



Joint report of the Executive Member for Environment and Transport and the Executive Member for Health and Social Care

Meeting of:	Date:	Ward(s):
Executive	21 April 2022	All

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SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF PARKS FOR HEALTH STRATEGY

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report sets out a strategy to achieve a new normal within our parks, where our key focus is supporting healthy communities, through the various strands and new partnerships we have created over the past 2 years. The Strategy is a high-level document setting out the vision, aims and approaches of the parks and green spaces services in both Camden and Islington as they progress from grant-funded programme into mainstream delivery.
- 1.2 Parks for Health is a joint project with Camden Council with the aim of exploring how to maximise the health benefit of parks for our communities. It is funded through the national Future Parks Accelerator programme - a collaboration between the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the National Trust and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (previously Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government). Our project also received support and funding from the Greater London Authority.
- 1.3 Although developed as a joint cross-borough strategy, it is underpinned by a separate local three-year Delivery Plans (see appendix 2), to be refreshed at 18-month intervals. These delivery plans will contain additional borough-specific context such as related strategies (corporate, health and wellbeing, environmental etc.).

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To agree the adoption of the new Parks for Health Strategy and supporting appendices as attached.

3. Background

3.1 Islington is the most densely populated local authority area in England and Wales, with 16,097 people per square km. This is almost triple the London average and more than 37 times the national average. The population is estimated to grow by a further 3% to 2030.

Only 13% of the borough's land is green space. This is the second lowest proportion of any local authority in the country and far lower than outer London boroughs such as Barking and Dagenham where approximately a third of the borough is green space. 29% of Islington residents do not have direct access to private green space. These figures show just how important our parks and open spaces are and the Parks for Health Strategy sets out how we aim to improve the quality of these spaces and maximise the health and wellbeing benefits they offer for the community.

3.2 As Britain's most densely populated borough, parks and green spaces are of huge importance to our communities in Islington. The Parks for Health project has enabled us to really focus on how we can use them to their full potential to support our residents' health and wellbeing

3.3 The need to maximise the public health benefits of our green spaces has been made all the more evident through the pandemic, with usage of parks by every part of our community increasing massively. However, there are still many residents who do not feel able to use these spaces and with such stark health inequalities in our borough, it's crucial that everyone who lives here is able to enjoy the wellbeing benefits our fantastic parks have to offer.

3.4 With the lowest quantity of open space per head of any borough in the country, we know that our focus must be on quality as well as quantity – doing the very best with what we have, to deliver better health outcomes for all. It's an essential part of our vision of a more equal Islington and this Strategy sets out a clear vision and plan for us to do just that.

3.5 Good health helps people to live a full and rewarding life. It is more than an absence of disease and illness – it is about physical, mental and social wellbeing. In Islington, too many people are still living in poor health for too many years of their lives. Health inequalities have increased during the pandemic and access to green spaces remains unequal, particularly for black, Asian or other ethnic communities.

3.6 In 2019, Camden and Islington were jointly awarded an initial £667,000 two-year grant as part of the national Future Parks Accelerator initiative, to make our parks and green spaces focal points for improving people's health and reducing health inequalities. We wanted to:

- transform our green spaces so that they would take an active and vital role in delivering improvements to health and wellbeing.
- build strong partnerships with the health and voluntary sectors to ensure those with the greatest need benefit.

3.7 The Parks for Health project initially sought to complete within 2 years receiving nearly £1m in funding and in-kind support. Due to the impact of Covid and realisation of the level of work included in all Future Park Accelerator projects, the funding has been extended and is now due to close in July 2022. This will mark the beginning of our journey, with this strategy setting out how our learning to date will inform our actions and ways of working

going forwards, including across other areas (such as streets and communal housing land). This strategy will provide a strong foundation for future Green Infrastructure strategies. Officers will periodically come together to review and refresh our actions with Camden Council, Public Health and stakeholders.

- 3.8 Our "Parks for Health" programme enabled us to accelerate change and transform the ways we work. The priorities and approaches of this Healthy Parks Strategy are based on this experience
- 3.9 In the nearly three years since we first received the grant, we have worked closely with 36 Friends and Parks User Groups, over 50 voluntary and community sector organisations and 9 GP practices, as well as strategic partners such as the newly formed North London Partners which brings together councils, clinical commissioners and health and care providers. Together, we have developed our shared, long-term vision, tested new ways of working, shared our knowledge and expertise, and made joint commitments to ongoing collaboration
- 3.10 The strategy has been developed in consultation with key stakeholder groups from both Camden and Islington which include, AgeUK (Camden and Islington), TVC, Octopus Community Network, Voluntary Action Camden, North Central London Clinical Commissioning Group, National Trust, Parks for London, North London Cares, Camden & Islington NHS Mental Health Trust and Executive Members from both Camden and Islington.
- 3.11 Two years ago, our parks' health offer was passive. Although Islington's parks are of high quality and public satisfaction is high, the health benefits they offered were relatively poorly understood by ourselves and our communities. We did not have a clear picture of their full potential for health and wellbeing or a strategy for how to realise this potential. Neither did we tend to engage outside of the traditional parks-related groups and stakeholders. As a result of the Parks for Health project, we have co-designed a clear vision, objectives and outcomes for the future role of parks. Building on our Future Parks Accelerator foundations, our strategy aims to:
- Improve the quality and accessibility of all our parks and green spaces, providing an environment and activities suitable for everyone – we call this our "universal offer";
 - Create opportunities and spaces for people with particular needs, especially where parks can help improve their health and wellbeing – we call this our "targeted offer".

Part Two of this strategy describes in more detail the thinking behind the strategy and why parks matter for health and wellbeing.

Part Three describes the main ways in which we will deliver the strategy in partnership with our voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, the NHS, social care, residents and others

- 3.12 Our Parks for Health vision is that Islington's public parks and green spaces are used, enjoyed and maintained as health assets for the whole community.

- Everyone feels welcome in our parks. More people than ever before visit and stay for longer - enjoying nature and taking part in activities which make them healthy and happy.
- Our parks are places where people can come together or spend time alone, be active or pause and reflect.
- Our parks are at the heart of community life.”

- 3.13
- The strategy sets out how we aim to achieve our vision going forward and this is set out in the strategy across 6 themes. They are:
 - Strategy Theme 1 Investing in our Parks – to Safeguard their Future.
 - Strategy Theme 2 Developing our Workforce – to Strengthen our Capacity to Improve Health and Reduce Inequalities.
 - Strategy Theme 3 Working with our VCSE organisations – to Support and Champion the Sector’s Role in Delivering the Parks for Health Vision.
 - Strategy Theme 4 Working with our Health and Social Care Partners – to Put Parks and Green Spaces at the Heart of Wellbeing.
 - Strategy Theme 5 Working with our Residents – to Share and Promote the Benefits of Parks and Green Spaces for All.
 - Strategy Theme 6 Widening our Partnerships – to Maximise the Reach of Parks for Health

3.14 For Theme 1 Investing in our Parks some of the things we want to achieve are:

- More high quality parks;
- A higher portion and more diverse funding of parks and parks community activity from external sources
- A greener and sustainable wider public realm

3.15 For Theme 2: Developing our workforce some of the key things we aim to achieve:

- A co-ordinated health offer across our parks
- A skilled, confident and motivated workforce with health and wellbeing of park users central to their roles
- A collaborative and partnership approach to delivery with other departments, VCSE and health partners

3.16 For Theme 3: Working with our voluntary, community and social (VCSE) organisations we want to:

- Ensure our parks are inclusive of a wide range of VCSE users, representing and supporting diverse communities.
- Our local VCSE sector has greater capacity and confidence to make use of parks for their activities.
- Productive relationships between VCSE organisations and with the parks, health and social care services, in the interest of our communities’ health and wellbeing.

3.17 For Theme 4: Working with our health and social care partners some of what we want to achieve are:

- High quality health and social care services, accessible to all our communities, are delivered in partnership with parks services, supporting independent living, prevention and recovery.
- Health and social care partners utilise parks and green spaces year-round for activities which improve health, connect people and communities and help reduce health inequalities.

- Joint Parks for Health roles and principles are embedded in mainstream health and care service provision.
- 3.18 For Theme 5: Working with our residents we want to share and promote the benefits of parks and green spaces for all/ We want to achieve:
- All members of our local communities recognise the health benefits of local parks and are able and confident to make use of them – such that health is improved overall and inequalities are reduced.
 - People choose to visit parks and green spaces more often, spending more time there and enjoying what they have to offer in different ways which benefit their health and wellbeing.
 - More, and more diverse, residents are actively involved in the stewardship, promotion and activation of our parks whether as volunteers or employees.
- 3.19 For Theme 6: Widening our strategic partnerships to maximise the reach of Parks for Health we want to achieve:
- That the Parks for Health vision and principles are expanded in the wider public realm
 - Parks and green spaces are embedded in partners area based strategies with health and wellbeing objectives
 - Major landowners systematically and substantively invest in green space for community health and wellbeing
 - Local businesses and business partnerships contribute to public realm improvements in line with the Parks for Health vision
 - Long-term research collaborations enable us to assess and disseminate our health impact over time.
- 3.20 As part of the work, a Natural Capital Accounting exercise for Islington’s parks was undertaken by Vivid Economics. This provided estimates of the numbers of visitors and the benefits they gain from our parks and green spaces. This showed:
- 2.7m visits each year
 - £75.8m worth of benefits per year, split as:
 - o £34.7m for mental health benefits or £13 per visit
 - o £18.8m for physical health benefits or £7 per visit
 - o £22.2m for amenity value (quantifying the preference to live near a green space and the resultant increase on property prices)
- 3.21 To better understand the evidence of the benefit of parks on health and wellbeing, a Rapid Evidence Review took place which highlighted some important evidence:
- Spending at least 2 hours a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing
 - Residents of areas with a lot of greenery (including parks, trees, street planting, etc.,) are 40% less likely to be overweight or obese.
 - Each additional use of any natural environment per week is associated with 6% lower risk of poor mental health.
 - A 2013 study found that regular use of natural environments for physical activity can cut the risk of suffering poor mental health by half.
- 3.22 The strategy is underpinned set of performance measures (see appendix 4) that will be used to track the progress we are making in achieving the aims of the overall strategy.

3.23 Our communities are characterised by inequalities in health and in access to green space which affect the wellbeing and life chances of particular demographic groups and those living in specific neighbourhoods. Some of these inequalities have become more stark nationwide as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This strategy will maximise the contribution of parks to people's health and wellbeing by preventing ill health in the first place and helping people with health problems as early as possible (also known as "early intervention" in health and care). Based on research evidence and local insight, we will focus our efforts to address the inequalities in health experienced by priority groups and where we believe parks and green spaces have a beneficial role to play.

Parks will help in improving social cohesion, reducing social isolation, increasing physical activity, improving mental health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.

Our priority groups are:

- People living in the most deprived circumstances (identified by small area, as per the Index of Multiple Deprivation).
- People from Black, Asian and other ethnic groups.
- Women and girls.
- People with disabilities, including learning disabilities and/or physical disabilities.

We will also further investigate physical and social barriers to people of different ages enjoying our parks, such as older people or teenagers.

The Parks for Health "targeted offer" specifically aims to challenge health inequalities. It includes: • Working closely with the voluntary and community sector and with communities themselves in order to understand their needs and preferences in designing our parks and supporting activities for wellbeing in parks. • Our programme of green social prescribing, developed and delivered in partnership with the NHS and social care.

Parks are an important means of breaking the link between deprivation and poor health. Parks are an important element of healthy cities that can benefit everyone, but we know their use, accessibility and recognition is not consistent across communities. Through this strategy we want to address this inequality and help ensure the benefits of parks reach those most in need. A report by Friends of the Earth set out the inequality of access to green spaces across the country, noting a clear correlation between access and ethnicity and green space deprivation and income. In the corresponding assessment, Islington was listed as the 8th highest authority in England in terms of the number of green-space deprived neighbourhoods.

3.24 The Parks for Health Strategy also supports the aims and objectives of a number of wider council strategies which include:

- Islington's council-wide strategic plan (2021) Islington Together: For a More Equal Future unites the environment and wellbeing in a "Cleaner, greener, healthier borough" strategic priority and delivery programme which explicitly links the climate emergency and health inequalities.
- Challenging Inequality Our Plan to Create a Fairer, More Equal Islington (March 2021):

The Challenging Inequality plan sets out Islington's long-term ambition to be more radical and take decisive action to achieve fairness and equality across the borough. It includes a commitment to prioritise communities disproportionately affected by Covid-19 through targeted Healthy Parks work.

- In November 2020 the council set out its Vision 2030 strategy to reach net zero, which includes plans for buildings, transport, sustainable and affordable energy supply, green economy and planning, and natural environment and waste.
- The Strategy will support the Council's ambitions around early intervention and prevention and form part of the Bright Islington offer.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial implications:

The strategy does not have any direct financial implications. The Greenspace Investment Programme details significant funding allocations from section 106, local Community Infrastructure Levy, external and council resources. Further additional funding requirements would need to be considered as part of the Medium-Term financial planning process.

The Council has a capital programme of over £6,000,000 that is funding improvements to our parks and open spaces, helping ensure the best quality spaces are provided. The Council also spend over £5,500,000 million each year managing and maintaining the 122 parks and open spaces in Islington.

4.2 Legal Implications:

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. Legal advice and support will be provided, as required, in the implementation of the recommendations.

4.3 Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

There will be some environmental implications related to the increased investment in the parks – particularly use of materials. However, the aim of the strategy is to increase the numbers of people using parks and green spaces responsibly. While the increased numbers are likely to cause more wear and tear on the spaces, but this will be mitigated by increasing the level of community volunteering (and the quality of the volunteering), improving the quality of the spaces themselves through better maintenance. The Green Space Investment Plan will also help focus investment to improve biodiversity and in areas of deficiency of access to nature further improving the environmental benefits these spaces bring to the local community. Infrastructure improvements will also focus on green technology such as LED lighting, air source heat pumps and green roofs (where possible).

4.4 Equalities Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and no equalities issues were identified with this strategy.

One of the key goals of the strategy is to provide more opportunities for the community to realise the health and wellbeing benefits that parks and greenspace offer. While the strategy aims to provide access to quality spaces for the whole community, it also acknowledges that our communities are characterised by inequalities in health and in access to green space which affect the wellbeing and life chances of particular demographic groups and those living in specific neighbourhoods. Some of these inequalities have become more stark nationwide because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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- People from Black, Asian, and other ethnic groups.
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- People with disabilities, including learning disabilities and/or physical disabilities.

By focusing on these priority groups and by ensuring that we provide a quality offer to all residents, this strategy should significantly improve the equality of opportunity for all.

5. Conclusion and reason for recommendations

- 5.1 Our Parks for Health Strategy is central to meeting our commitments to reduce health inequalities as well as improve health and wellbeing overall. It is an important feature of our post-Covid-19 recovery and renewal plans and supports the London Recovery Programme's aims to narrow inequalities and accelerate delivery of a cleaner, greener London.
- 5.2 This report recommends the adoption of the new Parks for Health Strategy.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Parks for Health Strategy
- Appendix 2 – LBI PFH Delivery Plan
- Appendix 3 – EQIA Screening Tool
- Appendix 4 - PfH Outcome Measures for Overall Strategy

Background papers: none

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



Executive Member for Environment and
Transport

Date 4.4.22



Executive Member for Health and Social Care

Date 4.4.22

Report Author: Barry Emmerson – Head of Parks

Tel: 020 7527 3762

Email: barry.emmerson@islington.gov.uk

Financial Implications Author: Steve Abbott

Email: steve.abbott@islington.gov.uk

Legal Implications Author: Peter Fehler

Email: peter.fehler@islington.gov.uk