

Report No.  
ES20355

## London Borough of Bromley

### PART ONE - PUBLIC

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**Decision Maker:** ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date:** Tuesday 23 January 2024

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent                      Non-Executive                      Non-Key

**Title:** OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2021-2031: YEAR 2 UPDATE

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**Chief Officer:** Colin Brand, Director of Environment and Public Protection

**Ward:** All Wards

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1. Reason for decision/report and options

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the delivery of the Open Space Strategy in the second year since its adoption in November 2021.

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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**The Environment & Community Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the progress made on the Open Space Strategy in its second year of implementation.**

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### Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: The Open Space Strategy has been developed to provide specific benefits for vulnerable adults and children, including actions to use open spaces to improve physical health and wellbeing as well as to improve playgrounds and their accessibility, and to improve access to environmental education.
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### Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy: Open Space Strategy 2021 - 2031
2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority (*delete as appropriate*):

(4) For residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean, and green environment great for today and a sustainable future.

(5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.

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### Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
  2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Parks and Greenspaces
  4. Total current budget for this head: £7.1m
  5. Source of funding: The delivery of the Open Space Strategy has been assisted by the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund. As noted in this report many of the projects for delivery under this strategy will be subject to external grant identification and funding applications.
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### Personnel

1. Number of staff (*current and additional*): 5
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: Unknown
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### Legal

1. Legal Requirement: None:
  2. Call-in: Not Applicable:
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### Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: Not applicable.
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### Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: Not applicable.
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### Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: The Open Space Strategy supports the ambitions of the Council's New Zero Action Plan.
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### Impact on the Local Economy

1. Summary of Local Economy Implications: The Open Space Strategy includes Strategic Objective 4 which is to support local economies through attractive open spaces in town centres and provision for sustainable community events.
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### Impact on Health and Wellbeing

1. Summary of Health and Wellbeing Implications: The Open Space Strategy includes Strategic Objective 3 which is to 'manage Bromley's open spaces for improved health and wellbeing'.
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### Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (*current and projected*): The Open Space Portfolio covers a range of sites and habitats including formal and informal parks, recreation grounds, nature reserves and woodlands. Accordingly, it affects all customers, including residents, businesses, visitors, and tourists to the borough.
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### Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

### 3. COMMENTARY

3.1 Following scrutiny at the meeting of the Environment & Community Services PDS committee on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021, the Portfolio Holder for Environment agreed to the adoption of the *Open Space Strategy 2021 – 2031* (ES202132).

3.2 The Strategy sets out the Council's vision for 'an open space portfolio that promotes the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of the borough, allowing residents, communities and wildlife to thrive.' The Strategy sets out five Strategic Objects (SOs):

SO1: Quality and accessibility

To improve the quality and accessibility of Bromley's open spaces

SO2: Natural, cultural, and historical assets

To enhance Bromley's diverse natural habitats, protect its cultural and historical assets and to increase public understanding of these sites.

SO3: Health, wellbeing, and community

To manage Bromley's open spaces for improved health and wellbeing

SO4: Local economy

To support local economies through attractive open spaces in town centres and provision for sustainable community events.

SO5: Financially viable open space portfolio

To ensure Bromley's open spaces are financially sustainable by identifying new income and commercial opportunities that allow sensitive enhancement and modernisation of the portfolio.

3.3 Under each Strategic Objective, the Strategy identified specific Action Points. This report provides an update against each of the action points with a target date for delivery before December 2023 or those with a later target date where there is progress to note, with a summary of progress identified in **Appendix 1**.

3.4 Whilst there is still much to do to deliver the ambitions set out in the strategy, there have been some key achievements in 2023, with several projects planned for 2024 and beyond that will deliver these strategic objectives. It is notable that many of these achievements and projects have been made deliverable by the funding from the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund which was intended to accelerate the achievement of the objectives in the Open Space Strategy whilst also contributing towards the renewal of assets (**CSD22023**). Much of this has only been possible thanks to the partnerships created with community groups, and specifically our Friends of Parks, who in many cases have been able to raise additional funds to support the improvement of their local green spaces.

SO1: Quality & accessibility

3.5 An audit of park infrastructure was undertaken in 2023, with this information being used to prioritise use of the budget for repairs and maintenance. A review of the condition of the equipment and surfacing of playgrounds has also commenced.

- 3.6 A new and improved template for management plans has been established by idverde, and updated management plans have been produced for 72 sites. Green Flag Awards were achieved at 7 of the borough's directly managed open spaces, with idverde aiming to achieve this award at another four sites by 2025, with support of the local Friends groups.

#### SO2: Natural, cultural, and historical assets

- 3.7 New management regimes are being piloted at sites across the borough, including the Nature Friendly Verges pilot which launched at 11 sites in March 2023, and the Sustainable Planting trial which launched in December 2023 at 10 sites. Additionally, the Brilliant Butterflies project introduced scrapes in two additional sites, and a further two countryside sites were converted to naturalised grasslands.
- 3.8 The Council continues to plan for new woodland establishment. We have appointed Forestry Commission recognised consultants Maydencroft who are working on initial designs for woodlands at the three previously agreed sites (Edgebury Grazing Lands, Kemnal Road, and Worlds End Lane) with public consultation planned for February 2024. Additionally, two new community orchards are currently being planted in Jubilee Country Park and Richmal Crompton Fields, both funded by the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund. Finally, the Friends of Cator Park and Alexandra Recreation Ground have fund raised to plant a Tiny Forest in Cator Park, planting a mix of native trees in a small area to replicate the natural processes of forest regeneration.
- 3.9 In terms of natural regeneration, the Council is supporting a grant funding application by the Froglife Trust on their Blue Chain project which would seek to restore or create sustainable waterbodies for the benefit of reptile and amphibian species which could include regenerating the pond at Shaftesbury Park, Plaistow. Two ponds at Scadbury Park were also restored this year with funding from the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund, to reduce gaps between viable breeding habitats for Great Crested Newts. Finally, officers are working with the Southeast Rivers Trust and the Friends of Riverside Gardens and Kent Pond to restore the wetland in Riverside Gardens through an improvement to the reed bed which will support better biodiversity.
- 3.10 The project led by Thames 21 and the Friends of Bromley Town Parks and Gardens to desilt the river Ravensbourne and restore the natural processes for sediment transport and improved fish passage and habitat completed earlier in the year, with funding from the Environment Agency's Water Environment Improvement Fund. Additional planting is planned for Spring 2024.
- 3.11 Works began on site to restore the Croydon Road Recreation Ground Bandstand, with these due to complete shortly.

#### SO3: Health, wellbeing, and community

- 3.12 Opportunities for physical health and wellbeing have been enhanced in 2023:

- Improvements to tennis courts thanks to grant funding secured from the Lawn Tennis Association, with resurfacing work commenced at four tennis courts in the borough (Coney Hall Recreation Ground, Church House Gardens, Goddington Park and Poverest Park.
- Funding has been secured to introduce new Non-Turf Cricket Pitches at Goddington Park and Poverest Park, with delivery expected in 2024.
- New trim trails have been introduced at Blake Recreation Ground and Penge Recreation Ground, with an adventure trail also installed in Whitehall Recreation Ground, all driven by the local Friends group and funded by the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund.

- A new outdoor gym has been approved for installation at Biggin Hill Recreation Ground following Biggin Hill Friends of Parks successful application to the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund.

3.13 Opportunities to improve mental health have also been progressed in 2023:

- An award has been made to the Amber Crisis Pregnancy Care from the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund towards plans for a memorial garden in a disused part of the cemetery which will be a quiet space of contemplation for those who have lost babies. There will also be opportunities for volunteers to support the maintenance of this new space. Fundraising for this project continues in 2024.
- Several of the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund projects aim to tackle loneliness: projects at Beckenham Green, Richmal Crompton Fields and Winsford Gardens will create opportunities for people to become more involved in their local green space and make connections with other volunteers.

#### SO4: Local Economy

3.14 A town centre feasibility study has commenced with Avison Young reviewing five town centre parks (Betts Park, Biggin Hill Recreation Ground, Church House Gardens, Kelsey Park, and Priory Gardens). Stakeholder consultation activities are now completed with the report and recommendations due to be completed in January 2024.

3.15 Several playground improvement projects have been delivered this year:

- New thermoplastic markings and refurbishment of the BMX ramps was completed at Betts Park, along with new benches for the playground funded by the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund and the Hadley Property Group.
- Surfacing improvements were made at Chislehurst Recreation Ground to tackle surface water issues, and new play equipment was installed. The zipline platforms were refurbished and the matting underneath was replaced.
- New accessible play equipment was installed at Kings Meadow, including some with sound features, and a popular accessible trampoline and cradle swing.
- New play equipment was installed at Petts Wood Recreation Ground, with the local pre-school and Friends group coming together on a community workday to improve the remaining features in the playground.
- New play equipment was installed at Pratts Bottom Open Space, with the local primary school jointing the Friends for an opening event.
- At Ravensbourne Open Space, a new accessible roundabout was installed, as well as woodland play features and a climbing frame for older children, making sure that there is play provision for everyone.
- With support from Riverside School and local businesses, the Friends of St Paul's Cray Recreation Ground secured funding for a resurfacing project for this playground.

3.16 Sporting facilities in the borough are also being developed. In addition to those set out in paragraph 3.12, the following progress has been made to deliver improved grass roots sports facilities and opportunities:

- The Delegated Sports Manager at Norman Park has received a grant of £132k for pitch improvements.
- New pitch licences were granted in 2023 at Biggin Hill Recreation Ground, Queensmead Recreation Ground and Hoblingwell Wood Recreation Ground to introduce additional sporting activities at these sites.

3.17 Catering concessions have been introduced into the Open Space Portfolio this year at Queensmead Recreation Ground and Kings Meadows. A tender for ice cream concessions across the portfolio is currently underway, with new contracts due to commence from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

#### SO5: Financial Sustainability and Modernisation

3.18 Fundraising for the borough's parks and open spaces is the responsibility of idverde under their contract. In 2023, idverde colleagues have commissioned and worked on producing a draft fundraising plan specifically for the Open Space Strategy which is due to be completed and put to the Portfolio Holder for adoption later in 2024. This draft plan is considering:

- How to best target applying for grant funding to deliver against the ambitions in this strategy.
- Options for raising funds through commercial sponsorship, donations, and legacy funding.
- Consideration of the establishment of an independent open spaces foundation to access funding not available to the Council.

3.19 In November 2022, officers recommended that three key challenges were addressed and prioritised:

- Understanding the open space portfolio – identifying requirements in terms of investment and enhancement and prioritising these
- Maximising the resources that we have – reviewing governance arrangements to get the most out of our open spaces.
- Having a plan for funding the delivery of the strategy.

3.20 Work is underway to audit the borough's open spaces, with an infrastructure audit completed earlier in the year, and an audit of the lifespan of all play equipment and play surfacing currently underway. Additionally, work has been undertaken to review the condition of the borough's water bodies with Early Contractor Involvement reports produced for five, and condition surveys on most of the park buildings have also been completed, all of which are starting to build a sense of the level of investment needed and how this might be prioritised. However, officers are revisiting the benefit of the natural capital accounting assessment approach referenced in the strategy considering the associated costs, which many local authorities are finding it difficult to justify given budgetary pressures. With the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain, Parks for London advise that an alternative approach through the creation of Local Nature Recovery Plans may be a better way of understanding opportunities for investment in local greenspace to support improved biodiversity.

3.21 Further work is needed to review governance arrangements for stakeholders in 2024; it is anticipated that a streamlined approach could be used to make better use of the time contributed by stakeholders, and to improve their collective ability to influence the management

and maintenance of greenspaces in the borough. In terms of contractual governance, changes were made to the way in which Key Service Objectives are monitored under the idverde contract, with these being reported in the annual contract performance report in November 2023 (**ES20318**).

3.22 Paragraph 3.18 sets out the work that has been done this year to look at long-term funding for the delivery of the strategy, which sits alongside the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund.

3.23 Key deliverables in 2024 are:

SO1: Continue with the audit of Open Spaces, and review opportunities for Local Recovery Plans with planning colleagues.

Aim to prepare Green Flag Award applications for a further four sites with revised management plans produced in partnership with key stakeholders.

Complete a review of governance and organisational structures.

SO2: Review the feedback on the Nature Friendly Verges and Sustainable Planting pilots and consider the future use of these management regimes in the borough.

Apply for funding for delivery of woodlands under the Woodlands Establishment project.

Complete works to restore the Croydon Road Recreation Ground bandstand.

Apply for funding for a second phase of works to the Moated Manor at Scadbury Park.

SO3: Install a community garden in Kelsey Park and develop plans for community gardens in Priory Gardens and Betts Park.

Implement changes to web content and align information across the Council, Bromley Parks (idverde), and Friends Forum website.

SO4: As a result of successful applications to the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund, undertake playground improvements at Cudham Recreation Ground, Farnborough New Inn Fields, Goddington Park, Hoblingwell Wood Recreation Ground, McAndrews Recreation Ground, Queensmead Recreation Ground and Palace Square Open Space.

Explore opportunities for additional concessions in parks and open spaces.

SO5: Adopt a Fundraising Plan for delivery of Open Space Strategy objectives.

3.24 The delivery of the Open Space Strategy continues to be monitored through the governance arrangements previously agreed (**ES20223**) with Council officers and idverde staff meeting regularly, and progress monitored at the monthly contract meetings.

#### **4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN**

- 4.1 The Open Space Strategy includes Action Points which aim to ensure that those who are not traditional users of Open Space are included to promote social cohesion and equality of opportunity. This includes:
- The enhancement of Open Space for mental and physical health benefits, including ways to facilitate social networking to combat loneliness and social isolation.
  - The modernisation of play provision to include accessible equipment that caters for a wide range of needs.
  - Enhancement and promotion of the outdoor education offering across the borough.

## **5. TRANSFORMATION/POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Open Space Strategy supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Strategy: Making Bromley Even Better. Whilst there are elements that support each of the Council's ambitions under this strategy, it has the greatest impact on Ambition 4: For residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean, and green environment great for today and a sustainable future.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly because of the progress report on the Open Space Strategy, however many of the projects and proposals have cost implications when they are separate considered and many will be subject to external grant identification and funding applications.
- 6.2 To date, the Council has committed £562k of the Platinum Jubilee Parks Fund to fund projects which support the deliver of the strategic objectives in the Open Space Strategy.

## **7. CARBON REDUCTION/SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Open Space Strategy supports the delivery of the Council's Net Zero Action Plan with inclusion of several sustainability initiatives, including woodland establishment projects and nature friendly management regimes which support delivery against Initiative 6: Woodlands, Parks, and Greenspaces.

## **8. IMPACT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY,**

- 8.1 Strategic Objective 4 of the Open Space Strategy is Local Economy and aims to activate Open Spaces adjacent to or within town centres so that they can be used to sustainably support their growing economies, as well as the provision of community events and the enhancement of the amenity, health, recreation, and sports provision of the Portfolio through the participation of the local community.
- 8.2 This report outlines that officers are working to deliver the Action Points within this Strategic Objective through measures including the Town Centre Feasibility Study and the enhancement of playground facilities.

## **9. IMPACT ON HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

- 9.1 The Open Space Strategy includes Strategic Objective 3 which is to 'manage Bromley's open spaces for improved health and wellbeing'. The Strategy has specific action points to deliver opportunities for physical health and wellbeing and mental health. Paragraphs 3.12 and 3.13 outline progress made against these action points in 2023.

## **10. CUSTOMER IMPACT**

10.1 The Open Space Portfolio covers a range of sites and habitats including formal and informal parks, recreation grounds, nature reserves and woodlands. Accordingly, it affects all customers, including specifically residents, businesses, visitors, and tourists to the borough.

<b>Non-Applicable Headings:</b>	Personnel Implications, Legal Implications, Procurement Implications; Ward Councillor Views
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	<p>Open Space Strategy 2021 – 2031 <a href="#">Open space strategy – London Borough of Bromley</a></p> <p>ES20223 Open Spaces Strategy: Year 1 Update  ES20132 Open Space Strategy 2021 – 2031  ES20027 Draft Parks and Green Space Strategy 2020 - 2025</p>