Parks and Open Spaces
Our Strategy for Barnet 2016-26
Appendixes to Strategy Document
Appendix N

Comments
Dear Ms Miller

Parks & Open Spaces Consultation

I am grateful for the opportunity to comment on the consultation by Barnet Council on the borough’s parks and open spaces.

I believe that parks and open spaces should be among the highest priorities for the Council. They contribute significantly to the quality of life of local residents. They are a key reason why people move to Barnet. With the expected increase in population, they will become ever more important, not least because many new homes being built either have small gardens or none at all.

On page 29 of the consultation, you have set out some key themes, all of which I would support, with particular emphasis on health, education and community safety.

One of these themes is to provide better facilities in parks with the promotion of new cafes etc. I appreciate that care needs to be taken to ensure that any new enterprises in parks do not undermine the peace and enjoyment people visit parks for. However, I accept that there are some types of new business and facilities, particularly where this is connected with sporting activities, which can enhance our parks and open spaces.

I have been trying for some time to assist constituents who wish to rent the brick pavilion in Tudor Park to open a new café. Discussions have stalled but I hope that a satisfactory resolution can be reached. I believe provision of such facilities can promote community involvement in parks which is another key theme and one I would strongly support.

I would add the provision of more toilets in parks is important, particularly for families with young children. A number of my constituents have contacted me on this point.

I agree that our parks and green spaces can limit the effects of climate change and help to prevent flooding, the latter being an important point given the house building taking place in the borough. They can, of course, also play a crucial role in efforts to combat obesity and promote exercise and healthy living.

In developing the Open Spaces Strategy, I note that an assessment of the value of each park and open space has been undertaken. I am not sure whether this includes Whalebones Park in my constituency. This is an important area of green space and one which I, and many constituents, wish to see protected from any development.

Additionally, there are disused playing fields around Barnet Cricket Club and Quinta Club, both of which could be valuable assets to the community. I am concerned that the Barnet Cricket Club ground is unused and hope that some community access may be possible soon. It is also depressing that the building on the Quinta Club ground is increasingly dilapidated. I hope that this can be remedied and the building brought back into use.

I do of course recognise the financial implications of meeting the key themes of your consultation and note the six possible funding options. I note the concept of social enterprise and partnerships being set up giving local residents the chance to manage their local parks and green spaces. This is an interesting idea which is worth considering but would not be not be the way forward for all sites. It may well be that different options need to be considered for different areas.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to respond to your consultation.

Regards
Some Accessibility and Leisure needs of Visually Impaired People (and those with other disabilities too) in Public Open Spaces within the London Borough of Barnet

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Last updated on: 12th March 2016

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* Level of need: A combination of Risk Assessment (the degree of bodily harm possible x likelihood of injury) together with emotional reaction to an incident or situation (from a very pleasant to unpleasant experience to actual fear)

1 = Lowest rating, a desirable action but not essential
3 = A moderately important need
5 = Highest rating, urgently required to prevent serious physical and/or emotional harm

Introduction

About 15% of residents in any area of England are said to be disabled (Reference 4). In the London Borough of Barnet with a steadily increasing population – thought to be ca 380,000, there would be – according to this estimate – about 57,000 disabled people. Of this number, some 10,000 are Visually Impaired (Ref 5) ie their sight cannot be improved.

A number of people with actual physical disabilities or borderline cases may find experience in parks emotionally beneficial, but may need to gain access to open spaces along poorly-maintained pavements or even paths within parks. They may require transport by car. Yet without sufficient spaces for disability parking, then their access to the local park or woodland is denied them.

According to Reference (4), some 47,000 residents of L B Barnet have a moderate or serious physical disability. Furthermore, the elderly ie those over the age of 65 are an increasing proportion of society. They will experience some degree of physical shortcoming that may render them vulnerable to tripping or slipping on poorly-maintained surfaces – either on the approaches to, or within parks and other public open spaces.

This brief report attempts to include all those with Visual Impairment and also people with all other disabilities who may be excluded from public open spaces because of their infirmity requires certain features that are unfortunately either poorly-maintained or lacking from their local Public Open Spaces. We also try to include other vulnerable groups: the elderly and also expectant mothers.

From Reference (4):
“Factors underpinning health and well being for all include poor housing, unemployment, crime nd disorder and poor transport links.

Disabled people face additional barriers in several areas:
• Physical access barriers, • Policy barriers • Empowerment barriers • Attitudinal barriers

These factors mitigate against an inclusive lifestyle for disabled people, cause stresses which can lead to a worsening of any medical condition that the disabled individual may have. This can lead an individual to be more dependent on outside support than someone with a positive self image of disability”.

Abbreviations used
VIPs = Visually Impaired People (those whose sight loss is irreversible)

Parks = All Public Open Space (ie Parks, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, Nature Reserves, woodland walks etc)
Suggestions for improved-designs / maintainence of services in public parks within the London Borough of Barnet

Most VIPs are elderly (aged over 65) and suffer from varying levels of sight loss from a slight blurring to total loss of sight. An estimated 10,000 people in the borough suffer from an irreversible loss of sight. Most VIPs are elderly (aged over 65) and suffer from varying levels of sight loss from a slight blurring to total loss of sight. An estimated 10,000 people in the borough suffer from an irreversible loss of sight.

Suggestions for improved-designs / maintenence of services in public parks within the London Borough of Barnet

Most VIPs have some residual vision, but need the following

- Level areas on which to walk,
- Walking surfaces free from hazards of slipping or tripping
- Large, bold, coloured surfaces that are contrasting with the ground beyond the path edges in order to see their route and important landmark items eg paths, steps, fences, bollards, particular trees, buildings etc. Generally asphalt or concrete surfaces are in marked contrast to grass and clearly visible. However, paths through woodland may be confusing and difficult to follow and some kind of white or yellow path edging would be helpful.

1. Creating “Quiet Areas” in parks ie excluding cyclists from some footpaths and parkland areas

Although the majority of cyclists are considerate, some behave in a rude or belligerent manner – dare one mention teenagers? Aggressive behaviour - feared and dreaded by the elderly just once - can frighten and so deter the elderly from future visits to a particular park for years afterwards.

VIPs may not be able to see cyclists approaching and cyclists rarely have bells – or those which tinkle only faintly then a near-miss makes it really frightening for the elderly and especially VIPs.

Suggested remedies:
(a) A cycle-only path, side-by-side with a pedestrian-only footpath
(b) Large parks (eg Friary Park) can have “quiet areas” fenced off for VIPs, physically-disabled and elderly people, also for families with young children that can run freely and sit on the grass.
(c) These “quiet areas” would be fenced off with notices requesting that cyclists, skate boarders and dogs should not enter (except for VIPs guide dogs of course).
(d) These “quiet areas” need to be situated close to an entrance with blue-badge parking only just beyond. This would ensure that disabled people can come by car and don’t have too far to walk.
(e) Small or narrow parks can be either cycle-free or cycle-friendly
Eg The Dollis Valley walk is dissected by roads which are access points to two parts of the park. If one park on one side of the road is cycle-free and the other cycle-friendly, then both pedestrians and cyclists can benefit.

2. Slipping and Tripping

2.1 Slip hazards occur most commonly in puddles
(a) Puddles: Slipping occurs in puddles either when wind-blown leaves and plastic bags are trapped in the puddle. Both decomposing leaves or plastic bags can be very slippery.

(b) Frozen puddles in winter can be fiercely slippery and highly dangerous (eg both sides of Ballards Lane N12 has several such puddle areas north of Victoria Park, as does the asphalt path on the Glebelands Open Space. Here, spring water flows over the path set in a hollow. The problem needs to be remedied by a French drain on both sides of the path ideally connected by a drainage pipe beneath the lowest point of the path.

(c) Smooth surfaces Slipping also occurs when walking on the newer, smooth concrete paving slabs or red tiles on pavement verges (eg in West Finchley especially the Nethercourt Avenue N3 area on the approaches to the Dollis Brook walk).

2.2 Trip hazards - who is most at risk?
Everyone – but especially those with (a) sight loss, (b) old age, (c) tiredness, (d) inebriation. Any of these can lead to lack of concentration, to the feet dropping downwards at every step and in the right position to be abruptly stopped by a projecting tilted paving slab or asphalt pushed up by tree roots.

2.3 Where are the most trip hazards?
(a) Tilted paving slabs or poor-quality asphalt surfaces increase the risk of tripping or slipping on any pavement leading to a park entrance or within a park itself.

(b) Trip hazards are associated mainly with paving slabs on pavements
When paving slabs are tilted eg by vehicles being driven over them, producing an upward-projecting edge which is the trip hazard.

Roots of trees in streets frequently lift paving slabs and asphalt too, producing ridges which cause trips. Tree roots also project upwards on paths of nature trails – especially on earth footpaths (eg Coppetts Wood, Dollis Valley walk).

(c) Tripping may also occur on pavements leading to park entrances.
Any pavement route from car park or from bus stop to every park entrance may also contribute to the “Park Experience” and must be taken into account.

Trip hazards can and do lead to extremely severe injuries. See next paragraphs

2.4 Trip injuries
(a) Broken wrists, nose and dislocated shoulders are common results of tripping and falling onto a hard surface eg concrete paving slabs.

(b) Fractures and dislocations can cause severe pain and immobility for protracted periods and require expensive physiotherapy and carers to help with dressing, washing and toilet.
Costs to the NHS and to Barnet Social Services are immense.

(c) Other less common results of tripping are broken teeth and even complete blindness if the retina is shaken loose. An account with photographs are shown in Reference (2).

(c) It is surely cheaper to repair dangerous surfaces than to pay compensation claims – see next paragraph.
2.4 Costs to Barnet Council of tripping over
(a) The legally-based compensation costs for tripping over bad pavements in the years 2000 to 2005 in L B Barnet – when over one thousand people claimed compensation was in total in excess of £1M. (Reference 1) ie the total average annual compensation claims of £200,000 – for just tripping over poorly-maintained surfaces.
(b) All pavements and paths should have a slight slope eg a slight camber – enabling rain water to drain away rapidly. Some pavements have an unpleasantly steep slope, but I don’t know whether this would be hazardous to anyone eg someone with balance difficulties.
(c) Eventually asphalt paths become worn and need repair. They do last a long time. Eg: The asphalt path in Colney Hatch Lane N12 leading to Coppetts Wood LNR has not been re-surfaced for over 35 years and now in 2016, it is crumbling and needs repair.
(d) Legal size of trip hazards: The smallest ridge or gap can cause someone to trip over. But the lower limit for compensation award for a trip hazard is 25 mm (one inch). This was given in a court case and has been followed by local authorities which are held legally-responsible for trip hazards of 25 mm or more and on this award compensation. However, smaller trip hazards are unlikely to compel a local authority to pay compensation let alone offer apology (Reference (2)).

2.5 Suggested remedies for slip and trip hazards
(a) Surveys must be undertaken to locate every slip and trip hazard on all footpaths in every park.
(b) All types of slip and trip hazards must be remedied.
(c) Public input is essential to survey every park.
(d) Public input is essential to survey every pavement route: from car-parking area or from nearest bus stop to every entrance of every park.
(e) The latter must include bus stops on the other side of the bus routes (ie for the return journey home).
(f) Every publicly-reported slip and trip hazard needs to be remedied.
(g) Changing the surfaces (from concrete to asphalt) must also be considered.
(h) All pavements and paths should have a slight slope eg a slight camber – enabling rain water to drain away rapidly. Some pavements have an unpleasantly steep slope, but I don’t know whether this would be hazardous to anyone eg someone with balance difficulties.

2.6 Types of surfacing materials
(a) The preferred surfacing for most parks and most pavements is asphalt. This is a smooth flexible material that does not produce trip hazards unless poorly undertaken using inferior materials, pushed up by tree roots or erosion by frequently-parked vehicles.
(b) All paths in every park should be of asphalt and rolled flat or with a slight camber to provide a surface that is trip-free and has no hollows to collect rain water as puddles. On clay soils (in Finchley and Friern Barnet) concrete tends to crack and produce trip hazards – due to clay heaving and contracting when wet or when dry.
(c) This heave and contraction does not seem to affect asphalt pavements badly.
(d) Any tree roots that push up a pavement of any material or a path in any park will in time become a trip hazard and such elevated surfaces must be levelled out as a priority.
(e) To request information from the public on pavements from car-parking area to any entrance to the stated park
(f) To request information from the public on pavements within (say) 50 m of any entrance to the stated park
(g) To request information from the public on pavements from car-parking area to any entrance to every named park.

2.7 Urgent priorities - Summary
(a) To survey every footpath in every park
(b) To locate trip hazards and puddles

(3) Keeping to the footpath – especially on Nature reserves and wilderness trails. Here, path surfacing needs to blend with the surroundings and a variety of different materials may be used.

Sight loss may make it more difficult to follow such footpaths owing to poor colour contrast with surrounding soil / vegetation.

Suggested remedies:
(a) Dark path surfaces (eg bare earth as in woodland) may need to have a colour-contrasted line to assist VIPs. Alternatively cutting back shading vegetation may improve visibility of the footpath.
(b) Bredon Chippings rolled flat is arguably the best – it is coloured dull yellow and stands out well can be used on steep slopes, is hard-wearing and long-lasting.
(c) Hoggin is a mixture of clay, sand and gravel. It is yellow in colour and clear for sighted VIPs to follow. It should not be used on steep slopes as it washes away. It is relatively cheap.
(d) Road planings is a cheap material. It doesn’t wash away by heavy rain but is not easily seen against the earth and VIPs might wander off it.
(e) Type 1 granite chippings (NOT dust) when laid down and sprinkled with soil produces a hard, fairly level surface that blends in with the surroundings. It is stable even on slopes and will not wash away in heavy rain.

(4) Bollards and steps
The problems: Bollards made of grey concrete on a pavement of grey concrete can be difficult to see – especially in poor light conditions. Lorry drivers frequently knock them over leading to further pavement problems and council expense when replacing them. VIPs crash into them and they inflict terrible pain on the knee-cap (personal experience – Dr Oliver Natelson)

eg poorly-visible bollards occur on numerous pavements. Those between Sunny Way and the Glebelands N12 have painfully re-shaped my knees. They block vehicular access to the
small open space at Sunny Way; also bollards at one entrance to the Dollis Valley Walk and probably at other park areas too.

Poorly-visible step edges can cause tripping going up – and missed step going down. Tripping on steps up or down are extremely hazardous in view of the serious nature of the injuries and the likelihood of tripping.

Two series of steps are present at two different entrances to Coppetts Wood LNR, some steps in the grounds of Stephen’s (formerly Avenue) House), steps at East Finchley Station (not a park of course).

**Recommendations:**

- **Bollards should be tall and painted yellow.** These are easily seen and avoided.

- **Step edges should be painted white.** These are also more easily seen to avoid tripping.

**5. Branches above, steep slopes below and path dead-ends**

**5.1 Overhanging branches**

(a) The problems:
VIPs find it difficult to see and avoid branches or branches of a thorn tree or indeed spiny brambles overhanging a path.

(b) Examples
Example (i) At Victoria Park N3, along a footpath by the tennis courts, branches of a tree are at head-height across the path.

Example (ii) Occasionally, a thorn tree is planted on the pavement, its branches may hang low and brush dangerously against a face. Horsham Avenue N12

Example (iii) Brambles can “climb” up trees and fences and dangle over paths, their fierce thorns can not only tear clothes or cause scratches, but can cause serious facial injuries.

Serious examples are the two schools in Summers Lane N12 have brambles growing from the school boundary across the public footpath - occasionally at head height.

(c) Legal responsibilities
There is a legal obligation by the landowner to keep footpaths clear and free from hazards such as vegetation, the following is pertinent:

Excerpts from the **Highways Act 1980:**

*“Section 147ZA. Agreements relating to improvements for benefit of persons with mobility problems”*

*“Overhanging branches, uncut hedges”*

*“Section 154. Cutting or felling etc. trees that overhang or are a danger to roads or footpaths. Owners of private properties as well as the L B Barnet have legal responsibilities to ensure that vegetation over a road or footpath is safe.”*

See more legal details in Reference (3)

(e) Suggested remedies
- In parks, trees should be planted well away from paths, so that branches will not project above footpaths.
- On pavements, thorn trees should not be planted
- Barnet Council needs to issue notices to householders to ensure that trees and hedges in their front gardens do not project over pavements.
- Barnet Council needs to inform the public of a helpline number where such infringements occur.
- Barnet Council needs to ask its “friends of parks” to inform an officer of any vegetation overgrowing a footpath.

**5.2 Steep slopes close to a path edge**

(a) The problems
A VIP, a child or a swerving cyclist can suddenly find themselves sliding down a steep slope out of control. There are such slopes along the Dollis Brook walk – near the Windsor Park Open Space.

(b) Suggested remedy: a fence needs to be erected close to the footpath on the side with a sudden, steep drop

**5.3 The sudden termination of a path**

(a) Problems
VIPs amnd other visitors will continue beyond the footpath – and then may find themselves in difficulties.

(b) Examples
At Victoria Park N3, close to the Sensory garden for VIPs – if in winter you continue along the path – you flounder across a slippery, muddy grassed area.

(c) Suggested Remedy
Either continue the footpath until it joins to another path
Or block the end of the path with a fence or bushes
6. Sharps are harmful to Guide dogs

(a) The problems
VIPs with guide dogs may be unaware of broken glass or sharp metal on the walking surface and their guide dogs may suffer as a result

(b) Suggested remedies
“Friends of parks” need to patrol parks at least every 3 – 4 days, make a note of sharps ie nature, position and quantity. They may wish to remove the broken glass: Perhaps using protective leather gloves – sweep the glass with brush into a dustpan and pour onto several layers of newspaper, roll it up, fold over the ends and place in a carrier bag. This can be taken home and put into a wheelie bin.

Hypodermic needles – perhaps use the same method of noting the problem and then of disposal??

7. Dogs' Mess

(a) Problems
VIPs will be generally unaware of dog faecal deposits. VIPs may walk on them, their white sticks may press on them and the faeces then go into their homes, onto their floors. Canine faecal deposits are probably common in all parks.

(b) Suggested Remedy:
“Friends of” parks need to visit at least every 3 – 4 days to survey and remove dog faeces. But how? They would need a flat piece of wood to scrape it off the grass or asphalt path a newspaper to wrap it up and a carrier bag to remove it from the park. Perhaps a can of water to wash the surface.

8. Car Parking for Blue Badge holders

(a) The number of bays for car-parking for disabled people is insufficient. The number needed for any park needs to be assessed and the public consulted adequately. This may be undertaken during renewal of Blue Badges but this must not be the sole source of information.

(b) There appears to be a complete lack of blue badge parking areas for the Gibelands Nature Reserve N12, for Coppetts Wood Nature Reserve N12, probably for Friary Park N12, for the park at the former Friern Hospital site N12, probably for Victoria Park N3, possibly for the Dollis Valley walk.

(c) Disabled car parking spaces need to be really close to the park entrance and also to the “Quiet Area”.

9. Loneliness and companionship

(a) Loneliness affects many elderly people – especially when their life’s partner dies. Many seek company and could find this in parks if provision is made.

(b) There seems to be a need for quiet areas to be set aside where benches are arranged opposite, or at an acute angle, enabling people to face each other and converse. These ought to be in a “Quiet Area” near to an entrance. Other benches can be isolated along a path for those that prefer solitude.

(c) Nearby - a sensory garden should be planted especially for VIPs. For this, the natural world is supremely rewarding. All plants within reach should be touch-friendly ie devoid of thorns, stinging hairs or irritant sap. The sensory garden should be close to an entrance and not isolated – that could sadly lead to vandalism – as in Victoria Park N3. This should be be relocated near an entrance and properly planted and maintained.

Hence Holly, thorny Roses, Brambles, stinging Nettles, and spurges should not be planted where VIPs can touch them.

Planting suggestions
(a) Plants with highly-coloured foliage, stems or flowers eg large red, yellow or orange flowers (contrasting strongly with green foliage) or bearing leaves that turn red in autumn would be ideal. We are not sure whether white or blue flowers would appeal to all VIPs

(b) Plants with highly aromatic leaves or flowers eg Lavender, Rosemary and other herbs. If planted eithin a buried metal mesh might withstand theft.

(c) Plants with interesting textures eg Goat Willow, Hazel have furry leaves

10. The value of wildlife and interaction with the elderly

(f) VIPs – especially elderly tend to loneliness and seek to interact with other people as well as with their surroundings

(g) Elderly folk and especially VIPs would benefit from having a quiet area in a park where they could sit and chat to each other and also interact with birds that are attracted to them for seeds or meal worms etc. Thus some benches could be angled close together eg forming 3 sides of a square – so they could chat. Bear in mind that these may be very lonely folk and eager to face and talk to other people at nearby benches.

(c) Encouraging birds and interacting with them is a wonderful experience for all ages – especially elderly and lonely VIPs
Interactive wildlife is especially important for the elderly – often a neglected feature of their lives

But a bag of seeds (grass, sunflower etc) would attract a host of birds at their feet and give the elderly immeasurable enjoyment.

(d) I remember Fred - an old man living on his own – the birds from Coppetts Wood were his only visitors. They were his only friends
It gave him something to look forward to every day

I shall never forget that old man
and neither should any of us forget the elderly – and their love of birds pecking for seeds at their feet
You cannot better that gift of wildlife offered by a park to a lonely soul. It is very uplifting to the human spirit to help defeat depression and loneliness.

Birds are very important to everyone especially elderly and VIPs
The following proposals are to introduce hedges, thickets as well as wild grasses and wildflower meadows in parks.
These features are designed to attract birds to breed and to feed

To people sitting quietly on a park bench:

**Detailed proposals**

To encourage birds, Parks and all open spaces need both breeding and feeding sites:

**Sites for breeding birds**
Areas of Thicket – ie trees growing closely together (eg 3 metres apart and coppiced every 10 years or so on a rotational basis. branches can be being sold as bean poles or firewood to finance this management. Some thicker branches must be left to rot down and provide invertebrate habitats.

Boundary hedges, cut once a year in September -October to produce an A-shape in cross-section (ie wide base, narrowing to an apex at 1.5 to 2 metres height above ground.

Both of the above (ie thicket and hedges) are valuable for nesting ie breeding birds.

In sunny positions: Tussocky grass and tall herbs. Grassland near paths – for ease of mowing 30 – 50% of grassland and herb areas are to be mown once a year on a rotational basis in October after seed has set.

After mowing, the ground should be harrowed and raked flat.

These areas will benefit bird life enormously Hedges will benefit House Sparrows that have declined enormously over the past 20 years. It is these House Sparrows that are so beloved by Londoners as they come close to people sitting quietly to gether a few crumbs.

**11. Friends of Parks**

(a) Friends of parks are groups of local residents that like to become engaged in community work within their local park.
(b) They need insurance cover. Friends of groups often undertake litter-clearance – but lack the finance necessary to obtain insurance cover. Currently, this amounts to about £330 per annum via TCV with Zurich Insurance
(c) LB Barnet could organise and finance their insurance cover. This would greatly enhance the operations by Friends of groups. They could more frequently pick litter and recycle as appropriate, report damaged trees, flower beds, report vandalism to toilets or fences etc, report on storm damage, report on the state of footpaths within their park and also pavements leading to the park. They could undertake many duties and save LB Barnet considerable costs – provided that L B Barnet recognised their work and paid for their insurance costs.

(d) There could be minimum work agreements set by LB Barnet eg a minimum of 200 hours per annum (ie 2 hours per week for two people) as a minimum requirement to receive full insurance funding.

**(12) Toilets**

Public toilets are needed of course – but often vandalised. Nonetheless, if these are kept locked and keys issued to disabled people then hopefully, this system will reduce or even prevent vandalism of these particular toilets.

There is a nationally-available type of lock with keys issued to all local authorities and LB Barnet could use this system available to all disabled people throughout the country.

For many people, a toilet is absolutely and totally essential to their needs. To be “caugth short” in public is sufficient deterrant to prevent them going out.

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**To be sent to**
The Project Manager for the consultation is Ruth Miller, Environment, Planning and Regeneration ruth.miller@barnet.gov.uk

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**13. Bibliography**

Reference (1) “Thousands of Londoners claim £50m … for tripping over cracks in pavements”
Evening Standard 24 November 2005, page 6

LB Barnet was a average local authroity in the compensation claims made by all 33 of Londons local authorities. It paid out over £1million to over 1,000 people who tripped over badly-maintained pavements – over a 5-year period 2000 to 2005.

Reference (2)
“This is acceptable?”
“No apologies as the dodgy pavement which caused horrific injuries was not uneven enough”
Headline on front cover of a local newspaper together with photographs of Lily Kimsey aged 81 who according to the newspaper report: suffered a broken nose, facial injuries and concussion as a result of tripping over a paving slab 15 mm (over half an inch) high. Nor was compensation let alone apology was given by Enfield Council.
Enfield, Southgate and Edmonton Gazette 19 May 2005 page 1
Reference 3
Extracts from the Highways Act 1980:
Section 147ZA. Agreements relating to improvements for benefit of persons with mobility problems

Overhanging branches, uncut hedges

Section 154. Cutting or felling etc. trees that overhang or are a danger to roads or footpaths

(1) Where a hedge, tree or shrub overhangs a highway or any other road or footpath to which the public has access so as to endanger or obstruct the passage of vehicles or pedestrians, or obstructs or interferes with the view of drivers of vehicles or the light from a public lamp, or overhangs a highway so as to endanger or obstruct the passage of horse-riders, a competent authority may, by notice either to the owner of the hedge, tree or shrub or to the occupier of the land on which it is growing, require him within 14 days from the date of service of the notice so to lop or cut it as to remove the cause of the danger, obstruction or interference. For the purposes of this section the following are competent authorities-

[(a) not included.]
(b) in relation to a highway for which a local Highway Authority are the Highway Authority, that authority and also, if the highway is situated in a non-metropolitan district, the council of that district;
(c) in relation to a road or footpath that is not a highway, the local authority in whose area the road or footpath is situated;

(a) that any hedge, tree or shrub is dead, diseased, damaged, or insecurely rooted, and
(b) that by reason of its condition it, or part of it, is likely to cause danger by failing on the highway, road or footpath,

the authority may, by notice to the owner of the hedge, tree or shrub or to the occupier of the land on which it is situated, require him within 14 days from the date of service of the notice so to cut or fell it as to remove the likelihood of danger.

(3) A person aggrieved by a requirement under subsection (1) or (2) may appeal to a magistrates' court.
(4) Subject to any order made on appeal, if a person on whom a notice is served under subsection (1) or (2) above fails to comply with it within the period specified in those subsections, the authority who served the notice may carry out the work required by the notice and recover the expenses reasonably incurred by them in so doing from the person in default.

Reference (4)
Joint Strategic Needs Assessment: Barnet 2011-15

Factors underpinning health and well-being for all include poor housing, unemployment, crime and disorder and poor transport links.

• Physical accessibility barriers

Reference (5) Barnet Vision Strategy 2013 – 2016 Executive Summary

The population of visually impaired people in Barnet is expected to increase from 9,290 to 11,910 by 2020.1 RNIB Sight Loss Data Tool (Nov 2013)
THE BARNET SOCIETY

RESPONSE TO DRAFT PARKS & OPEN SPACES STRATEGY FOR BARNET 2016-26

INTRODUCTION

Barnet’s green spaces are among its nicest assets, so the Barnet Society welcomes a Borough-wide Strategy for their maintenance and enhancement over the next ten years.

Since the Society was founded 70 years ago specifically to protect the Green Belt and other designated open lands in and around Chipping Barnet – which are now possibly under as great a threat now as then, due to pressure to build and relaxation of planning legislation – we are particularly keen that the proposed Strategy in no way weakens that protection.

The Council is commendably frank about being driven by the need to save £1.7m from its parks and open spaces budget between 2015 & 2020. This adds to our concern.

We are glad, therefore, that the draft document is so methodical and thorough. In fact it is a pleasant surprise that such a big study (running to 131 pages plus four appendices, and clearly the product of much effort) should be commissioned at a time of drastic Council cuts.

CONCERNS

However, we have some important concerns centring on the following issues:

1. the reliability of the Strategy’s scoring of quality and value;
2. the detrimental implications for spaces assessed as ‘low quality, low value’;
3. unconvincing future management and funding options;
4. inadequate explanation of the investment opportunities identified;
5. the absence of detailed financial and organisational information on the various proposals; and
6. the absence of Area Action Plans, and the lack of opportunity to comment on them before they are adopted in May.

1. Scoring

We support the Green Flag criteria for assessing quality, and the broad definition of the value of parks and open spaces on page 16 of the Full Summary: a common framework is obviously necessary. But the criteria are unweighted so that, for example, heritage value scores only one point out of 18 possible (barely 5%) for value – and none for quality!

In short, the scoring gives a misleading impression of objectivity.

It cannot be right, for example, that Hadley Wood (misleadingly included under Monken Hadley Common) should be classified as low in both quality and value. It is a remarkable enclave of ancient and mainly indigenous woodland (the former Enfield Chase) miraculously preserved within London, and unique in Barnet. Not being owned by the Council, the Wood is unlikely to be affected by the Strategy; but it calls in question the reliability of the rankings.

The Strategy also takes no account of the many other Green Belt and other significant local green spaces bordering the 199 studied. For instance, the meadows along the Dollis Brook south and west of the Council-owned land around Barnet Playing Field greatly extend the natural scene, visually and environmentally, thus multiplying their value. Conversely, any development of Council-owned open space adjoining the Green Belt would have a disproportionately damaging impact on the latter.

We also note a discrepancy between the combined assessment spreadsheet and map. The latter shows Hadley Green as ‘low quality, low value’ and King George’s Fields as ‘low quality, high value’. Is this the wrong way round, or another example of fallible scoring?

2. ‘Low quality, low value’ spaces

The action proposed in Table 5.11 of the Strategy for ‘low quality, low value’ spaces is, “Enhance quality and value or consider delivering outcomes through an alternative use” (our italics). Since funds are unlikely to be found for the former, the latter causes us considerable concern.

In our area, spaces designated ‘low quality, low value’ include:

- Monken Hadley Common (& Wood)
- Byng Playing Fields
- Hadley Cricket outfield
- Hadley Highstone
- King George V Playing Fields
- Potters Lane Open Space (not listed, but on Combined Quality & Value map)
- Ravenscroft Gardens
- Rowley Green Nature Reserve
- The Tudor Golf Course

Development of most of these sites would be totally unacceptable to the Barnet Society.

Although we might not oppose some development of certain other sites, it would be extremely sensitive among local communities. We would require a convincing demonstration of the housing, educational or other need, and a thorough appraisal of alternative options, costs and benefits. Any resulting architectural and landscape schemes must be to the highest design and environmental standards, with adequate compensatory planting, amenity space and provision for wildlife.

3. Management and funding options

The Society’s views on each option for future management and funding options (page 31 of the Full Summary) are summarised as follows:

- Retaining the status quo. Though often preferable, this is clearly not realistic in most cases.
- Shared public service. The precedent of Housing Association Maintenance Contracts, with their loss of control over cost and quality, is not reassuring.
- Third Party Contract Management. Essentially long-term outsourcing which, judging from Capita’s performance in Barnet and elsewhere, is also unappealing.
- Social Enterprise/Partnerships. The idea is worthy, but it may be hard to attract sufficient volunteers (see below).
- Trusts and Foundations. Likely to work only for places of special interest.
- Precepts and Levies. In this time of budget cuts, residents may give greater priority to causes such as social care, police and libraries.
Section 4.4.5 of the Strategy considers volunteering as a potential resource, and Figure 4.9 shows High Barnet as an area where residents are very likely to volunteer to support green spaces. Our experience is that goodwill is already stretched. Recent calls for volunteers in aid of the Physic Well and Whiting's Hill have attracted negligible response.

In our view, increased engagement will only come about if the community is involved from the start, and shares both the vision and the shaping of projects. Barnet Council's record in this respect (e.g., its recent dismissal of local opposition to the sale of Brookdene Nature Reserve) gives us no grounds for optimism.

4. Investment opportunities

The Strategy identifies areas which could attract lottery or sports investment such as Hadley Green and Barnet Playing Field. These are intriguing, but it's unclear what is proposed, or how probable is the funding. The costs quoted on page 29 of the Full Summary look precise, but according to Ruth Miller (on behalf of the Council) “as yet no feasibility studies have been undertaken on specific sites”, so we wonder where the figures come from.

In the case of Hadley Green, uncertainty is compounded by Figure 9.1 – Major Investments Map, where the HLF site marked (in red) is actually King George’s Fields. Whichever is meant, £2.2m seems generous for spaces that are reasonably maintained and well-loved as they are.

A better candidate for heritage funds might be Ravenscroft Gardens. With its frame of Arts & Crafts houses, this 1880s development exemplifies the commuter garden suburb ideal pioneered by Norman Shaw only a few years earlier at Bedford Park. Its typical Victorian mix of specimen trees, formal bedding and ponds has been sadly eroded, but its horticultural significance – unique in this part of Barnet – deserves better.

For Barnet Playing Field, is the Council also hoping for Department for Education funding? After all, the proposed academy site will be a tight fit for 1,890 pupils, and access to the Playing Field would ease that – but where will that leave local residents? Or will they have reciprocal access to the academy’s extensive facilities for learning and leisure?

5. Financial and organisational details

We would want to see detailed financial and organisational details on each of the proposals, i.e., costing estimates for future years - both capital and revenue; the means/proportions by which these costing estimates will be met by the Council and/or outside funds; the proposed length of any future third party, trust, or foundation arrangements; and the means by which their effectiveness will be monitored and ensured.

6. Area Action Plans

For the Society and most Barnet residents, the crux of the Strategy is missing: Section 11, Area Action Plans. How investment in parks and open spaces will be effected across the borough – and which will be sold off or left to decline – is unstated.

Ruth Miller has stated that, “the action plans are being developed at the moment and will be made available after the consultation period with the final approved report. We will be taking all the consultation comments and incorporating them into the action plans. The final committee date is in May.”

We understand the sense of awaiting the outcome of the present consultation before drafting action plans, but the plans themselves also need proper consultation – which won’t be practicable before May. If the Area Action Plans come as a fait accompli, this consultation will be seen as largely a sham.

CONCLUSION

We accept that Chipping Barnet is fortunate in its green spaces. In principle it would be fair for more deprived, or soon-to-be-densified, parts of the Borough to get a greater share of the pot.

If some of our sites are being considered for sale or significant change of use, however, that is a completely different proposition – and one that we will oppose vigorously unless early, meaningful and ongoing consultation takes place, on both the principles and details of building and landscape design.
BARNET OPEN SPACES STRATEGY

London Wildlife Trust

London Wildlife Trust has been active in Barnet borough since we were established in 1981. We currently manage three nature reserves on behalf of the Council; a fourth was under joint management with the Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust until the early 2000s. We have an active local group of volunteers, some of whom are involved in direct land management; others with a broader remit of commenting on planning applications that might impact the borough’s ecological assets.

The Trust is committed to working in Barnet and assisting the Council where we can in the management and enhancement of its ecological assets. We will continue to seek to secure investment for Totteridge Fields and Oak Hill Woods, and are committed to developing a Living Landscape approach to our work around both nature reserves.

Barnet’s ecological importance

The current draft strategy states Barnet has a great collection of parks and open spaces and these are an important part of what makes Barnet a green borough. It is also important to stress that Barnet is one of the most ecologically rich of London’s 33 boroughs. This was described in detail in Nature Conservation in Barnet by the then London Ecology Unit in 1997, at a time when the Council had taken positive action to enhance the ecology over some of its landholdings – and adopted a suite of over 60 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) within its then Unitary Development Plan (1991). It was one of the first London boroughs to produce a green spaces management strategy, and a nature conservation strategy.

Whilst this is still recognised by many stakeholders, there is a question as to whether that strategic importance is recognised by the Council today. Barnet is one of a handful of London boroughs that has never adopted a Biodiversity Action Plan. The draft strategy – in our opinion - underplays the ecological interests of its parks and open spaces, and there is little reference to the key SINC framework that not only helps to inform planning policy, but also to guide decisions on site management and investment.

Draft open spaces strategy 2016-20

We welcome the Council’s objectives for parks and open spaces as set out in its Corporate Plan: ‘Barnet’s parks and green spaces will be amongst the best in London’.

Whilst the executive summary refers to Barnet has currently having ‘a unique blend of parks, open spaces, Green Belt and access to the countryside beyond London’, it does not refer to the ecological importance of these at a strategic level.

Within the ‘environmental benefits’ there is no reference to biodiversity let alone its strategic importance (e.g. the role of Barnet’s open spaces in supporting, for example, some of the most important neutral hay meadow communities in London – somewhat lost under section 3.4.1).

The borough’s Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation appear to be reduced to a criterion for access (e.g. Table 2.1) rather than a critical part of the framework of open spaces to be protected and managed (e.g. as covered in London Plan policy 7.19, and Barnet Core Strategy policy CST (protecting existing Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and working with our partners including the London Wildlife Trust to improve protection and enhancement of biodiversity in Barnet).

This under-appreciation of the Barnet’s ecological assets is compounded under the Value section (4); biodiversity (4.3.1) is reduced to a sub-section of Green Infrastructure, with very little about the wealth of wildlife in the borough and the role that parks and open spaces in sustaining this. There are seven sites of regional importance (including Scratchwood, the Totteridge Fields complex, Arrandene Open Space, and Hadley Green), as well as the nationally important Welsh Harp Reservoir SSSI.

Under Future challenges (8), there is no reference to changes in species or growing seasons in respect of climate change, nor of the likely incidence trends of plant pests and pathogens (e.g., oak processionary moth nests recorded in Oak Hill Park on 4th March).

We recommend that some of these points are considered in the next iteration of the Strategy.

Current Trust activities

The Trust has managed three nature reserves on behalf of Barnet Council – Totteridge Fields, Oak Hill Woods and Mill Hill Old Railway NR - since the early 1990s. We have undertaken this management with very little financial support from the Council (close to £0 in the past 5 years); we have secured funding from lottery and landfill sources, as well as Higher Level Stewardship (at Totteridge Fields), to enable us to achieve our conservation objectives as best possible on these sites. We are not convinced that we can continue this for all three sites into the medium-term, and are currently focusing on the two of highest ecological interest.

We have been assisting the Council and local stakeholders on the future of Darlands Lake, and we have been advising the Friends of Coppetts Wood as to how to sustain their management in constrained times.

We are shortly to appoint an officer at West Hendon to help ensure the biodiversity interests of the Welsh Harp SSSI are protected as part of the regeneration programme. We also wish to explore the potential of managing Rowley Green Common, as it supports one of the few tracts of Sphagnum mire within London. However, this will require resource commitments from Barnet – as a partner - if we were to proceed with this.

Inevitably the Trust’s continued active presence in Barnet is partly dependent on the resources we can secure to manage our nature reserves, as well as deliver any future time-limited projects we might wish to pursue (for example, ‘natural estates’ approaches on housing land). We recognise that the Council’s likely future budgets to maintain and improve its open space portfolio are going to lead to competition for resources and necessary prioritisation. Nevertheless, we wish to work cooperatively with the Council, especially on how we may deliver more effective benefits for biodiversity across the borough.

Options for governance

We welcome the setting out of a number of options for future management and governance of Barnet’s open spaces, and that further consultation will take place, especially in respect of the 6 options explored. We don’t hold strong views on any at this moment, other than the Council should recognise that an organisation like the Trust could operate more strategically within Barnet along the lines of a social enterprise, or as a third party contractor.

Mathew Frith

Director of Conservation

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1.0 Benefits of good parks and open spaces

We strongly agree that parks make an important contribution to the quality and character of Barnet; they should be easy to access and can directly support the health and wellbeing of our community. However this can only be the case if they are properly maintained and benefit from a regular programme of investment. In Mill Hill we are less convinced that they are important for encouraging small businesses to set up or that areas should be set aside for growing food as there is already good provision of allotments.

2.0 Criteria to define the quality of parks and open spaces

We strongly agree that parks in Mill Hill should have a good variety of well-maintained facilities. This includes basic furnishings such as bins and benches along with good facilities for children’s play, active recreation and where appropriate toilets, cafes and other community facilities. The cleanliness of parks is fundamental and all spaces should be welcoming and safe to use. In Mill Hill, natural sites including Arrandene, Scratchwood, Moat Mount, Mill Hill Old Railway and parts of Copthall should promote a well-managed diversity of natural habitats although we consider that this should be less important for the more traditional amenity parks such as Mill Hill Park and Bittacy Hill Park. All green spaces are treated alike, there is no indication of the great variety and therefore differing management regimes which should be applied.

3.0 Priority areas for investment

The most important areas for investment should include better signage that is more welcoming at park entrances and general standards of horticultural maintenance. We would encourage further investment in children’s play areas as families with young children are often the most regular users of parks. For key parks we would like to see refurbished or new cafes that include toilet facilities to encourage greater use throughout the year and provide a means of generating some income for reinvesting in parks.

4.0 Options for funding and managing parks in the future

We have yet to have a clear preference on the most appropriate option for managing the boroughs parks in the future and would encourage further and more detailed consultation on this issue. We are unclear whether the options presented would be adopted across Barnet or for certain areas and where potential pilot projects may be established. Any option should be properly funded with adequate skills and expertise to maintain parks and green spaces and should seek to employ local staff with good training prospects wherever possible.

5.0 Getting involved

As a Society we have contributed to the upkeep of various parks and green spaces in Mill Hill in a number of ways over many years. This includes tree planting, occasional community clean-up events and a regular programme of nature walks. Some of our membership, which totals almost 900 individuals, may be interested in joining occasional parks working groups and attending parks events. The Society is particularly keen to ensure the quality of various parks and green spaces that make a direct contribution to the historic and traditional character of Mill Hill are maintained and improved. This includes The Mill Field that is surprisingly not mentioned in the strategy, the green spaces and ponds along the Ridgeway, Arrandene Open Space, Mill Hill Park and Bittacy Hill Park.

6.0 Standards of open space provision

Whilst Barnet is perceived as a green borough we note that the hectare provision of parks per head of population falls below the local plan standard. With a significantly growing population...
this is set to get worse in the future. It is therefore essential that Barnet continues to protect its parks and green spaces and that new and generously proportioned parks are created in areas of intensification. This is particularly important in the south of the borough which is becoming increasingly urbanised and dense.

7.0 Assessing quality and value
We are not convinced by the methodology that has been established to assess both quality and value. Specifically we are very concerned about how this ‘will inform decision about supply of greenspace in the context of current and future demand and a range of other indicators’ (p64). Greater clarity should be given in the strategy about what this actually means. Additionally we do not agree with the conclusion of the tables for combined quality and value scores for both parks and natural/semi-natural green spaces (p76 and 77) and challenge the selection of many sites that are currently listed as having low quality / low value. For example, Battacy Hill Park has a significantly important value and role to play in supporting the development of Millbrook Park in Mill Hill East, and both Darlands Lake NR and Mill Hill Old Railway are valuable nature conservation areas for the borough and in particularly within Mill Hill.

8.0 Engagement
We have found some of the information on engagement difficult to interpret (eg Fig 7.1 and 7.4 in particular) and are concerned on the relatively low level of responses to the public consultation events. In the absence of further information apparently provided in the appendices we are concerned that conclusions have been drawn from a small number of responses to the initial engagement and consultation for the strategy.

9.0 Future funding and investment
We support the opportunities to seek additional funding for parks from external sources. It is clear Barnet has a poor track-record in securing funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (Table 9.1) and this should be improved. Opportunities for sports investment from the Football Foundation and Sport England should also be pursued for the more active parks in the borough. We are encouraged by the proposed £20.25m investment in regeneration areas (table 9.6) but this should note what has already been spent and what future budgets will be. We consider future investment should also focus on areas adjacent to regeneration areas that will also experience greater demand and use. We are also concerned that adequate additional funding is also identified and protected for the future upkeep of these new spaces.

10.0 Current maintenance budgets
We are fully supportive of the ambition of Barnet’s Corporate Plan that the boroughs ‘parks and green spaces will be amongst the best in London’. However we are concerned that the level of existing funding on maintenance is modest, likely to reduce in coming years and is recorded to be much lower when compared with some other London boroughs (Table 10.1). Achieving the objectives of the corporate plan will require adequate funding is maintained, and in places increased, in the coming years.

11.0 Appendices
We note that the main strategy document makes reference to various appendices that do not appear to have been made available as part of this consultation. For example ‘Appendix II sets out the full assessment of ‘value’ of the portfolio that is within scope for this strategy’ (p70) is not provided and may have significant bearing on levels of investment in the future.

We trust that you will find these comments helpful and MHPS are keen to be kept informed on the development of the strategy over the next few months.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Neal
The Environment Group
Mill Hill Preservation Society
email to ruth.miller@barnet.gov.uk

Dear Madam,

There is a need to allow submissions in the form of an email or letter without a questionnaire which may only allow particular input. Also I do not want to place my data on a US controlled server!
Parks cover a wide range of uses in Barnet and it is necessary for Barnet Council to consider some of them individually. But there are also some considerations that apply to all parks.

1. With the increase in population of Barnet there should be no park space that is "declared surplus to the Council's requirements". Additionally, park space should not be taken for new schools, other infrastructure,.... but should remain open space for this and future generations to enjoy. Additionally green space and trees are necessary to purify the air. Barnet Council must not sell Victoria Park Lodge or grant long leases to the developer of the woodland to the rear of 71 Holden Road or to Chase Lodge the natural areas for a carpark and another sports field when there are other sports fields not being used at weekends and outside the Saracens Controlled Parking Zone.

2. Apart from certain types of sports grounds that require hard paving for that sport (eg tennis), all concrete and asphalt should be progressively replaced by natural surfaces or soft surfaces.

3. The population generally is becoming less active, more obese and people are living older. The infrastructure of parks needs to be changed to reflect the needs of residents. Asphalt and concrete paths need to be progressively replaced with either natural surfaces or modern surfaces that are kinder to the body. The human body interacts with the surface with a foot strike, whereas wheeled vehicles roll over the surface. The needs of each are very different. Additionally, with people living longer and there being more obese people the surface below their feet needs to be softer than the present concrete and asphalt to preserve their joints. It should be possible for a person to exercise throughout their lifetime without the need for hip and knee replacements. If rubber from discarded tyres was used for paths this would greatly improve the infrastructure for pedestrians. Paths should also be at the same level as the surrounding ground with no hard edges that someone might roll their ankle on.

4. Frequently in Council documents the only pedestrians referred to are walkers as though those running and jogging do not exist. The needs of these pedestrians for softer surfaces are even greater than walkers as the force of their foot-strike against a surface is greater.

5. Park spaces should be considered destinations in their own right to be enjoyed - and not as transport corridors. The attempt to turn Dollis Valley Greenwalk into a cycleway must be reversed. The needs of pedestrians and cyclists are too different for them to be combined. If Transport for London wants to have an off-road cycleway through Barnet, then they could create a cycle corridor along the Northern Tube Line rather than destroying Dollis Valley Greenwalk. As the Greenwalk is not lit, TfL require an alternative route along streets. The section from Fursby Road to Dollis Road that they have tried to change to allow cycling is not up to London Cycle Design Standard or Department for Transport Shared Use Routes for Pedestrians and Cyclists. The surface is very hard, much wider than required for a pedestrian path, is raised with a hard edge, so unsuitable for running on, and because of its increased width leaves no alternative route. Also they have destroyed trees to try and make it fit, and generally reduced the value of the area as an area of Nature Conservation and for other users. When you consider the low percentage of cyclists one wonders why they are being catered to so extensively, without considering the previous legitimate users. Previously this was a no cycling footpath and it has remained a footpath. There was no public consultation before the construction of this new path - a Certificate of Lawfulness was relied upon which was not sufficient for the construction of this path. There was no consideration of the Equality Act or the Localism Act. The area has been further compromised by the introduction of invasive weed seeds in the soil and gravel brought in for the construction of the paths.

6. There is a need for the provision of safe toilets for users. Many people are restricted in their use of parks by their toileting needs. If you exercise, are older, and the weather is cooler, then you are more likely to need to use a toilet more often. Yet as an example, along the entire length of Dollis Valley Greenwalk, there is only the use of the toilet at Totteridge and Whetstone Tube Station available for users! In other parks, like Victoria Park, the toilets are old with internal passageways, so not considered safe if there are not many people around, which is often the case in winter. Toilet design needs to consider the safety of users (single self-contained cubicles opening directly to the park with outward opening doors).

7. Biodiversity is of great concern in Barnet. Along Dollis Brook and Folly Brook there are the three invasive species of Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed, the species mentioned in the Weeds Act 1959 (Ragweed, Creeping Thistle, Spear Thistle and Docks) along with many on the London Invasive Species Initiative (LISI) like Buddleia and Cherry Laurel. Additionally, there is a need to remove species not originally in the area but that have been spread by human means. The works along Dollis Valley Greenwalk last year introduced white daisy, hogweed, creeping thistle, hemlock, Queen Anne lace, groundsel, and many other species that were not...
present in the area prior to the works and spread others like Himalayan Balsam to a greater area. Maintaining biodiversity and the eradication of weeds needs to be an in-house operation. No contractor would want to be too good at this job as it would eliminate their being needed. It is the eradication of every last plant that is needed and for this there needs to be i) a system, perhaps on-line or by post-card whereby members of the public can report the location of species requiring control, ii) the use of Community Groups to control species that have become widespread like Himalayan Balsam. This could be a fundraiser for Community Groups and would be more effective than using contractors. By involving Community Groups in this manner, those individuals would then become your invasive weed spotters in the future. The present Parks Department has paid very little attention to evasive weeds this year. I have spent many hours removing seed heads from Dollis Brook and Folly Brook of Himalayan Balsam and Hogweed as even though I had made Barnet Council Parks aware of the problem, they had taken ineffective measures in too few areas. The basics of eliminating the weeds furthest upstream to prevent their continued spread downstream has not occurred so any elimination downstream will not be effective.

8. Barnet Council have contractors who frequently arrive and cut down trees with no prior warning. There is no consideration of the local community and no recognition that a mature tree has much more ecological value than a newly planted tree. Earlier this month, a tree was cut down on the corner of Victoria Park, Finchley, that was over 60 years old with no prior warning and no noticeable decay. There needs to be more consideration given to the local community as this frequently happens. And once cut down, the tree cannot be replaced with a mature tree. City Suburban Tree Surgeons have a contract that was surpassed in financial value last year. While I accept that the occasional tree may require removal due to risk of falling or disease I cannot accept that there was a need to remove over 1000 trees for this reason last year. Does the Localism Act require the involvement of the local community in any decision to remove a tree?

9. The annual plant beds need to be managed better. As plants are planted as well established garden-ready plants there must be no need to have empty beds for periods of time between planting. When a bed is still flowering beautifully why should the plants be removed? In the last few days the plants in the flower beds at the entrance to Victoria Park have been removed. While the antirrhinums had finished flowering because they had not been dead-headed, the bedding begonias were a beautiful display. Why remove them to leave empty beds? Surely the begonias could have been left until the winter / spring bedding plants are planted. The antirrhinums would have flowered again if they had been dead-headed. Additionally, there are no spring bulbs planted in these flower beds anymore yet these are a welcome display in Spring which require very little extra effort when the winter / spring bedding plants are planted.

10. There is a need to have variety in parks. Some parks are designed for the playing of sport whereas other are for quiet relaxation and others for individual exercise. Still others find the need to escape the city and be able to go to areas where there are no man-made paths or structures or city noise - just tranquillity and nature. Bird watchers also value these areas. But Barnet Council appears unable to value these quiet spaces. Instead they appear to regard them as areas available to be "developed" or "surplus to Council's requirements". Last year we saw the destruction of the small, quiet area behind the tennis courts to the rear of Brent Way. For many this was an area devoid of man-made structures but close enough to feel safe enough to venture to by oneself to feel far from the city. Sadly, Barnet Council saw it as a wasteland to force a sub-standard cycleway on. This is likely to result in the removal of the horse chestnuts in this area within a few years as they will be seen as a danger now there is a path below them! Earlier this year there was a consultation regarding the introduction of outdoor gyms in parks. While I am pleased that there was a consultation, it gave me the impression that Parks financial interests will prevail.

11. If Barnet Council proceed with their intention to contract out Parks the value of parkland will be further eroded. Contracted staff will not have any consideration for the residents of the borough and the needs of wildlife as the parkland will be further eroded. Contracted staff will not have any consideration for the residents of the borough and the needs of wildlife as the financial interests will prevail.

It is hoped that the present Council will value the diversity of the parks in the borough and involve the local community in decisions regarding them.

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Response to the draft Open Spaces Strategy for Barnet.

This response to the draft Open Spaces Strategy for Barnet represents the views of the Board of the Friends of Childs Hill Park. We have not consulted with the wider membership, who have however been encouraged to respond to Barnet’s online questionnaire.

Background

The Friends of Childs Hill Park came into existence in Autumn 2014. Since then we have collaborated with Barnet to introduce major improvements to the park. These have included a new playground, picnic benches, outdoor gym, table tennis table, an orchard, new woodland planting and a major landscaped educational area, the Marsh Garden. Activities organised include regular children’s sessions (arts and crafts, chess); community planting; photography competition and exhibition; local history exhibition; family days.

We have raised funding from the London Borough of Barnet, the Trust for London, the Big Lottery, the Woodland Trust (in kind), London Orchard Project (in kind) and private donors.

We started as a community group, and have since become a registered charity governed by an elected Board of Trustees. The Friends have created a partnership with a charity, the Harington Scheme which trains young people with special needs in horticulture. Together with Harington, we have signed Adopt a Place agreements with Barnet, Harington undertook the construction of the Marsh Garden and has led many community planting events.

Response

The strategy proposes many changes for how parks and green spaces should be operated in Barnet. Some of these are structural, including the different models suggested for future funding and governance. We comment briefly on these models at the end of this note. The main body of our response is concerned with improvements which could be made irrespective of structural changes. These ideas are based on our experience of working with Barnet, what has gone well and what has stood in the way of progress.

The Adopt a Place Scheme

Green Spaces has encouraged a responsible attitude to working with community groups in parks via the Adopt a Place Scheme. This is an informal contract which allows the community group to state which particular part of the park it intends to improve with the efforts of volunteers, and in turn commits the Green Spaces team to provide support and advice.

In practice Barnet finds it very difficult to deliver on its side of the contract. It can take an inordinately long time for us to get a response to requests for help (unanswered phone calls/e-mails), lack of resources (no plants, no seeds), simple non delivery of promises (one of two scrapes dug for Marsh Garden, repeated failure to dig second).

But the Adopt a Place Scheme is the most structured aspect off Green Spaces interaction with us as a Friends Group. For the rest, there is little contact. We have managed to arrange a very occasional meeting with officers. We follow this up with a clear ‘action points agreed’ note. The Green Spaces team appears to have no system to follow up at all. So we are neither told when a commitment will be complied with, nor (unfortunately far more frequently), that it cannot be delivered. This makes our planning and communication with our members very difficult.

What could help?

The draft Strategy makes clear that Barnet wishes to engage far more closely with community groups in running its parks. For that to happen, Friends need a structure within which they can contribute. Elements could include;

1) Barnet Green Spaces drawing up a rolling 3 year strategy, which includes consultation with Friends Groups. The resulting strategy could make clear what each side intends to achieve. There could be quarterly mutual updates, and twice yearly face to face progress meetings.

2) Barnet to clarify what financial or in kind support it is able to offer. This could include materials (wood chip/compost/seeds/plants), staff support, machinery. Support should be specific and timed (e.g. Team of 4, for half day once every 2 months, timing agreed.) Small amounts of investment can be surprisingly effective in achieving substantially greater outcomes because of the way...
volunteers multiply value by donating their time and labour freely, and can also attract matching external grants.

3) Barnet to facilitate co-ordination of Friends Groups across Borough. Arrange quarterly meetings, encourage collaboration, bulk purchase on behalf of groups.

4) Offer a level of administrative support. For example, offer an agreed amount of printing/laminating of publicity materials.

5) Tie delivery of existing resources more closely into work with community groups. For example, we asked the Tree Section to help us green the streets around the park. They led a tree walk and have agreed to plant more than 20 new street trees. We much appreciated this response to our request. There is scope for the Tree Section themselves to initiate this approach with community groups to ensure local priorities are taken into account in allocating existing tree planting.

Raising Funds

The Strategy makes clear that Barnet will need to raise significant external funding to deliver its objectives for its parks. Currently the system for community groups is rather ad hoc. Helpful if following steps were taken;

1) Barnet itself is an important source of funding – but it is hard to know whom, how or when to approach. There is mainstream funding from Green Spaces; Corporate Grants; Area Grants. Friends Groups need to know the distinction between these funding streams, what is available and how to proceed.

2) Barnet could take proactive role in supporting Friends Groups to obtain external grants. This could include informing groups of potentially relevant grants; where needed, helping groups complete grant applications; creating ‘syndicates’ to include the Borough and several Friends Groups to apply for funding for cross borough projects.

3) As proposed in strategy, Barnet could itself apply for grants at European and National level for major projects, and where appropriate, allocate to Friends Groups to implement schemes.

Activities

Friends Groups can play a positive role in community cohesion. Well run parks attract users from all backgrounds and age groups. This effect is enhanced if there are community activities in the park. Barnet could assist;

1) Currently Barnet charges for events in parks, with discounts for community groups. Where activities are arranged by Friends Groups recognised by Barnet and are not for profit, there should be no charge.

2) Barnet could support Friends Group to arrange healthy activity in the park. For example, health walks ‘prescribed’ by G.Ps; Tai Chi sessions (particularly good for senior users). Barnet could facilitate the necessary collaboration with those responsible for health promotion.

3) Similarly Barnet could help Friends Groups to network with schools to promote environmental education and forest schooling in the park.

Innovation

Our Friends Group has tried to innovate ideas to achieve improvements to the park with very limited funds. One important approach has been our partnership with the Harington Scheme, with whom we have worked very successfully for over a year. This has had significant advantages on both sides – for the Harington because it has enabled them to train special needs students in municipal gardening so improving employment prospects for its trainees; Barnet and Childs Hill Park because of the excellent work they have done on building, maintenance and community planting activities. They have also started to involve pupils from 2 other local special schools. Ideally Harington would like to take on wider responsibility for the park, and will be seeking external funding.

This is a model which Barnet could consider for application more widely across the borough. A similar scheme (cited in the strategy document 2.5.5) has been trialled under NESTA auspices in Park Work Bristol, a project to consider the capacity of parks to provide training into work opportunities for local people living in difficult circumstances while improving overall management and maintenance. This project run by the city of Bristol attracted nearly £100,000 of external grants. If done in a co-ordinated way in several parks across Barnet, it is far more likely to attract significant funding than a one off application by a single Friends Group and Charity.

Using Park Assets

Many parks have underused buildings. In Basing Hill Park there is a kiosk which has not been used for several years. In Childs Hill Park there is a Bowling Green Pavilion which has been out of use for over 2 years since the club folded – and is now considered unsafe.

But this is an important community asset. It could be repaired and extended to provide a multi-use centre (for example, nursery school, indoor horticulture training centre, community and commercial meetings and events). There is clear scope to raise revenue, as well as delivering community benefit. Realising such a project would need collaboration between Barnet and local community groups, but could be successful in raising some grant funding for capital costs from companies such as Veolia who distribute funds from landfill tax.
Barnet could also approach other external bodies who could rent under-used buildings. For example, the RHS uses premises in Regents Park as a base for training its students, again providing mutual benefit to both sides.

**Scope of Green Spaces**

The document is focused on parks and recognised green spaces. But as housing density and population increases, it is worth look at the full potential to green other aspects of the urban environment. For example, an expansion of pocket parks; more diverse planting of lawned areas between high rise properties; further street tree planting; greening alley ways.

There is also the possibility to encourage more environmentally friendly practices by Barnet householders. Small planted areas can be incorporated when front gardens are covered with hard standing, balconies can provide spaces for flower and food plants in pots. Many schools already have school gardens, and other institutional buildings could follow suit.

These initiatives could be supported at low cost – many are within the scope for external grants. Barnet could run more competitions, for example, for the most productive balcony. The important issue is to recognise the wide scope to increase environmental diversity beyond existing designated parks and green spaces, and incorporate their potential within the strategy.

**Options for Funding and Governance**

The Vision Statement is drawn in broad terms, and from the Council’s perspective. It would be helpful to draw together a clear and succinct vision statement of what the end state will look like from the point of view of a park user/Barnet resident, which could provide a framework to help evaluate the options.

As a Friends Group we do not have the experience which would enable us to express preference between the various funding and governance models set out.

Childs Hill Park does however get a specific mention as possibly suitable for a pilot social enterprise model. It is rightly pointed out that this would require ‘a long gestation period and an extensive consultation and participation of a variety of partners’.

We are willing to participate in such consultation and in developing realistic plans. But we are also aware of our limits, and could not commit to deliver beyond our managerial or financial capacity.

Whichever option is selected, successful delivery will be dependent on strong leadership and structure especially if community groups are to be involved in delivery. This will require resourcing, as the existing Green Spaces are at full stretch managing the day to day maintenance of Barnet Green Spaces.

**Conclusion**

We think that this draft strategy document is extremely thorough and helpful in setting out Barnet’s ambitions to run excellent parks and green spaces, and in exploring different ways to get there. Change is clearly essential, as Barnet’s parks have shown a deterioration in quality over the last few year, and new ways of finding increased investment is vital. We look forward to participating in the translation of the good ideas set out in the strategy into practice.

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For more information please visit: http://engage.barnet.gov.uk.

If you would like to request this consultation in an alternative format please e-mail @barnet.gov.uk or phone 020 8359