

Barnet's Local Plan
Examination in Public
Technical Paper on Parks and Recreation
April 2022

1.0 Executive summary

- 1.1 This Technical Paper sets out the policy approaches of the new Barnet Local Plan for parks and recreation, covering open space, sport and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision.

2.0 Evidence

- 2.1 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF requires Local Authorities (LAs) to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations, and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being. This requirement is further strengthened by NPPF paragraphs 93, and 98 to 103 which require that LAs recognise the importance of access to a network of high quality open spaces that provide opportunities for sport and physical activity as they not only support the health and well-being of communities, but can also deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.
- 2.2 The London Plan Policy GG2 has an underlying theme of Good Growth which aims to make the best use of land including protecting and enhancing "London's open spaces, including the Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land, designated nature conservation sites and local spaces, and promotes the creation of new green infrastructure and urban greening, including aiming to secure net biodiversity gains where possible".
- 2.3 Part of the evidence base for the London Plan consisted of the All London Green Grid Strategy (ALGG) (2012) (EB_GI_05). The ALGG examines how the green spaces and routes across London link together. It also identifies areas deficient in regional parks and identifies where they could be placed to address the deficiency. The ALGG identifies the Brent Ridge and Barnet Plateau as being deficient of a regional park and identifies an area in Barnet that could provide an opportunity for a regional park. This was also identified in the Barnet Growth Strategy and the Local Plan. Further studies to identify its exact location and the feasibility of a regional park in Barnet are required in order to justify inclusion within the Barnet Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) (Core_Gen_19).
- 2.4 Barnet recognises the importance of open spaces for the health and well-being of residents. Access to quality parks and open spaces that can be used for essential daily exercise and recreation within a readily walkable distance became even more important during the lockdowns of the COVID19 pandemic. With more people set to continue to work at home there has been a greater connection with local services, including public open spaces.

- 2.5 Barnet is one of the greenest boroughs in London and has 28% of its area designated as Green Belt. Overall, there is 1,192 hectares of public open space across the Borough. Barnet has 10 district parks and 77 local parks ranging in size from Hamilton Road Playground (0.04 ha) to Monken Hadley Common (41 ha).
- 2.6 The importance of open space is recognised in the Local Plan Vision with the following statement:
- “Getting the best out of our natural environment through expanding and improving access to green and blue infrastructure, delivering biodiversity net gain and restoring the Borough’s rivers to the benefit of people and wildlife whilst protecting our communities from flooding.”*
- 2.7 A key challenge for the Local Plan is to ensure that the distinctive character of the area is retained and where possible, enhanced further, whilst achieving sustainable growth. Character can also evolve over time in a positive way with good growth from developments large and small. Furthermore, the Council seeks to optimise the opportunity to use the Borough’s open spaces asset to improve the health and wellbeing of its residents and attract visitors to the area. Policy BSS01 Spatial Strategy for Barnet acknowledges this with the inclusion of the aspiration to deliver a Regional Park and three Sports and Recreation Hubs in Barnet within the timeframe of the Plan. Local Plan Policy ECC04 provides greater detail on the provision of future open space and further support for a new Regional Park.

Supporting Strategies and Evidence

- 2.8 There is a challenge in protecting and enhancing this space and amenity value to residents. Barnet’s Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2016- 26 (BPOSS) (EB_GI_08) provides evidence on existing open spaces that forms part of Barnet’s Green Infrastructure network and its intrinsic value. The BPOSS also builds on the research undertaken as part of the 2009 Barnet Open Space and Recreational Facilities Assessment (EB_GI_01) which provided part of the background evidence for the BPOSS especially in regard to the distribution of parks across Barnet and residents access to open spaces. The BPOSS was also integral to the development of the Green Infrastructure SPD (EB_GI_10). The SPD outlines the capacity of Green Infrastructure to deliver a wide range of benefits and how these might be promoted and delivered including the importance of parks and open spaces for Barnet.
- 2.9 BPOSS recognises that Barnet is set to change in regards to the level of residential development, and therefore population, and that parks in Barnet will have to fulfil the function of supporting the development of sustainable communities and attractive neighbourhoods as well as helping to attract businesses and employment to town centres. The challenges highlighted by BPOSS include :
- Maintaining quality parks
 - Addressing areas of the Borough that have limited access to quality open space
 - Investigating the potential for a Regional Park in Barnet
 - Continuing to investigate funding options for Barnet’s Parks, these are also highlighted in the IDP but continue to evolve as funding options present themselves.
- 2.10 While changes in legislation and Government guidance have heightened the emphasis on environmental issues such as climate change and biodiversity since the development of the BPOSS, the Strategy already recognised the importance of green infrastructure

in assisting the Borough in managing the impacts of climate change, especially flooding, and that sustaining biodiversity and providing places for people to connect with nature were also important benefits that parks could deliver. The Council also continues to view the ability of residents to access quality open space as an important issue, as is expressed in the Barnet Growth Strategy (EB_Gen_18) and The Barnet Plan (Corporate Plan) (EB_Gen_17). The Corporate Plan aspires to make Barnet's open spaces the best in London, this is elaborated on further in the Barnet Growth Strategy by promoting open space for its ability to assist in place making, promoting the health and wellbeing of Barnet residents and providing the environmental enhancements that the parks and open spaces across the Borough enable. BPOSS therefore remains relevant to the Corporate policies and the delivery of the Local Plan.

- 2.11 To make Barnet carbon neutral by 2050 the Council is progressing a Sustainability Strategy (EB_GI_20) that sets out the actions we will take to deliver a green and thriving Borough; with a key focus on keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and with good air quality, ensuring that development and growth in the borough is sustainable, maximising reusing and recycling, and reducing consumption and waste. The BPOSS recognises the importance of green infrastructure, primarily parks and open spaces, in delivering good air quality and enabling sustainable growth.
- 2.12 The 2009 Barnet Open Space and Recreational Facilities Assessment (EB_GI_01) serves as a reminder that a growing population can place increasing pressure on the Borough's existing parks, this has assisted in securing improvements to existing parks and the provision of new parks as part of development projects, for instance the new parks that are being delivered as part of the Council's regeneration programme (EB_H_17).
- 2.13 The Playing Pitches Strategy (EB_GI_13) provides further detail on the number of playing pitches available in Barnet across a variety of sporting codes and then estimates future demand and need for additional pitches for each sport. Fit and Active Barnet (EB_GI_07), seeks to encourage participation of Barnet residents in physical activities many of which are based on parks or sports grounds in the Borough. Two of the four outcomes of the report identified the need to make leisure opportunities and facilities (including parks and open spaces) more easily accessible, and high quality for residents so as to remove barriers to participation.
- 2.14 Open spaces and outdoor sports and recreation facilities allow the residents of Barnet to make the most of the natural assets while enhancing the natural environment through expanding and improving access to green and blue infrastructure, delivering biodiversity net gain and restoring the Borough's rivers to the benefit of people and wildlife whilst protecting our communities from flooding. The All London Green Grid Strategy (EB_GI_05) identified the need for a new Regional Park for north London and that this should be within the Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land of Barnet. This was carried through into the Barnet Growth Strategy and has been set out in Local Plan Policy GSS13; together with 3 new destination hubs for sport and recreation at: Barnet and King George V Playing Fields; Copthall Playing Fields and Sunny Hill Park; and West Hendon Playing Fields.
- 2.15 Masterplans for the 3 sports hubs have been progressed by the Council. An update on the programme is set out in Improvements and Investments in Barnet's Parks and Open Spaces (EB_GI_39).

- The Barnet and King George V Playing fields Master Plan aims to deliver, a community sports hub, a skate park, children's play areas, outdoor gym, multi-use games area (MUGA), football pitches and Gaelic football pitches.
- The Cophall Master Plan identifies a leisure centre and facilities for rugby, football, cricket, and athletics, as well as all-weather pitches.
- West Hendon Master Plan intends to provide, adventure play area, MUGA, children's play area, adventure golf, bowling green, tennis courts, a skate park, outdoor gym and an orchard.
- These and a range of other parks projects that aim to enhance the parks across Barnet are identified in the Barnet IDP.

2.16 Parks are a strategic asset for Barnet and as such require long-term strategic planning to ensure their funding, delivery and enhancement. Together the 2009 Barnet Open Space and Recreational Facilities Assessment, and 2012 ALGG has allowed for the BPOSS and the Corporate Plans, the Barnet Growth Strategy, Playing Pitches Strategy and the IDP to understand the deficiencies in the types of open space across Barnet and develop strategic delivery programmes to address them. These in turn allow the Parks and Planning Departments to work together to produce Local Plan policies that will encourage developers to deliver open spaces and enable additional enhancement.

2.17 The Council considers that the evidence base for parks and recreation is fit for purpose, supporting corporate and planning policy for Barnet, it has also enabled policy to develop over time and has stayed relevant to the changing policy directions of London and the NPPF.

2.18 The Local Plan evidence base therefore conforms with the London Plan and NPPF policies in recognising there are areas deficient in open space and where need is likely to arise in the future both geographically and in terms of the type of space required.