

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Parks Service

## **Parks and Open Spaces**

### **Strategic Principles**

2024

## ***The Parks Service Vision – Creating a Sustainable Legacy***

*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 we will 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 remains at this level will continue to underpin decisions and actions proposed for the coming years.

To maintain and enhance the standards achieved, eight strategic principles for park management were adopted in 2011 and have guided the Parks Service since. These have been reviewed and revised in 2024 to ensure they remain aligned to our community's priorities.

The eight revised principles are:

1. Our parks and open space management will have biodiversity, climate change and sustainability at the forefront.
2. Community participation with our Friends and Community Groups will continue to be encouraged and supported.
3. Our parks will promote active, healthy living and social inclusion for people of all ages and abilities.
4. The management of Parks and Open Spaces will create a sustainable legacy for future generations.
5. The quality of our Parks and open spaces will continue to define LBRuT.
6. Richmond will lead in the delivery of excellent parks and open spaces services.
7. Through innovation, the future development of the parks will be ensured.
8. Richmond's Parks will offer positive experiences to all visi

## ***1 Our parks and open space management will have biodiversity, climate change and sustainability at the forefront.***

### *Our commitment*

The quality of Richmond upon Thames' environment and how it is managed is of paramount importance to our residents, visitors and to the wildlife that depends on the diverse habitats found in the borough. We will create biodiverse, climate-adapted spaces for people and wildlife. The Council will also maximise its contribution to tackling climate and nature emergencies.

### *Helping nature to recover*

The Parks Service will play a leading role in the Richmond Biodiversity Partnership, delivering the [Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan](#) (BAP) and creating the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the borough and London. The Council will ensure its conservation sites are exemplars in terms of management and monitoring, will advocate for improvement of other sites in the borough and collaborate with neighboring authorities in cross-borough enhancements. Biodiversity Net Gain will be thoroughly implemented to ensure developments produce measurable improvements for nature.

On a practical level, we will:

- Conserve Richmond's priority habitats and protected species.
- Bring biodiversity into all the borough's green spaces.
- Restore rivers and their wildlife.
- Manage invasive non-native species.
- Gather ecological information to inform decision-making.
- Encourage local people to respect nature, especially through the network of Friends groups and other community organisations.

### *Adapting to climate change*

We will safeguard and enhance the biodiversity and ecology of our green spaces, and facilitate connective networks of green infrastructure, to improve resilience against the negative impacts of climate change. We will maintain our street and park trees and increase their number, to maximise their environmental benefits.

### *Managing our parks sustainably*

We are committed to maintaining our open spaces as centres of excellence for sustainable management, reducing the environmental impact of our operations. We will continue to increase our use of alternatives to fossil fuel powered equipment and vehicles, maximise re-use of our own green waste and reduce our use of chemicals as per our [Integrate Pest Management](#).

***2 Community participation with our Friends and Community Groups will continue to 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 in 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 Habitats and Heritage (H&H), an umbrella body that promotes and supports community-based activities for the natural and historic environment in south and west London. We will

work with H&H to encourage stronger links, better communication between Friends and Community groups and other local organisations and seeking partnerships for cross boundary working.

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 explore opportunities to attract new audiences and will develop partnerships within the community to reach out to people who are not currently using our parks and open spaces. 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. This work is bolstered by the [Friendly Parks for All Project](#).

### ***3 Our parks will promote active, healthy living and social inclusion for people of all ages and abilities.***

LBRuT's parks provide safe, accessible and stimulating spaces which are welcoming to all 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.

#### *Keeping safe in parks 2024*

This statement is a revision of the Personal Safety in Parks Policy. We have set out what we do to keep you safe, how you can keep yourself and others safe and how to keep wildlife safe when using our parks.

#### *A meeting place for the community*

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

#### *Removing barriers to create Friendly Parks for All*

The service is working closely with partners to understand the barriers that prevent some groups of residents from making the most of the borough's open spaces. We will improve the impact, reach and quality of parks and the activities we run through our [Friendly Parks for All](#) model, to encourage the engagement of different community audiences through publicity, events, activities and consultation.

#### *Play and sport*

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.

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 [Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy](#).

#### *Support public health strategies*

The service will contribute to the borough's public health prevention and promotion strategies. Alongside partners we will identify opportunities to tackle health inequalities and support community mental health, developing targeted activities and facilities that contribute to the wider public health agenda, including accessible cycling in parks, engaging young people and providing outdoor gyms.

#### *Our shared Heritage*

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.

*Allotments*

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.

#### ***4 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 healthier and more 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

- Adopt the most efficient and effective ways to deliver services and generate income, for financial sustainability
- 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
- Work in partnership with other open space managers in the borough and in neighbouring boroughs.

##### *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



## ***5 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.

Since 2005, satisfaction levels for parks and open spaces have risen from 60% to 93% in 2023. This rise has coincided with a period of significant investment through our Parks Improvement Program (PIP) and other capital enhancements.

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 provides 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 physically active lifestyle. Parks also offer peace and tranquility and an opportunity to escape from the noise and stress of everyday 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 and satisfaction levels that 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.

## ***6 Richmond will lead in and celebrate the delivery of excellent parks and open spaces services***

### *Investment in our parks*

Since 2005, the Council has invested several million pounds in park improvements, creating a legacy of excellent parks. Every park and open space across the Borough have seen investment, ranging from enhanced children's play to improvements in path surfacing and signage, and significant programmes focused 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 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.

### *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 capital investment made and our high maintenance and horticultural standards as the top priority in everything we do, whilst also continuing to invest in the quality of our parks for the future.

### *Partnerships and Added Value*

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. We will work with other open space managers in Richmond and across boundaries with neighbouring boroughs.

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 and Celebrating 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.

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.

#### *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.

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.

***7 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 enterprises in the management of all parks and open spaces across the Borough.

We have a track record of successful partnership projects. Much of our success in achieving significant external grant funding and delivering projects in recent years has been due to the support of local community groups and cross-borough working. 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 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

## ***8 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.

### *Keeping our parks safe*

Our parks will be safe spaces for all people. Equipment and facilities will be well-maintained and, in the safest borough in London, personal security is still a high priority. We will work with the police and community groups to ensure safety is designed into our parks and that anti-social behaviour is tackled effectively.

### *Our trees*

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. They are also crucial assets in adapting to a changing climate and protecting people in the borough from environmental extremes, providing shade and cooler temperatures through heatwaves. We are committed to ensuring that our trees remain a significant visual and environmental asset to the Borough and to maximising these benefits through tree planting.

### *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.

### **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 Strategic 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.