

Open Spaces Strategy for London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Consultation Summary

Introduction

Over one third of the area of the London Borough of Richmond is open space. Some of these areas are world renowned, for example Richmond Park National Nature Reserve, Kew Gardens and the River Thames, linked by an extensive network of smaller open spaces and green routes which all add to the special landscape heritage of the Borough. The open spaces add significantly to the quality of life enjoyed by people who live or work here as well as the large numbers of people who visit the Borough. This Draft Open Spaces Strategy was developed by the Council in consultation with key stakeholders including representatives of the major open space providers. We have set out a joint vision for preserving, managing and enhancing open spaces for local people and visitors alike. This is your opportunity to let us know what you think and we would be delighted to receive your ideas and suggestions.

What is an Open Space Strategy?

An Open Space Strategy is designed to set local standards based on assessments of need, demographic and cultural changes and audits of existing open spaces. It is the basis for redressing quantitative and qualitative deficiencies through the planning process and recommends strategies and standards for inclusion in the Unitary Development Plan.

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Open Spaces Strategy aims to set out a clear vision and priorities for the provision and management of open spaces in the Borough. The primary goals are:

- Establishing and demonstrating a clear understanding of the existing amount, type, distribution, quality and condition of the Borough's open space;
- To understand of the needs of communities and stakeholders with regard to open space;
- To produce principles and guidance for the future use of open space;
- To recommend priorities for action to redress deficiencies, maintain standards and meet needs and demands.

Scope of the Open Spaces Strategy

The scope of the Strategy includes all open space in the Borough including: parks, gardens, woodlands, rivers and canals, civic spaces, allotments, cemeteries and disused or operational land, whether in public or private ownership. It also considers the important contribution made by sites just outside the Borough boundaries.

Development of the Open Spaces Strategy

The Strategy has been written by the Council, in partnership with the Greenspace Stakeholder Group. This group includes the main open space providers and

representatives of key customer groups including: the Royal Parks Agency; English Heritage; the National Trust; the Crown Estates; Hounslow Community Partnership; Richmond Advice and Information on Disability and other interest groups. The methodology and development of the Strategy has followed guidance set out in Planning Policy Guidance 17, government guidance which sets out a clear requirement for local authorities to audit their current open spaces against local needs and demands and provide a strategic approach to providing and managing open spaces.

The Strategy builds on the findings of the Parks and Open Spaces Best Value Review in 2001, supplemented by a comprehensive site and desk-based audit of the open space which is currently open to the public, matched against needs and demands for open space. The Strategy considers how, by working together, the Council and its partners can make the best use of the management resources available. The Strategy sets out fundamental strategies and guidance to help rectify deficiencies identified during the. Following consultation, these approaches and ideas will be refined and developed into an Action Plan.

Structure of the Strategy Document

- Introduction (summarised above)
- Policy Framework
- Audit - A comprehensive audit of the scale, quantity, function and quality of the open spaces to establish accurate information with regard to existing conditions and provision.
- Needs and Demands - An assessment of the socio-demographic make up of residents and visitors to the Borough considering the needs and preferences of the community and associated stakeholders.
- Options (Resources and Other Issues)
- Strategy - Through the collation of the information obtained from the areas above, strategies were formulated which seek to redress deficits and meet needs.
- Implementation. Following this consultation, Borough wide and area specific implementation plans will be developed.

Policy Framework

An assessment of the existing national, regional and local policy guidance including draft, un-adopted, information on the formulation of Open Space Strategies obtained from the Greater London Authority (GLA). A full list of the documents considered and a summary of their implications are included.

Audit

The Open Spaces Strategy and supporting appendices include detailed outcomes of the audit. The results are summarised on Area Analysis Maps of 9 areas. The Open Spaces Strategy Audit Report and Appendices are available in local reference libraries and on the Richmond Council Website.

Quantity, Distribution and Function of Open Space

With well over 2000 hectares of open space, of which approximately one quarter is managed by the Council, the London Borough of Richmond is fortunate to have a

generous overall supply of open space. Although the open space is not evenly distributed, at 13 hectares per 1000 population this more than five times the National Playing Field Association's recommendation of 6 acres (2.48 hectares) per 1000 population. The quality of the open spaces is generally high, however the infrastructure is beginning to deteriorate and will require substantial investment if that quality is to be maintained and health and safety is not to be compromised.

The size, distribution, and primary function of the open spaces has been mapped. This includes open space functions including parks, gardens and semi-natural open spaces, sports facilities, cemeteries and allotment sites. For ease of future analysis, it would be helpful to capture and store this information on a Geographical Information System (GIS).

Quality and Condition of Open Space

The quality of many of the open spaces is high with several being of sufficient landscape design quality and historic value to be formally registered as Historic Parks. A high proportion of the Borough is designated as Conservation Area. This inherent quality is very positive, however, it does mean that maintenance of these sites needs to be carefully considered and is often more expensive.

The maintenance of the landscape features, walls, paths, playgrounds, pavilions and memorials has been rather neglected, historically. This is symptomatic of the decline of open spaces funding across the country. A recent survey by English Heritage revealed that there was a very considerable backlog of maintenance to the country's historic features: 'State of the Historic Environment 2002' English Heritage. In Richmond Council's open spaces alone this backlog of repairs exceeds £4 million.

An audit has been undertaken which assess the quality and condition of each open space. The results are shown on the Area Analysis Maps.

Needs and Demands – The Community Perspective

Analysis of the existing supply and quality of open space against the projected need for open space established a number of key issues for resolution, as well as gaps in provision. These issues and gaps are the focus of this strategy. The two main analytical tools used to assist this process were consideration of the socio-demographic profile and a general appreciation of the changing nature of recreational needs.

Socio-demographic Profile

The 2001 Census data reveals that 33% of the households have children and the Borough has the 9th highest proportion in Greater London of children under 5 years old. 14% of the population are over 65 and the Borough has the 4th highest proportion of over 85s in Greater London. 23% of households have one or more persons with a limiting, long-term illness. The Borough clearly needs to consider the accessibility issues presented by high numbers of carers of small children and high numbers of older people. 9% of the Borough's population fall into the non- white category, within which there is a considerable range of different backgrounds. A more detailed level of analysis will be completed following receipt of ward level data (anticipated Summer 2003.) The Borough has the 3rd lowest crime rate in London, but fear of crime remains a significant concern.

A Changing Society

The Strategy has taken into account a rapidly evolving change in lifestyles, shifting demographics, shrinking household composition, ethnic diversification and technological advances requiring the Open Space Strategy to be as much about flexibility of function as it is about provision and maintenance. More leisure time, higher aspirations, greater choice in leisure activities leading to 'competing' demands and the need for places which foster social interactions require a creative response to open space planning and provision by those responsible for the Borough's open spaces to ensure that such changes are acknowledged, responded to and celebrated.

Surveyed residents share a common set of basic requirements for their parks and open spaces. These include parks and open spaces that are:

- Clean – without litter, dog mess or graffiti
- Safe – preferably with a visible staff presence
- Green – restful, rich in wildlife
- Varied – with activities and events and a variety of local choices
- Welcoming - well maintained, with good signage and infrastructure

Key Issues

Twelve key issues were identified following the Audit, as follows:

1. Areas with limited access to open space
2. Resources are heavily constrained for repair and maintenance of infrastructure (e.g paths, pavilions, sports pitches and historic features)
3. Ensuring that the special character and value of the Borough's open spaces is maintained and enhanced.
4. Providing safe welcoming open spaces and designing out crime and fear of crime.
5. The need to improve the accessibility of open spaces
6. The need to provide safe children's playgrounds.
7. The need to provide adequate sports facilities
8. The need to support and develop community interest and involvement in open spaces
9. Event management
10. Concern about dog behaviour and dog fouling
11. Long term provision of burial capacity
12. Provision of allotment capacity to meet local needs

Each of these issues is considered in the section called 'Key Issues and Proposed Approach' in the light of the resources which are currently available.

Resources

The Borough has a relatively large amount of open space per capita compared to the national average. This requires substantial capital and revenue funding purely to maintain them at their current standard let alone implement significant improvements and adaptations. Improved revenue and capital support from the Government, and creative financing methods including partnering are required to help enable improved

maintenance and open space enhancements to be implemented. The full Audit Report addresses this issue in more depth.

Revenue Funding

The Council has a relatively low spending level per hectare of open space when compared to other outer London Boroughs. The Parks and Open Spaces Service has, in common with similar services around the country, been subject to reductions in budget allocation although there has been a recent budget increase to allow increased standards of maintenance and additional restoration of park keepers to two Key Parks.

Capital funding

Reduction in revenue funding has been coupled with sustained lack of capital investment which is starting to show in the condition of the parks and open spaces and, in particular, in the infrastructure including: buildings, paths, walls, fences, historic features and playground equipment.

This situation is unlikely to alter in the current financial climate and current resources have therefore been reviewed and opportunities for external funding opportunities explored. Funding approaches and options considered include:

- Planning expenditure to maximise benefit through partnership
- Partnership working to secure benefits often available through community groups
- Local business sponsorship
- Ensuring match funding and 'pump priming' funding is available
- Giving priority to projects where external funding is available
- Maximising the use of volunteers
- Transport for London (TfL) funding for maintenance and off road routes between open spaces
- Section 106 agreements secured for local improvements as part of planning processed
- Increasing income through increased fees and charges
- Private Finance Initiative – securing benefits in e.g. sports facility improvements
- Setting up a Parks Endowment Fund to receive monies from any of the above, including possible disposal of open land of less value to 'endow' the remaining parks and open spaces.

All of the above are assessed in more depth in the full Open Spaces Strategy Audit Report.

Strategic Approach

The approach has been derived by considering the key issues which arose from the Audit. This included: current provision; an assessment of current needs and demands for open space; population and social trends; future opportunities. The overall approach has had to take account of prevailing financial constraints.

This has led to the development of a Vision, Strategic Objectives and 10 Key Principles.

A Vision for the Richmond upon Thames' Open Spaces

“To provide access to an exciting range of open space experiences for all.”

Our 4 Core Strategic Objectives

- Partnership towards civic pride
- Quality of design and management
- Safety and security
- Variety and enjoyment

Our 10 Key Principles

Stewardship

1. Protect visual and physical access to open land
2. Protect, enhance and promote the characteristic features of the Borough particularly the riverside, historic landscapes and features.
3. Improve and maintain infrastructure

Management and Use

4. Plan to provide for the needs of the community and visitors
5. Make the best use of public and private resources and maximise external funding
6. Work in partnership with the community and other local landscape agencies
7. Promote the use of open land for all
8. Reduce the fear of crime by providing healthy, safe environments and promoting activity

Environmental Protection

9. Maintain and enhance the Borough's biodiversity
10. Providing high quality, sustainably-managed open spaces

What Should Be Provided and Where?

Following analysis, the Strategy proposes the following standards of provision. These standards have been used in the auditing process to identify areas of deficiency/targets for action.

Type of Park/Open Space Experience/Site	Target Distance/Proposed Open Space Policy (origin of standard in brackets)
District Park/Key park with staffing	1.2Km (adopted UDP)
Public open space	400m (adopted UDP)
Equipped playground	400 m (adopted UDP)
Wildlife site	500m (adopted UDP)
Multiple sports pitch locations/events sites	Two sites (Group suggestion: Barn Elms and Old Deer Park)
Horticultural Site	One either side of Thames (Group suggestion to take account of charges at Kew Gardens)
Cemetery	Safeguard existing cemeteries and crematoria and land reserved for future burials (adopted UDP)
Allotment	Retain statutory and resist loss of non statutory where there is a demand (adopted UDP)
Schools (including private)	Encourage and promote dual use of open land facilities (adopted UDP)
Linking sites/routes	Promote use of safe, accessible routes to and between open spaces (adopted UDP/Walking Strategy)

*Unitary Development Plan (UDP). Other suggestions were made by the Best Value Review Team or the Greenspace Stakeholders Group.

Key Issues and Proposed Approach

1. Areas with limited access to open space
2. Resources are heavily constrained for repair and maintenance of infrastructure (e.g paths, pavilions, sports pitches and historic features)
3. Ensuring that the special character and value of the Borough's open spaces is maintained and enhanced
4. Providing safe welcoming open spaces and designing out crime and fear of crime.
5. The need to improve the accessibility of open spaces
6. The need to provide safe children's playgrounds.
7. The need to provide adequate sports facilities
8. The need to support and develop community interest and involvement in open spaces
9. Event management
10. Concern about dog behaviour and dog fouling
11. Long term provision of burial capacity
12. Provision of allotment capacity to meet local needs

Issue One – Areas with limited access to open space

- In order to address deficiency in District Park provision, adopt smaller multi-use local parks as Key Parks with staff and additional play equipment and other facilities.
- In terms of analysis treat the larger Royal Parks, Bushy and Richmond as Key Parks.
- Improve linking routes and signage to and from open spaces and e.g. town centres or railway stations
- Work in partnership with other open space providers including private owners and schools to provide an adequate Borough wide coverage
- Negotiate access to additional areas.
- Work towards increasing views into open areas to which physical access is limited.
- Negotiate provision of open space as part of redevelopment schemes and seek to provide amenity, informal open areas if the opportunity arises.

Issue Two - Ensuring that the special character and biodiversity value of the Borough's open spaces is maintained and enhanced.

- Celebrate and increase awareness of the natural, historic and landscape heritage of the Borough.
- Support the community to develop positive local partnerships to draw on additional resources to enhance their own areas.
- Value the economic benefits of these special areas to attract businesses and tourists to the Borough.
- Invest in areas in order to maintain their unique character.
- Maintain sites to protect, manage and enhance their biodiversity and develop Local Biodiversity Action Plans in consultation with the community.
- Maintain the potential of these areas as an invaluable local educational resource.

Issue Three – Resources are heavily constrained for repair and maintenance of infrastructure (e.g paths, pavilions, sports pitches and historic features)

- Maximise effective use of resources by planned rather than reactive approach
- Explore flexible alternatives for developing additional resource streams including working in partnership with the community to seek external funding using the Council's assets.
- Identify match funding allocation to enable external grant aid to be sought
- Develop a Parks Endowment Fund as a way of funding these initiatives.

Issue Four – Providing safe welcoming open spaces and designing out crime and fear of crime.

- Maximise the number of sites with a visible staff presence – called Key sites – shown with a 'Person' symbol on the Borough plan.
- Improve the first impression of sites by improving entrances, signage, graffiti etc.
- Develop a positive approach to provision and management of activities for young people by promoting greater appropriate use of open spaces through events and activities throughout the opening hours.
- Developing sporting opportunities
- 'Design out' the potential for crime, to reduce fear of crime.

Issue Five – the need to improve the accessibility of open spaces

- Consider accessibility in its widest sense – for disabled visitors, the elderly, carers with children, people without cars, people with low disposable income etc.
- Develop a fully costed action plan from the completed accessibility audits
- Implement the improvement programme using recent £100K allocation
- Take advantage of partnerships with clubs and societies to ensure that all alterations to sites or building include accessibility improvements to BS 8300 and add e.g. baby changing facilities.
- Ensure new designs/improvements are assessed to ensure that specifications are appropriate by a trained/expert advisor
- Ensure that off and on site information includes advice about levels of accessibility, toilets, nearest public transport connections etc.
- Review the provision of signage and information to ensure that it is at a suitable height, designed to be easily legible etc according to advice from the Sign Design Guide - a guide to inclusive signing published by RNIB.

Issue Six – The need to provide safe children's playgrounds.

- Work with other open space managers to provide playgrounds which meet local needs and address gaps identified by the audit, particularly by negotiation and S.106 agreements.
- Improve access to existing play facilities including 'safer routes'
- Inspect and maintain playgrounds regularly to ensure that they meet current safety standards.
- Develop a prioritised rolling programme of reinvestment into playgrounds.
- Work with community groups to seek external funding for additional play equipment.

Issue Seven – The need to provide adequate sports facilities

- Develop the objectives of the Strategy for Sport at all levels of sports participation.
- Work in partnership with the community to enhance sporting opportunities through external funding applications
- Support local clubs and sports organisations to develop youth provision and access for all sectors of the community.

Issue Eight - The need to support and develop community interest and involvement in open spaces

- Provide a formal network to develop, support and sustain 'Friends' Groups, volunteer groups and other networks to encourage practical interest in open spaces, cemeteries and allotments
- Provide Council officers with expertise in organisational development of community organisations, who can support, train, motivate and develop local people to get involved.
- Work with community groups and organisation to make the best use of external grant and other resources for the good of their local open spaces.

Issue Nine – Event Management

- Work with other open space providers to agree a Borough wide Events Liaison Group and adopt a Borough Events Code.
- Work together with other providers to promote events and activities.
- Ensure that events are appropriate and minimise disruption to local residents.
- Reinvest income from events into the service.

Issue Ten – Concern about dog behaviour and dog fouling

- Work with other open space providers to reinforce a standard open space policy on dog management
- Promote responsible dog ownership through literature, positive events to reinforce responsible behaviour backed up by enforcement for persistent offenders.
- Provide dog free and/or dog exercise areas in suitable open spaces.

Issue Eleven – Long term provision of burial capacity

- Short term – reclaim allotment land at Twickenham Cemetery and reclaim unused burial capacity
- Medium term - explore long term initiatives to provide extra burial space and consider any legislative change and develop a burial strategy.
- Long term – Implement burial strategy.

Issue Twelve – provision of allotment capacity to meet local needs

- Promote full occupancy on all sites.
- Work in partnership with each allotment holder through encouraging Site Associations and providing support for the User Group Committee.
- Encourage environmentally friendly methods of cultivation.

Strategy into Action – Your Local Area

The Strategy includes a series of key principles and outlines broad approaches to key issues. The Borough Plan (Plan 1 attached) shows the current network of open space across the Borough. The Borough has been split into nine areas for analysis of current provision, needs and opportunities. The detailed descriptions and maps show how the principles will be applied, in practice across the Borough.

For detailed analysis maps please visit your local library.

Implementation

This Open Spaces Strategy will be subject to consultation, following which the priorities for the Strategy will be refined.

Your Feedback Please

We would appreciate your feedback on the strategic principles set out in this Consultation Summary of the Open Spaces Strategy. Details of other local areas and the full text of the Audit Report are available on the Richmond Council Website and in local libraries. www.richmond.gov.uk/parks/openspacestrategy.

Please contact us at
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Open Spaces Strategy
Parks and Open Spaces Section
Room 213
The Civic Centre
44 York Street
Twickenham
TW1 3EX

Area based workshops will be held to develop the detailed Implementation Plans for each area. If you are interested in receiving more information about these workshops please note this in your feedback.