

Appendix B - Parks for Health Project Update

Introduction

Parks for Health is a major two-year programme to May 2021 to transform the parks and green spaces in Camden and Islington for now and future generations.

“People need parks,” stated Robert Jenrick, Communities Secretary, in April 2020 during the coronavirus lockdown. He continued: “For the health of the nation, people should be able to safely enjoy fresh air and green space.” We know that time spent in parks:

- Is good for your mental well-being
- Can help to reduce obesity, diabetes, heart disease and the impact of dementia
- Increase physical activity levels, which has additional health benefits
- Can bring people together.

What is more, parks are free, accessible and Islington has 132 of them. Parks for Health aims to transform our parks and green spaces to maximise these benefits.

Future Parks Accelerator

Parks for Health is managed by Islington and Camden Councils. It is funded by the Future Parks Accelerator (FPA), which was set up by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the National Trust, and has additional funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Greater London Authority; this total funding is £670k. Additionally Islington and Camden councils and Public Health contribute £25k. The FPA is investing in eight urban areas. Parks for Health is the only FPA in London.

Vision

Our long-term vision is a world where Islington and Camden’s public parks and green spaces are used, enjoyed and maintained as public health assets for the local community. We will work to change parks and green spaces so they have a central role in:

- increasing physical activity levels
- improving mental health and wellbeing
- increasing social cohesion
- reducing social isolation and loneliness.

We want to ensure parks are inclusive, attractive and accessible for all, reaching those with greatest needs and building partnerships with the wider health and voluntary sectors to ensure parks and green spaces are much more central to our collective vision of a healthy Camden and Islington.

Objectives

- Create insight and innovation to understand the current value of our green space as health assets in terms of physical and social infrastructure.
- Workforce transformation to build new partnerships with the health sector and to re-focus their role to support health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Build sustainable infrastructure through co-design and innovation to maximise the current usage of parks to achieve health and wellbeing benefits.

High-level outcomes

- Systems transformation so that parks and green space become central to local strategies for promoting health and wellbeing.
- Greater use of parks and green space by those communities who are currently making least use of them (and are also least active).
- Sustainable future business model for the delivery of parks as public health assets for the 21st century.

Structure

The project board is the decision-maker for Parks for Health, which includes senior councillors and officers from both boroughs. For Islington this is the:

- Executive Member for Health and Social Care
- Executive Member for Environment and Transport
- Head of Greenspace and Leisure
- Corporate Director of Environment and Regeneration
- Director of Public Health for Camden and Islington.

The Director of Public Health for Camden and Islington is the chair of the board.

The Projects Team are working on five workstreams support the delivery of programme activities and help us achieve the project outcomes. The workstreams are:

- Workstream 1, Strategy. Its aim is to develop a strategic plan that will utilise parks and green space for the prevention of long-term ill health. It will identify opportunities for new and improved interventions for health-based capital expenditure and commissioned activity programmes.
- Workstream 2, Communications and Marketing. Its aim is to provide communications and engagement support to the Parks for Health programme through the development of a communications strategy framework.
- Workstream 3, Networks and Partnerships. Its aim is to work collaboratively with our key networks, partners and the public to co-design, pilot and evaluate initiatives that explore better ways to deliver health benefits from parks and green spaces for target groups.
- Workstream 4, Insight and Innovation. Its aim is to deliver evidence and new tools to demonstrate the value of Camden and Islington green spaces through the development of a health strategy. This will also provide a clear evidence-base to guide future decision-making.

- Workstream 5, Workforce Transformation. Its aim is to review structures and skillsets needed for effective delivery of parks as key health assets across both councils. This includes resident and volunteer engagement in parks and open spaces in Islington.

Membership of the workstreams is drawn principally from the Islington and Camden green space teams and Camden and Islington Public Health. Other members come from the councils' leisure and communications teams, Age UK Islington, the GLA, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and London Sport.

Parks for Health has a project team based in Islington and Camden councils.

Work to date

The project was launched in June 2019. The initial months were spent establishing the vision, objectives, outcomes and structure described above.

Each workstream has developed a workplan, which are based on proposed workpackages for agreement at the mid-point review. This is the point at which the high-level, long-term strategy and model for our parks is agreed. This is followed by the transition phase, in which the structures and strategies that need to be in place for the model to function into the future are implemented.

In October 2019 the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) approached us to be a social prescribing demonstrator project. This pilot aims to connect people with green space to improve mental health outcomes through social prescribing. This is the first and to date only demonstrator project in the country. The project is for six months, December 2019 to May 2020, and takes place in Caledonian Park, Islington, and Talacre Gardens, Camden. Detailed work is taking place with the health sector and local organisations involved in improving well-being, which feeds into the Parks for Health project.

We also took part in Parks Challenge which took place at the end of 2019. Officers from the National Trust visited over 40 parks across the two boroughs, and talked to many Friends of Parks groups and parks staff, to look at how parks are run and could be improved. Their recommendations about the visitor experience, communications, staff and volunteering feed into our work.

Impact of coronavirus lockdown

The Covid19 Public Health Emergency has had significant impact on the progress of the project. Almost all officers involved in the project and who are outside the project team, have been focused on the local authorities' emergency response to the pandemic. These officers primarily work in Public Health or are responsible for the management of the parks in the two boroughs. Other officers work in communications or the councils' sports and activity teams.

The five members of the project team are continuing to work on the Parks for Health project. As the team is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund it is unlikely that members of the team will be partially or wholly redeployed.

We are currently assessing how we can continue to move the project forward in the current and likely future environments. These discussions are happening in conjunction with the Future Parks Accelerator Projects Team.

As the value of parks to the community is never more apparent than at this time, it is vital that this project continues and helps us maximise the benefits these spaces can offer to help us recover from this crisis.

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