

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Parks Service

Parks and Open Spaces

Strategic Principles

2011

The Parks Service Vision - Making the Investment Last

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames' parks and open spaces are recognised as outstanding, and enrich the quality of life of our residents and visitors. We are proud of our achievements as leaders in the field, and are committed to maintaining and improving our existing high standards and expanding partnerships. We will explore opportunities to maximise our assets and resources, and respond and adapt to change. We will continue to lead as a service and develop new ways to deliver accessible experiences for all and make a positive contribution to the health and well-being of our residents. We will continue to seek recognition for the excellent service delivery that we provide through consultation with our users and competition for awards.

Introduction

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames has the largest area of public open space per head of population of any London Borough. LBRuT has a local and national reputation for quality and leadership in the delivery of excellent parks. The protection, improvement and management of these spaces is of primary importance to the Borough's residents, who rate the quality of their environment as a priority. The Borough has a strong 'parks culture', with parks and open spaces highly valued as the hub for local communities for activities, events, sports and relaxation. This 'parks culture' is a strong contributing factor in much of the policy and decision making within the Council.

A period of significant investment has seen the standard of parks and facilities improve to be amongst the best in the country, as recognised by a series of prestigious awards. The LBRuT Parks Service's commitment to ensuring the quality of parks and open spaces across the Borough remain at this level underpins decisions and actions proposed for the coming years.

To maintain and enhance the standards that have been achieved, a series of strategic principles by which the Parks will be managed have been developed and adopted by the Parks Service. The eight principles are:

1. The Management of Parks and Open Spaces will create a sustainable legacy for future generations.
2. The Quality of our Parks and open spaces will continue to define LBRuT.
3. Parks and Open spaces will enrich the life, health and wellbeing of residents and visitors.
4. Richmond will lead in the delivery of excellent parks and open spaces services.
5. Richmond's Parks will offer positive experiences to all visitors.
6. Through innovation, the future development of the parks will be ensured.

7. Increased community participation will be encouraged and supported.
8. The Parks and Open Spaces within Richmond will be centres of excellence and celebrated.

1 The Management of Parks and Open Spaces will create a sustainable legacy for future generations

LBRuT is committed to sustaining the high quality standards of its Parks and Open Spaces. To ensure that the legacy of excellence is maintained and enhanced the Strategic Principles outlined in this document have been developed in conjunction with users and stakeholders. Through aligning all service delivery decisions to the Strategic Principles, the following commitments will be achieved:

Parks and Open Spaces will provide:

- Safe, welcoming, accessible and stimulating spaces for all our residents and visitors
- Opportunities to enhance the health, well-being and quality of life of our residents
- Facilities for sport and opportunities to develop a more healthy and active lifestyle
- Facilities for play and education for children and young people
- Venues to celebrate the rich and diverse culture of the Borough

The Parks Service will:

- Strive to maintain and develop our position as leaders in the quality of service and innovation
- Ensure that parks remain at the heart of policy and decision making in the Borough
- Maximise opportunities to make the best use of our resources through training, partnerships and working with the local community
- Publicise and promote parks and open spaces and the opportunities offered
- Support Friends and Community Groups to increase local participation in parks
- Promote and lead in sustainable investment in parks and open spaces

Management of Parks and Open Spaces will:

- Sustain high standards, diversity and quality throughout the Borough
- Provide access to a rich and diverse range of wildlife habitats and contribute to the biodiversity of the Capital
- Preserve and interpret the rich heritage of the Borough
- Involve the local community at all stages

2 Parks and open spaces will continue to define LBrut

Our Parks and Open Spaces Network

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is rich in the provision of its parks and open spaces. More than one third of the Borough is open space amounting to a total area of over 2,000 hectares. The Council Parks Service is directly responsible for the management of over 25% of this land. The remainder is made up of some of our most iconic parks and landscapes including the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Richmond Park, the Thames Path and Marble Hill Park. This network of parks and open spaces is one of the defining characteristics of the Borough and reflects the changing heritage of our community.

The importance of parks and open spaces to our residents

Our customer satisfaction surveys tell us that parks and open spaces contribute enormously to the quality of life of our residents and are the most valued feature by those who live and work in the Borough.

Between 2005 and 2010 satisfaction levels for parks and open spaces rose from 60% in 2005 to 90% in 2010. This rise coincided with a period of significant investment through our Parks Improvement Programme (PIP).

The value placed on our parks and open spaces is embodied in the number and strength of Friends and other Community Groups directly involved in the management of their parks and open spaces.

Why are parks and open spaces valued?

First and foremost our network of parks and open spaces provide freely accessible green space to all members of the community across the Borough. They contribute to the health and well-being of our residents providing high quality, accessible facilities for all and opportunities to adopt a more active lifestyle. Parks also offer peace and tranquillity and an opportunity to escape from the noise and stress of every day life.

Parks and open spaces reflect the cultural and natural heritage of our Borough and also provide wildlife habitat, contribute to carbon reduction and flood water management and form green transport links.

Our commitment to Parks and Open Spaces

We are committed to sustaining the high standards we have achieved over the years, and will ensure that our high quality parks and open spaces continue to be one of the defining characteristics of our Borough and an asset for all our residents and visitors to enjoy.

3 Parks and Opens spaces enrich the life, health and wellbeing of residents and visitors.

LBRut's parks provide safe, accessible and stimulating spaces which are inviting to users and encourage participation. As a service, we will listen to our residents to ensure our parks continue to provide facilities for all. From responses to surveys and our consultation with Friends Groups the following have emerged as key themes and priorities in the management of our parks and open spaces.

Play provides enjoyment and is recognised as an important learning tool for young children. We will maintain the significant investment we have made in our play areas and explore opportunities to introduce new resources. Our priorities for play are set out in the Council's Play Strategy: <http://cabnet.richmond.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=13708>

Sport brings many people into our parks and we will ensure that we continue to provide a range of high quality sports facilities to meet the needs of all members of the community. Our commitment to sport is supported by the Council's Sports Strategy: <http://cabnet.richmond.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=16054>

We understand the social impact of our parks, contributing to community cohesion. Our parks and open spaces will provide a place for quiet relaxation, meeting friends and family days out.

The story of the development of many of our parks and spaces reveals a rich heritage and provides a fascinating insight into the history of the Borough. In addition to their natural and built heritage, many parks and open spaces have strong cultural associations or are associated with important historic events. We will celebrate this heritage through facilitating events and activities, which encourage inter-generational and cross-community involvement, interpretation and support to schools and other community groups.

Parks offer access to a rich and diverse range of wildlife habitats including woodlands, meadows, rivers and wetlands. Contact with nature enhances enjoyment, provides variety, colour and interest and opportunities for active community involvement through learning, volunteering and training. We will ensure wildlife habitats are managed and improved, working in partnership with local and regional wildlife groups. The Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) describes the priority habitats and species across the Borough.

http://www.richmond.gov.uk/richmond_biodiversity_action_plan2-2.pdf

Our allotments are increasingly popular. There are 24 allotment sites across the Borough and all have waiting lists. Our Allotments Strategy sets out our aims to ensure a sustainable future for allotments and to ensure an effective ongoing partnership with the plot holders.

http://www.richmond.gov.uk/allotment_strategy_2010-2015.pdf

4 Richmond will lead in the delivery of excellent parks and open spaces services

The Parks Improvement Programme

The Parks Improvement Programme (PIP) provided investment of £3.85million over a five year period (2005 to 2010) and has created a legacy of excellent parks. The PIP enabled us to deliver capital improvements in all parks and open spaces across the Borough.

These ranged from substantial investment in play to improvements in path surfacing and signage and significant programmes focussed on sports and pavilions. Protection of this investment lies at the heart of our priorities for the management of our parks and open spaces.

Excellence in Service Delivery

We consider one of the strengths of our Parks Service to be the quality and dedication of our staff. Our Parks Service is recognised for its leadership and innovation by the industry. We recognise that our knowledge and experience are assets that others may wish to benefit from. We will use our reputation in the field of parks management to our advantage and develop opportunities to raise funds for our Parks through sharing our expertise. We recognise the benefits of investing in the professional development of our staff, and will continue to treat this as a priority, encouraging and supporting staff to continue to

develop and learn.

We will seek opportunities to work in partnership or to commission others to provide added value, skills and expertise which are complimentary to those of our in house team. We will also promote our skills and the lessons we have learned to other departments in the Council and organisations in the wider community.

Partnerships and Added Value

We will maximise opportunities to make the best use of our resources. Above all, we will ensure our high standards are maintained, while delivering a sustainable, quality, cost effective service. We will provide value for money by working with and providing support to other Council services and cross Borough working, bringing added value to new schemes and initiatives.

Working with the Community

Our residents provide the main benchmark against which we judge our performance and are our most valued partners in the management of our parks and open spaces. Building on our already strong working relationship with our local community is one of the key commitments throughout this strategy.

5 Richmond's Parks and Open Spaces will offer positive experiences to all visitors.

A positive experience for visitors

First impressions are essential to the quality of experience for visitors to our parks. We recognise the importance of welcoming entrances, providing clear, useful information and a quality of appearance and care throughout, which will invite visitors into our parks and encourage responsible use of the facilities. Our parks will be places where people feel safe and secure. Cleanliness and the control of litter and dog mess are key to these first impressions.

Trees are one of the defining features of the historic landscape of the Borough and the management of trees is important to the attractiveness and safety of our parks and open spaces. In Richmond our streets and parks benefit from a high number of trees, and the importance of attractive and well managed trees is a topic that our users raise with us regularly. We are committed to ensuring that our trees remain a significant visual and environmental asset to the Borough.

Buildings and Facilities

Cafes and other catering facilities often provide a focal point and

meeting place for park users. We will seek new opportunities to create these vital community hubs within our parks.

We will improve and maintain our Pavilions both for sports use and also for new uses such as cafes and community spaces. By bringing a pavilion back into use through a community partnership or social enterprise, we gain a community asset, and reduce maintenance costs. We will actively seek new uses for our pavilions and other built assets, working with the community and other organisations to provide facilities that contribute to the life of the park.

Promoting our Parks

We recognise the importance of publicity and promotion to ensure that all residents are aware of the facilities in the Borough and everyone benefits from our parks and open spaces.

We will ensure that information on the benefits of parks and celebrating our achievements is available to local press and through the parks website. We will work with Friends and Community Groups to develop and manage our Parks and Open Spaces webpages. Priorities will be to ensure that the website is kept up to date and to develop links to our Friends and Community Groups and to others involved in the management of our parks and open spaces.

6 Through innovation, the future development of the parks will be ensured.

Partnerships and Social Enterprise

We will work closely with partner organisations and support social enterprise in the management of all parks and open spaces across the Borough. The success of the Crane Valley Park in securing funding through the “Help a London Park” was the result of cross Borough working and the overwhelming support of the local community. We have a track record of successful partnership projects. Our Play Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plans were delivered by partnerships involving local and national bodies, local partners and different Borough departments.

Our work with partners will be based on clear agreements which define responsibilities and commitments in order to ensure that project outcomes are achieved, and the quality of our parks remains excellent.

Parks and Events

Events provide an opportunity to celebrate our parks and attract new audiences. In planning events we will be sensitive to the needs of the local communities and ensure that we minimise the impact on the parks which we are working to preserve and improve.

We will identify commercial opportunities through new events and be professional in how their presence is managed in our open spaces. Our Events Strategy also addresses other public events in the Borough. Funds raised through events will be re-invested in our Parks and Open Spaces.

Planning for Parks

Development can provide opportunities for the creation of new open space and contributions to the enhancement or management of nearby existing open space. We will work with our colleagues in Planning to protect the character and quality of our existing open spaces, and to ensure that opportunities to secure new investment are delivered and targeted in areas where the need is greatest.

Grants and Income Generation

We have been successful in obtaining grant funding for a number of parks improvement projects. We are committed to exploring new opportunities to raise funds to support the investment that we have made in our Parks and Open Spaces. We will continue to work with partners, Friends and other local community groups to seek grant aid to help fund new projects.

7 Increased community participation will be encouraged and supported.

Friends and Community Groups Network

Friends and other community groups are one of the greatest strengths of parks and open spaces in Richmond. The strong relationship between the Borough and Friends Groups and the level of participation by local people in parks and open spaces has been instrumental to our success.

Friends groups help support our work in managing parks and other open spaces. We would like to encourage an increase in the capacity of some of our Friends groups by enabling greater involvement at all levels in the management and maintenance of our open spaces. We understand that the membership and ability to participate will vary between groups. There are good reasons for this, as all voluntary groups are dependent on individuals. We will encourage and offer support to all our Friends groups to take a more active role.

We will encourage Friends groups to work together, to share expertise and knowledge, and become more pro-active and self-sufficient in their activities. We appreciate that to do this we need to ensure that they have sufficient support and guidance.

One source of assistance is the Richmond Environment Network (REN), an umbrella body that promotes and supports community-based environmental activities within the Borough. We will work with REN to encourage stronger links and better communication between Friends and Community Groups, schools and other local organisations.

We will build on our working relationships with other groups involved in the voluntary sector to help supervise and provide opportunities for volunteer involvement in tasks and activities. We will also work with our neighbours and other partners to enable us to provide more effective support to groups looking to take a greater lead in their parks and open spaces.

Parks for all

We will work to ensure that all residents feel welcome and comfortable using our Parks. We will develop partnerships within the community to reach out to people who are not currently using our parks and open spaces through publicity, events, activities and consultation.

We will explore opportunities to attract new audiences. Providing remote access to learn about our parks and facilities through our website and providing IT access in our parks is one option to encourage new visitors.

8 The Parks and Open Spaces of Richmond will be centres of excellence and celebrated

Maintaining Standards

We are committed to maintaining high standards across all our parks and open spaces. We understand that the quality of our Parks is reflected in the high satisfaction ratings of our residents. We will put maintaining the investment of the PIP, high maintenance and horticultural standards and continuing to invest in the quality of our parks as the top priority in everything we do.

Measuring our Achievements

The Green Flag Award is the benchmark national award for parks and green spaces in England and Wales. In recognition of our achievements, Richmond was selected to participate in the Green Flag Award trial of a Borough-wide approach. We will seek to maintain and increase the success of Parks recognised by the Green Flag Awards, as part of our commitment to community involvement and high standards of maintenance and quality parks.

The London in Bloom Awards promotes and encourages gardening,

horticulture and environmental sustainability across London. In partnership with Richmond in Bloom we have consistently achieved recognition for the Borough as a whole and in the town centre and individual park/garden categories. We will continue to seek recognition of our excellence and leadership in parks management through awards such as Green Flag and London in Bloom.

We will embrace opportunities to promote the reputation of our parks and open spaces on a national and international level, supporting major sporting events and ensuring that our Borough remains a world-class destination.

Celebrating with the Community

The support of the local community has enabled our success with Green Flag and other awards. We will create opportunities to celebrate these achievements in our parks, working with our Friends and Community Groups in organising events and activities which celebrate our parks. Celebrating our parks and open spaces with the community, will be one way by which we will maintain and develop our parks and open spaces as hubs for local events and activities.

Making the investment last

LBrut has a local, regional and national reputation for quality and leadership in the delivery of excellent parks, and the management of these spaces is of primary importance to the Borough's residents. A period of significant investment has seen the standard of parks and facilities improve to be amongst the best in the country. The Principles outlined in this document provide the foundation guiding the management and maintenance of parks and open spaces in the future. LBrut's strong 'Parks Culture' and the services' motivation to continue to be leaders in the field will ensure the future success of parks, through innovation in delivering value for money services, and exploring new ways of working.