

Open Spaces, Sport and Leisure

8.39 As Hillingdon is one of the least densely populated of all the London boroughs, it contains large areas of public open space comprising of the following:

- Green Belt land
- Metropolitan Open Land (MOL)
- Countryside Conservation Areas
- trees and woodlands
- nature conservation
- amenity green spaces
- outdoor sports facilities
- natural and semi-natural areas
- parks and gardens
- green corridors
- blue ribbon network
- allotments

8.40 These all contribute towards an image of an outer London Borough that is relatively well endowed with open spaces, green network and biodiversity.

8.41 Public open space: For the purpose of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies, public open space is defined as all open spaces of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers and canals which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can also act as a visual amenity. The definition covers a broad range of types of open spaces within the borough, whether in public or private ownership and whether public access is unrestricted, limited or restricted.

8.42 Private open space: Private open space such as front and back gardens and trees, green roofs and living walls add value in terms of visual amenity and can play a significant role in reducing surface water run off rates thereby reducing the risk and effects of flooding as well as supporting biodiversity.

8.43 Trees and woodlands: Hillingdon's trees and woodlands are one of the borough's key assets. They support local ecosystems and help to tackle climate change by reducing carbon dioxide levels and providing shade in the hotter summers. They are a key component to the character of Hillingdon's neighbourhoods and are a significant contributor to helping to define a sense of place for many communities. It is for these reasons that Hillingdon has over 600 Tree Preservation Orders and has nationally protected woodlands.

8.44 The Council is preparing a Tree and Landscape Strategy to identify such areas for future protection and enhancement and ensure sustainable management of tree and landscape features for the benefit of the community as a whole. All the street trees in the borough have been mapped and are part of a regular maintenance programme including replacement planting where necessary.

8.45 Informal recreation: Open space more generally, whether part of a strategic open space network or not, can serve as a vital focal point for community activities, bringing together members of communities and providing opportunities for informal recreation and social

interaction, thereby contributing to the quality of life and wellbeing of the community. It plays a vital role in promoting healthy living and in the social development of children through play, sporting activities and interaction with others.

8.46 Public Rights of Way Network: The borough contains a Public Rights of Way Network that is approximately 112km long and encompasses both urban and rural routes. Urban paths are mainly used for convenient short cuts to schools, shops, public transport and other local amenities. Other public footpaths follow and cut through farmland, parks and open spaces, woodland, nature reserves, golf courses, river banks and canal towpaths.

Main Challenges

8.47 Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 identifies three main challenges relating to open spaces:

- The need to improve the quality of and access to open spaces, rivers and canals for all groups of people in the community
- Pressure to balance the demands of growth and the impacts of flood risk with minimal harm on the blue ribbon environment
- The need to mitigate noise and air quality impacts, especially around Heathrow and the road network

8.48 Open spaces for active recreation - Developing the potential for open spaces to provide and accommodate an expanding range of outdoor pursuits that will increase the appeal and draw of using green spaces. This will enable green spaces to have a wider draw by recognising changing and developing trends in demand for alternative opportunities in active recreation. There is opportunity for Hillingdon's green spaces to provide a unique offer in West London for both developing formal and informal opportunities to be physically active to increase use while also recognising potential conflict with the need to adequately protect the local environment.

8.49 Visual amenity: The ways in which parks, open spaces, trees and woodlands contribute to the visual amenity of Hillingdon are influenced by the amount of open space in the area and the contribution it makes to the street scene and the wider landscape. Hillingdon has over 200 open spaces that contribute towards creating a visually attractive area and providing a break in the built up townscape.

8.50 Countryside Conservation Areas: The traditional agricultural landscape is made up of small fields, hedges, copses, woods and farm ponds, all of which contribute to the visual amenity of the borough. As agricultural practises change, the elements that make up the character of such a landscape often comes under threat. There are three Countryside Conservation Areas in the borough (see Map 8.1). The Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies will need to ensure protection of the borough's open spaces and landscape.

8.51 Quiet areas: The Borough is situated within close proximity of two motorways and one major international airport. These pressures can have a detrimental impact on the tranquillity of open space and reduce the enjoyment of those using it. The Environmental

Noise (England) Regulations 2006⁽⁴⁴⁾ requires quiet or 'tranquil' areas to be identified and protected from increases in environment noise. The Council will work with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to address this. In addition, consideration will be given to 'relative tranquillity' to accord with the Mayor's London's Ambient Noise Strategy and intentions in the London Plan.

8.52 Population growth: The population is expected to increase by approximately 14% over the period of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies⁽⁴⁵⁾, which will present more pressure on open space provision. In reality, these pressures will affect some areas more than others as provision levels vary across the Borough, with the south being far more built up than the north.

8.53 According to Hillingdon's Green Space Survey (2010), 60 - 78% of Hillingdon residents are very or fairly satisfied with the borough's parks and green spaces. This is 9% higher than the London average⁽⁴⁶⁾. The Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies will need to ensure public satisfaction of the borough's parks and green spaces improves over the plan period.

8.54 Public Rights of Way Network: The Council has prepared a Rights of Way and Permissive Routes Improvement Plan (2009-2019), which proposes improvements to public access routes, including connecting open spaces in the borough. The improvements will be secured through Policy T1 of the transport chapter (chapter 9), the Local Implementation Plan proposals or through other funding opportunities. The Local Implementation Plan is addressed in paragraph 9.1 of chapter 9.

8.55 Areas of Environmental Opportunity: The former Greater London Development Plan identified four strategic linear features of the borough as areas for environmental opportunity:

- the Colne Valley
- the M4/Brent Wedge Corridor (the "A4/M4 Linear Park")
- the area around Heathrow, and
- the Western Avenue, A40

These are identified on Map 8.1.

8.56 A large part of the authority lies within the Colne Valley, a regional park located to the immediate west of Greater London. The Park, which was established in 1967, includes parts of Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and the London Borough of Hillingdon. Former gravel workings are a specific characteristic of the area and this has provided a reason for the creation of recreational lakes. It also has other areas of landscape and nature conservation value, and provides countryside recreation for adjacent urban populations. An association of local authorities known as the Colne Valley Partnership

44 Source: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20062238.htm>

45 Source: Hillingdon Profile 2008

46 Source: CABI Space Urban Green Nation - <http://www.cabi.org.uk/files/urban-green-nation-summary.pdf>

co-ordinates the overall management of the Park. This is achieved primarily through a Vision and Action Plan ⁽⁴⁷⁾ agreed by the partnership. The implementation of the Plan is undertaken by a wide range of partners, with Groundwork Thames Valley playing a major role.

8.57 The Council considers that strong development pressures on Areas of Environmental Opportunity and the risk that land may be allowed to deteriorate in the hope of securing development could undermine these important strategic concepts. The protection and enhancement of these areas will be secured through policy EM4 with a more detailed policy in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Development Management Policies LDD.

8.58 The Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies will bring about improvements in this figure by setting out a requirement for open spaces, both old and new, to be of high quality, attractive to users, accessible, well maintained and managed as part of the wider open space network.

Open space provision

8.59 The borough's Open Space Strategy was published in 2011 to provide a qualitative and quantitative audit of publicly accessible open space and an assessment of current and future needs in the borough. The content of the Strategy will form the basis of more detailed policies and allocations in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Development Management Policies and Site Specific Allocations documents.

8.60 The Strategy sets quantity standards to provide a guideline as to how much open space, sport and recreation provision per 1,000 people is needed to strategically serve the borough over the plan period. Standards for each type of provision are created in relation to demand, access and future population growth.

8.61 A quality standard is provided based on the audit and assessment of sites against criteria such as for green flag status.

8.62 An accessibility standard is also provided based on catchment areas and how far people should be expected to travel to visit each type of provision. The recommendations will be adopted in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies with more detailed policies in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Development Management Policies LDD.

8.63 Hillingdon has sixteen Green Flag sites. namely Barra Hall Park, Churchfield Gardens, Cowley Recreation Ground, Cranford Park Countryside Park, Fassnidge Park, Harefield Village Green, Lake Farm Country Park, Little Britain Lake, Little Harlington Playing Fields, Minet Country Park, Norman Leddy Memorial Gardens, Ruislip Woods, Uxbridge Common, Warrender Park, Hillingdon Court Park and Yiewsley Recreation Ground. The Council reviews the status of the borough's parks annually and aspires to achieve Green flag status on all of the boroughs parks over the plan period.

8.64 The London Plan (2011) sets a hierarchy of public open spaces which have been applied to the Open Space Strategy. The areas that currently have little or no access to local parks or open spaces within 400m (or 5 minutes walking time) will be identified as priority areas for the creation of new public open space.

47 Colne Valley Regional Park Action Plan 2009-2012 -
<http://www.colnevalleypark.org.uk/upload/documents/document55.pdf>

8.65 The creation of new open space is to be encouraged wherever practical, although it is recognised that creation of new open spaces may be limited due to densely populated areas and financial constraints.

Policy EM4: Open Space and Informal Recreation

The Council will safeguard, enhance and extend the network of open spaces, informal recreational and environmental opportunities that operate as carbon sinks and that meet local community needs and facilitate active lifestyles by providing spaces within walking distance of homes. Provision should be made as close as possible to the community it will serve. There will be a presumption against any net loss of open space in the Borough.

The Council will identify new opportunities for open space through an open space strategy. Major developments will be expected to make appropriate contributions to the delivery of new opportunities, or to the improvement and enhancements of existing facilities.

The Council will seek to protect existing tree and landscape features and enhance open spaces with new areas of vegetation cover (including the linking of existing fragmented areas) including front and back gardens for the benefit of wildlife and a healthier lifestyle, mitigating climate change.

The Council will work with DEFRA to identify and protect open spaces that provide quiet areas and will also consider whether other areas merit protection of relative tranquillity.

The Council will work with other local authorities and agencies to pursue the key aims of the Colne Valley Park.

Implementation of Policy EM4 - how we will achieve this:

The Council will implement Policy EM4 by:

- Improving the quality of accessible open space and provision of new open space through developer contributions.
- Protecting informal recreational spaces including allotments and promoting participation in food growing opportunities.
- Protecting and improving habitats and ecosystems throughout the Borough and to areas beyond, by maintaining existing trees and native vegetation (adaptable to climate change) and open spaces and creating new areas of tree and woodland cover (including the linking of existing fragmented areas) for the benefit of wildlife and in accordance with the local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Managing development to resist the loss of open spaces, trees and woodlands.
- Implementing Policy T4.

- Improving the Public Rights of Way network secured through the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Local Implementation Plan proposals or through other funding opportunities.
- Developing a policy for Areas of Environmental Opportunity in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Development Management Policies LDD.
- Joint working with other local authorities and agencies in the implementation of the Colne Valley Vision and Action Plan 2009-2012.
- Environmental improvement schemes undertaken or funded by the Council.

Monitoring of Policy EM4 - how we will measure success:

- Monitoring of the policy EM4 will be through the Annual Monitoring Report with a specific link to:
 - **LO18 Indicator:** Amount of open spaces with Green Flag Awards. **Target:** Increase the number of parks gaining Green Flag Status.
- Improve public satisfaction with the quality, accessibility and number of open spaces in the borough.
- Review the quality of information in the Open Space Assessment submitted with planning applications.
- Increase the area of land of new open space, including informal recreation space, in areas identified as deficient in the Open Space Strategy.
- Number of applications refused on open space grounds.
- Increase the length of the Public Rights of Way network.
- BV178 - Hillingdon's Public Rights of Way performance indicator.
- Implementation of the Colne Valley Vision and Action Plan.
- Amount of inappropriate development permitted in the Colne Valley Park.