young People’s Play Facilities – policy focuses on protection and improvement of children’s and young people’s play facilities, including provision of new facilities.
- Policy DM OS 8 Sport and Recreation Facilities – Public and private sports grounds including playing fields and recreational areas, courts and greens as well as private open space in recreational use will be protected and enhanced. Owners of private facilities will be encouraged to make them available for public access and use.
- Policy DM OS 10 Allotments and other food growing spaces – Existing allotments will be protected and enhanced. The provision of new allotments and other food growing spaces will be supported where opportunities arise.
- Policy DM DC 4 Trees and Landscape – this policy requires the protection and enhancement of the boroughs’ trees and landscapes.

Corporate Plan:

One of the themes in the Corporate Plan is ‘Place’, which identifies ‘A Green Borough’ as one of the main service priority areas. The Uplift programme will continue to revitalise areas of the borough through a range of improvements including enhancements to visual appearance, retail areas, open spaces and civic areas. In addition, a new multi-million pound Parks Improvement Programme is being delivered. This will directly support the protection, provision and enhancement of the parks and open space facilities in the borough.

The implementation of the next phase of a Parks Improvement Programme is also set out in the Corporate Plan, which will offer more facilities and experiences for all users and will ensure that Parks and Open Spaces remain as one of the most important service to Borough residents. Delivering improvements in parks through additional investment, creating parks and open spaces that encourages residents to make parks part of their everyday life is a specific commitment set out in the Corporate Plan. This commitment will be measured by maintaining high levels of resident satisfaction with parks and open spaces.

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents, including site briefs

All adopted SPGs and SPDs will be applied with respect to any development proposal coming forward in the Site Allocations Plan. There are no specific SPGs/SPDs that deal with parks and open spaces; however, some requirements in this regard are included in SPD offering design guidance, Conservation Area Studies and in relevant site briefs.

Details of all adopted SPGs/SPDs can be found on the Council's webpage:

http://www.richmond.gov.uk/supplementary_planning_documents_and_guidance.htm

2. Research and Evidence

An assessment of parks and open spaces has been carried out as part of the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment (2008):

http://www.richmond.gov.uk/needs_assessmentfinalupdatemar08.pdf. In addition, the open space, sport and recreation needs have been reviewed and updated as part of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan: http://www.richmond.gov.uk/infrastructure_delivery_plan.htm.

The above assessments identified the following in relation to **Parks and Open Spaces**:

- The borough has over 2,000 ha of open space; about one quarter of this is managed by the Council. Richmond Park (1,000 ha) and Bushy Park (450 ha) are the largest and second largest open spaces in London; the Old Deer Park (147 ha) and the River Thames towpath (27 km) provide a regional recreational function. Overall, the borough is very well provided with public open space in relation to its population, having 13 ha per 1000 compared to the Sport England's recommended 2.48 ha (6 acres) per 1000.
- The existing parks and open spaces provide almost 12 ha per 1,000 population, which compares extremely favourably to the traditional 2.43 hectares per 1,000 population. This shows that this borough is not deficient in open space on a borough-wide basis. The Borough's open spaces are well used by residents and visitors alike for informal recreation. Demand is more likely to increase than decrease, from local residents and from visitors from inner London boroughs, particularly as London's population grows.
- Nationally and locally walking is the most popular leisure activity, and promotion of the area for tourism and walking is also likely to increase demand. The borough is also well-served by strategic walking routes, such as the Thames Path National Trail, the Capital Ring and the London Loop. Two other promoted walking routes are the River Crane Walk and the Beverly Brook Walk. There are over 200 public rights of way, most of these are public footpaths.
- There are few areas now, which are outside the 400 m catchment for local parks, and most of these are within easy reach of a District Park. If the River Crane Park and Kneller Gardens are treated together as a District Park there are few areas outside

the 1.2 km catchment for a District Park. There are few areas outside the 500 m catchment for sites of nature interest. Most of the borough is within 1.2 km of at least one of the three strategic walking routes.

- In the areas of public open space deficiency (defined as being more than 400 metres away from a designated public open space; see the LDF Proposals Map and policy DM OS 6 of the Development Management Plan), open space may be made available where opportunities arise. This could include securing dual use or improving access to existing areas as well as new provision. In the remainder of the borough, the emphasis will be on the protection and enhancement of existing open space, including areas of nature importance, rather than providing new open space. Similarly, the existing walking routes should be protected and enhanced and links improved where possible (see background paper on Transport).
- The majority of parks and open spaces in this borough is protected open land (i.e. Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land or Other Open Land of Townscape Importance) and some are also designated as Public Open Space. In addition, some areas are designated for nature conservation (i.e. Site of Special Scientific Importance or Other Site of Nature Importance) and others for heritage purposes (i.e. Historic Parks, Gardens or Landscapes). Therefore, the majority of the open land is protected from most types of development. These designations are shown in the Council's LDF Proposals Map and the relevant policies can be found in the Core Strategy and Development Management Plan. As part of the Development Management Plan, all the designations and boundaries were reviewed and therefore the Council will not be suggesting significant changes within the Site Allocations Plan.

3. Consultation

The Council's All in One survey (http://www.richmond.gov.uk/all_in_one) has asked every resident in the borough about their priorities for the local area. 'Parks and open spaces' was the category that people best liked about the local area (chosen by 73% of respondents).

The All in One survey was followed with a series of village planning events across the borough during the summer of 2011. These events gave residents the chance to discuss local issues in more detail and find potential solutions, including how the Council and community could take things forward together.

There are now 14 Village Plans covering the whole borough, of which parks and open spaces, including associated sport and recreation as well as leisure facilities feature within some of them. Further information can be found at:

http://www.richmond.gov.uk/home/community_and_living/village_plans.htm

In addition, over the past years, the Council has carried out a number of consultations in relation to parks and open spaces, examples of which are set out below:

- Parks Strategic Principles:
http://www.richmond.gov.uk/consultation_details.htm?id=C00861
- Parks Improvement Programme (Holly Road Gardens, Garfield Road Open Space, Champions Wharf): http://www.richmond.gov.uk/consultation_details.htm?id=C01211
- Holly Road Garden of Rest Improvement:
http://www.richmond.gov.uk/consultation_details.htm?id=C01321
- Crane Park "People in Parks":
http://www.richmond.gov.uk/consultation_details.htm?id=C01213
- Open Spaces Strategy:
http://www.richmond.gov.uk/consultation_details.htm?id=C00301

