

FINAL DRAFT

A Parks, Greenspace and Countryside Strategy for the London Borough of Bromley

Introduction

In 2015 The Landscape Group (TLG) was commissioned to deliver Bromley Council's parks and greenspace service. A Key Performance Indicator is the production of an overall Strategy for the service with a number of supporting Annual Plans. This document, which will provide focus for a number of service-specific plans and strategies is entitled '*A Parks, Greenspace and Countryside Strategy for the London Borough of Bromley*'. TLG established a working group to author relevant content and a draft was circulated in September 2015 to key stakeholders as part of a broader consultation exercise.

The Strategy is a working document to be embedded within the day-to-day management for the Service. To be effective, the Strategy will provide a clear statement of our aspirations and provide a response to the ever-changing circumstances, pressures and opportunities we face.

We will undertake an annual review of the Strategy, focusing primarily on updating the Delivery Plan. We also recognise that the Strategy provides a new structure to guide ongoing work. While we believe that it will offer a robust and useful tool, we recognise that it is currently untested. Areas for improvement will become apparent once the Strategy has been adopted and tested against the actual needs of the Service.

For this reason we believe the initial annual review in 2016 will provide an opportunity to assess the first year performance of the Strategy, which may result in a more extensive revision than would normally be anticipated.

Monitoring progress is an important component of the review process. We have identified the need to integrate targets as a component part of the Delivery Plan, and this will form a core part of the 2016 review. Once the Delivery Plan is in place, monitoring the progress against targets will form an integrated part of our performance management systems.

Background

Bromley is undoubtedly London's greenest borough, encompassing 156 parks, 52 allotments and 21 outdoor sports facilities.

The Council is rightly proud of its custodianship of 7000 acres of greenspace on behalf of Bromley's 300,000 residents. Much of the countryside around Charles Darwin's former home at Downe is owned by Bromley Council, and has unique cultural significance as the 'open-air laboratory' in which Darwin developed his theory of evolution by natural selection.

Involving local people in maintaining and developing these green spaces has always been central to the Council's approach, so for over 25 years, the Council has supported and encouraged

communities to collaborate in the management of their greenspace. This has resulted in an enviable track record of delegation and self-management. The support provided by dedicated managers has enabled community groups and individuals to steer their local green space by becoming Friends and Volunteers. However, this level of engagement does not come easily. It requires building the capacity of local people to undertake these roles and continually developing the management of open space in the Borough. The Parks and Greenspace service is therefore of particular value to the Council and its residents, and merits a different approach to other environmental services.

Clearly, the service is committed to making open spaces accessible and conserving the natural environment within a changing climate. It also provides Bromley residents with sustainable travel connections to distinctive visitor destinations; including the promotion of healthy living, food production and green skills – all through sustainable design, management and maintenance.

In June 2015 The Landscape Group (TLG) became responsible for the management of the parks, greenspace and countryside service. Council teams delivering the management service were merged with TLG's grounds maintenance teams. TLG and Bromley Council agreed that the priorities for this integrated service were to:

- Enhance the high level of service achieved in recent years
- Increase the responsiveness of the service to stakeholder groups
- Deploy resources more flexibly to reflect stakeholder preferences or available funding
- Reduce the cost of the service through increasing productivity

To achieve these priorities, and central to the new approach, the integrated service is focused on three geographical Neighbourhoods, with a number of discrete Communities. A General Manager is responsible for all aspects of the service in his or her Neighbourhood; both community-facing services and the delivery of maintenance duties. Each Community has its own dedicated Community Team Leader (under the oversight of an experienced operational manager at Neighbourhood level) empowered to deliver virtually the whole service to their community. This approach enables communities in any one area to utilise the available resource in different ways within an agreed management framework. The structure is designed to focus day-to-day delivery but any Neighbourhood can access the specialised skills; such as biodiversity, countryside management or project management. The integrated service is led by a Contract Director, and a Borough-wide team of specialists supports the Neighbourhoods with Fundraising, Marketing, Finance, and Compliance.

Over many years, Bromley Council has successfully drawn on the commitment of community groups and external funding to uphold horticultural and biodiversity standards that would not otherwise be possible. For this reason, TLG believes that the service should remain heavily focused on maintaining productive relationships with these community groups, focusing on building their capacity further and developing the support provided to their fund-raising efforts.

Our approach

The outsourcing of the parks management service by Bromley Council is an industry-leading initiative. By joining up the teams that design and manage the service with those that deliver at the front-line, much greater value and focus can be achieved.

However, the outsourcing of any service requires a system of performance management, and being inherently subjective, parks management can be a difficult service to measure. Our solution to this is the development of a Strategy, backed up with specific Action Plans, to be agreed by Members, Officers and Stakeholders. This Strategy and its associated Plans have therefore been proposed as Key Performance Indicators to enable LBB's Officers to monitor and manage the performance of TLG.

impact	One statement summarising the desired impact of the parks management service, which is “ vibrant landscapes and empowered communities ”
outcomes	Three key outcomes : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• strong, inclusive and connected communities• attractive, biodiverse and sustainable parks, greenspace and countryside• quality services and value for money
objectives	Twelve objectives , which identify the different elements within each outcome that must be delivered to achieve the desired outcome; and
projects	Thirty-one discrete and measurable projects that TLG will deliver in order to satisfy these objectives.

OUTCOME ONE

STRONG, INCLUSIVE AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Where are we now?

Friends, Countryside and Greenspace volunteers

Bromley's volunteers are dedicated local residents who provide local custodianship to their sites, contributing a significant difference to the quality, accessibility, interpretation and management of their local green space. Our volunteers work in urban parks, the countryside, outdoor sports, allotments, churchyards and on heritage and archaeological sites.

At present, there are 42 fully active groups with over 3500 individual Friends. Together, they are the custodians of 50% of Bromley's greenspace portfolio and their role is increasingly proactive, developing stronger links with park users, TLG managers and the broader community. These groups provide education, social events, and additional maintenance tasks which complement the existing TLG grounds maintenance service. In countryside sites, they survey the local habitats and provide practical countryside skills.

Many groups attract significant external funding, as demonstrated at the annual Fundraising Celebration event. The Friends are supported by an excellent umbrella organisation in the Friends Forum, which was established as a ground-breaking solution to give the various friends a common and powerful voice. Bromley's friends' network enjoys unprecedented support from both The Landscape Group and Bromley Council; who understand the need for each group to be different without being constrained by bureaucratic or political fetter. The Bromley Friends 'concept' has been widely applauded world-wide - both in print and lecture.

Friends Groups have also made a powerful impact with regard to their fundraising and promotion of Bromley Council's diverse woodland stock. The London tree and woodland awards have been held annually since 2008 (promoted by the Forestry Commission, the Mayor of London and the RE:LEAF partnership) to celebrate the fantastic work taking place in the 'boroughs'. Our partnership working has been recognised with the following awards:

- 2014 Trees & Learning Award to Friends of Well Wood
- 2013 Community Award to Friends of South Hill Woods & Kingswood Glen
- 2011 Community Award to Friends of High Broom Wood
- 2011 London Borough of Bromley Tree & Woodlands Team
- 2010 Community Award to Friends of Mottingham Woods

Allotments

The 52 Allotment sites are supported by the independent Bromley Allotment and Leisure Garden Federation (BALGF) and the Bromley Leisure Gardens and Allotments Consultative Panel which includes Councillors, TLG Managers, and members of BALGF. All allotment sites operate independently – they manage the rental of plots, provide trading stores, and oversee the

management of their site and the welfare of their members. The Federation celebrates 50 years of Bromley Allotment co-ordination during 2015 and almost 40 years of self-management in partnership with the Council. At the time, such innovation was unheard of and it remains pioneering to this day – leading to the 2003 award by the National Allotment Association, of the '*Bledisloe Trophy*' for its outstanding contribution for the furtherance of allotments in the UK. The Bromley model was used as an exemplar in the central government publication '*Growing in your community – a good practice guide for the management of allotments*'.

In addition to individual use of allotments, a community site can be found at Brook Lane in Plaistow for sowing, growing, harvesting and cooking healthy food for nearby schools and local residents. TLG staff and stakeholders work with the broader community and include training on biodiversity and food preparation.

Sports and Recreation

The Delegated Managers lease and operate the sports pitches and bowling greens within the parks and greenspace portfolio at a local level; with only long-stop intervention from TLG. The 25 sports clubs include football, five-a-side, rugby, American football, cricket, and tennis. In addition there are nine bowls clubs on eight separate greens. These groups have been empowered to self-manage since 1991 for Bowls and 1993 for sports pitch based activities. By these arrangements, clubs fund the utility bills on their leased properties, collect litter after matches, organise pitch hire and remedial pitch maintenance, and minor pavilion upkeep. In addition the cricket clubs engage their own specialist fine turf contractor whilst bowls similarly employ their own green-keepers. The Bromley model of local management remains largely unique insofar as the latitude it has at permitting locally-devolved governance, championing initiatives and supporting the increasing number of external fundraising opportunities. Many other authorities simply speak of delegation in very limited terms of pitch bookings and other minor administrative undertakings.

Play and Fitness

The Borough has 67 playgrounds for children, most of which are located within one quarter mile from their homes. For teenagers, there are six dedicated skateboard facilities, ten Multi-Use Games areas and a dedicated BMX facility in Mottingham Woods. For family recreation, Bromley provides two paddling pools along with one boating pool.

Adult fitness is enhanced through the commissioning of two pilot Outdoor Gyms at Tugmutton Common and Betts Park, and there are six miles of safe cycle-ways constructed through urban park sites as part of the wider sustainable transport links funded by TfL (more fully described in Bromley Council's Cycling Strategy). Throughout the Borough there are various self-guided walking trails, mainly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Health walks organised by various Friends Groups and walks run by voluntary groups such as ENBRO, contribute significantly to the fitness of the local community. Practical nature conservation tasks carried out on a weekly basis also contribute to adult fitness.

Where do we want to be?

This strategy is based on the principle that partnership with local people, together with a dynamic approach to green space management, are essential to securing the landscapes, habitats and wildlife that everyone can enjoy. The objectives that underpin Outcome One are therefore as follows:

THE OBJECTIVES of OUTCOME ONE

- A. Promote participation in volunteering and expand membership of Friends groups.
- B. Support and mentor community groups to increase their involvement and capacity for self-help including the securement of external funding.
- C. Through community empowerment, enhance opportunities with regard to local wishes for play, recreation, sports, leisure gardens and allotments
- D. Work with external agencies to deliver greater community outcomes.

How will we get there?

A. Promote participation in volunteering and expand membership of Friends groups.

- 1. Deliver five training programmes each year to assist community groups in enlarging and upskilling their membership, including how to attract and encourage volunteering, fundraising and awards, specialisms and health & safety related courses.
- 2. Provide each Neighbourhood with at least one Community Manager to enable volunteers to extend the 45,000 hours per annum of overall current greenspace activity

B. Support and mentor community groups to increase their involvement and capacity for self-help including the securement of external funding.

- 3. Work with the Delegated Sports Managers to re-establish and promote a Bromley sports forum, to provide a strengthened community voice.
- 4. Provide direction and mentoring to community organisations including Friends Groups, Allotments, Delegated Sports and Bowls Clubs , working in partnership with TLG and Bromley Council to secure over £340,000 per annum of external fundraising aligned to the Annual Fundraising Plan and agreed priorities of groups.

C. Through community empowerment, enhance opportunities with regard to local wishes for play, recreation, sports, leisure gardens and allotments.

- 5. Attend community meetings , solicit joint planning and decision making and take feedback from the Stakeholder Engagement Panel, Friends Forum, Consultative Panels and individual friends groups. Tailor the service to meet demands where practical and affordable.
- 6. In consultation with local partnerships and stakeholders, review and consider greenspace improvements to enhance high quality and inclusive play, footpaths, cycle-routes, bridleways and other hard landscapes.
- 7. Undertake an annual review of all play facilities and replace/repair individual items, subject to available resources, including the expansion or re-design of sites where external funding permits

D. Work with external agencies to deliver greater community outcomes.

- 8. Through targeted schemes, including working with *Pro-Active Bromley* - improve the mental and physical well-being of user groups. Ensure that the 'teenage' market is designed to reflect aspiration and need.
- 9. Promote the presence and benefits of natural environments with statutory, business and charitable partners - through direct support or fundraising.

OUTCOME TWO

ATTRACTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE PARKS, GREENSPACE AND COUNTRYSIDE

Where are we now?

Countryside Management

Bromley supports a great and varied range of wildlife and features of biodiversity interest, representing an ecologically and socially valuable resource for the communities in the Borough.

These include six Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), three of which are owned by L B Bromley (Crofton Woods, Keston & Hayes Commons and Downe Bank & High Elms, five Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and 93 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs - not all of them Bromley owned). In addition it has a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and two Statutorily Listed Parks and Gardens (Crystal Palace Park and Priory Gardens, Orpington) Many of these sites are designated for nature conservation value. The Borough also contains a significant proportion of Green Belt land. Part of the borough is also included within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

With one of the largest areas of countryside, woodland cover and green space remaining in London, Bromley contains a wide range of semi-natural habitat types including ancient woodlands, wetlands, chalk, acid and neutral grasslands, veteran trees, farmlands and lowland heath and valley mire. In turn, these ecosystems mean Bromley boasts an impressive diversity of wildlife, supporting 27 named protected species, including dormice, water vole, kingfisher, great crested newt and bats, and many more that have rare or threatened status.

The countryside of Bromley provided much of the inspiration for the work of Charles Darwin, who lived in Downe. The landscape he worked in has unique cultural and ecological significance and is a nominated World Heritage Site.

Parks

The Borough owns and manages over 150 parks, woodlands, commons and open spaces – more than any other London Borough. Urban parks are predominantly in the northern half of the Borough – with country estates and woodland richest in the southern area. There is profound diversity across this portfolio from simple pocket parks/local amenity greens, through recreation grounds, formal urban sites and key horticultural sites such as Kelsey Park or Priory Gardens – to event sites including Norman Park and major regional parks such as Crystal Palace Park. The needs, aspirations and type of visitor are as diverse as the parks themselves. Many of the key parks have been previous recipients of the 'Green Flag' award and the Borough's landscape sites have not only been regular winners in London In Bloom – leading to the 'Champion of Champions' award, but have also attained a Silver Gilt at Britain In Bloom.

Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards

In 2008, TLG were charged with the sole responsibility of administrating the total cemetery function for residents on behalf of the Council. This highly sensitive service includes the management of burial bookings, issuing of paperwork, the historic database and dealing with customer enquiries. As

many Cemeteries and Churchyards are of importance for biodiversity, grounds maintenance will take into consideration the Bromley Biodiversity Plan in their management and will have management plans produced. TLG provides a burial service and delivers the grounds maintenance at Bromley's seven cemeteries and ten closed churchyards. TLG believes that investment in digitisation of records would reduce the cost of administration, and a project is proposed in this regard.

Environmental Education

BeeCHE (Bromley Environmental Education Centre at High Elms) is an accredited environmental education centre (Learning Outside the Classroom). The facility delivers paid-for services on a commercial basis. The building is an eco-friendly structure, provided in part from external grant funding.

The facility supports environmental education and Forest School training from pre-school to 'A' level and also provides teacher training programmes including first aid. Nash College for special needs are a regular customer. The building is used during school hours for formal education and lends itself to an Environmental Education Information Centre at weekends and in school holidays. It is recognised that this facility is under-utilised and that there is a demand for both income-generating and community activities.

Where do we want to be?

Clearly, it is the green spaces themselves that are the valued assets at the very heart of this strategy, and our objectives have been set in order to incorporate their special and varied features within our management plans. The objectives that underpin Outcome Two are therefore as follows:

THE OBJECTIVES OF OUTCOME TWO

- E. Protect and promote the range of habitats including those on land, water and marginal areas and designated sites through appropriate and sustainable landscape management, following best practice guidelines in the Bromley Biodiversity Plan
- F. Provide welcoming and accessible parks, open spaces, countryside and woodlands, maintained to high standards that reflect the needs of the community and its heritage.
- G. Transform the Bromley Environmental Education Centre at High Elms (BeeCHE) into a financially sustainable centre of excellence
- H. Ensure that the parks management service is accessible to all users and visitors

How will we get there?

E. Protect and promote the range of habitats including those on land, water and marginal areas and designated sites through appropriate and sustainable landscape management, following best practice guidelines in the Bromley Biodiversity Plan

- 10. Working to appropriate management plans, maintain, enhance and meet the statutory requirements of designated sites.
- 11. Publish the Bromley Biodiversity Plan 2015 – 2020 with the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership, LBB, Friends Groups and stakeholders, with a launch event.
- 12. Maintain and enhance the condition of Bromley owned SSSIa, LNRs and SINCs, protecting habitat size and quality to ensure species sustainability. Establish a baseline dataset on habitat types and species and apply for further funding.
- 13. Establish stronger relationships with the Authority's Town Planners, to improve their knowledge of biodiversity within development/planning proposals impacting on green spaces, biodiversity and protected species in the borough.
- 14. Deliver biodiversity training for staff and contractors to increase practical knowledge and understanding of biodiversity, and ensure biodiversity is included within management plans and work programmes.

F. Provide welcoming and accessible parks, open spaces, countryside and woodlands, maintained to high standards, that reflect the needs of the community and its heritage.

- 15. Monitor and improve the visitor experience at greenspace sites, including access, signage, interpretation, facilities, web and social media information
- 16. Review the current position of cemeteries and closed churchyards and produce a business plan to modernise the service.
- 17. Adopt the eight 'Green Flag' criteria as an additional measure of quality of Bromley's parks and greenspace. (www.greenflagaward.org.uk/judges/judging-criteria/)

G. Transform the Bromley Environmental Education Centre at High Elms (BeeCHE) into a financially sustainable centre of excellence

- 18. Create a viable business model for BeeCHE that identifies and secures funds.
- 19. Actively promote and market BeeCHE through campaigns, events, social media and the web
- 20. Improve BeeCHE and the broader High Elms Estate as a training and development centre.

H. Ensure that the parks management service is accessible to all users and visitors

- 21. Record, prioritise and address issues arising from feedback or surveys that limit or prevent enjoyment of Bromley's greenspace by any particular group.
- 22. Promote access routes and connectivity between the urban green spaces and the countryside through Bromley's circular walks, nature trails, self-guided walks, the regional London Loop, Green Chain and Capital Ring walks, and the local cycling and bridleways network to ensure access to nature.

OUTCOME THREE

QUALITY SERVICES AND VALUE FOR MONEY

Where are we now?

Management and maintenance

Bromley Council has outsourced its grounds maintenance services for many years, and has therefore market-tested these services regularly to ensure it receives best value. The specific maintenance challenges cover 156 parks and open spaces, 30 schools, 15 cemeteries/closed churchyards, 10 library grounds and 12 million square feet of grass verges. Each year, The Landscape Group plants 550,000 bedding plants, maintains 370,000 linear feet of hedgerow and empties 1000 dog and litter bins.

This maintenance service employs 115 staff in summer and 75 in winter, and deploys a fleet of 43 vehicles, 22 ride-on mowers and 5 tractors. This workforce has historically been organised according to the specific tasks required, with mobile teams focusing on grass, litter or horticulture, but the service will shortly be re-organised into the new Neighbourhood, community-focused structure.

From June 2015, Bromley Council transferred its Parks and Greenspace professional team to TLG, which has now successfully been merged with the existing TLG staff to provide a fully integrated management and maintenance service.

Financial sustainability

External revenue schemes have been actively pursued to conserve and enhance Bromley's greenspace and develop community involvement in parks. There are three key sources of external funds:

In 2014/15 £337,000 of **grant funding, sponsorship and donations** funding was secured by community groups and staff collectively. The Fundraising team work alongside Friends of Parks, Community Sports and Allotment Associations to secure money identified against improvements prioritised on the agreed Fundraising Plan. Training has been provided to 100 community fundraising leaders to empower and maximise capacity. In future, new and innovative sources of funding will continue to be explored such as greenspace legacies.

Partnership funding to the value of £173,000 was also secured in 2014/15, largely from Section 106 monies and Transport for London Local Implementation Plan funding.

Finally, **commercial income** is secured from BeeCHE (teaching, family events and activities); commemorative benches; event hire; and concessions. It is recognised that this area of funding has potential to be increased and maximised.

Where do we want to be?

It is vital that Bromley's parks, greenspace and countryside are managed professionally and safely, by well-trained and motivated staff; that the service becomes more community-focused whilst continuing to deliver excellent value; that further third party investment is secured; and that there is full transparency in terms of quality delivered. This is the essence of Outcome Three, and the objectives required to deliver this are as follows:

THE OBJECTIVES OF OUTCOME THREE

- I. Design a new community-focused and totally integrated approach to green space management to achieve the highest standards possible within the resources available.
- J. Enhance the financial sustainability of the service by increasing resources through new and innovative funding streams that benefit the greenspace
- K. Train and develop TLG's management and workforce.
- L. Introduce performance reporting and quality monitoring mechanisms to ensure that high standards are maintained and continually improved.

How will we get there?

I. Design a new community-focused and totally integrated approach to green space management to achieve the highest standards possible within the resources available.

- 23. Establish 'neighbourhood' teams to deliver an integrated service for the Borough's greenspace.
- 24. Create and implement agreed service standards with Friends groups or other relevant stakeholders
- 25. Create a dedicated post for enhancing customer service.

J. Enhance the financial sustainability of the service by increasing resources through new and innovative funding streams that benefit greenspace.

- 26. Demonstrate to Bromley Council that their money and resource has been invested wisely - expenditure is relevant, adds value and is effective.
- 27. Strengthen relationships with partners to maximise income for open space enhancement - including sources made available to the Authority, such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Transport for London's Local Improvement Plan (LIP).
- 28. Appoint a dedicated Business Development Manager to work with the Fundraising Manager and General Managers and capture new income generating opportunities, including events, legacies, corporate activity, donations and crowd funding.

K. Train and develop TLG's management and workforce.

- 29. Deliver training and undertake professional update programmes for staff in fundraising, biodiversity, horticulture, countryside management, heritage & archaeology, stakeholder relationship skills and customer service - to produce a better equipped workforce. Implement the TLG apprentice and graduate programme.

L. Introduce performance reporting and quality monitoring mechanisms to ensure that high standards are maintained and continually improved.

- 30. Implement TLG's ACORN service management system to provide transparent reporting on feature quality achieved, and to improve efficiency.
- 31. Attend formal and informal meetings with the Authority's Elected Members and Officers, to report upon and improve the service.