


<p>Health and Wellbeing Board Tuesday 21 February 2017</p>	
<p>Report of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Engagement Paper: emerging Open Space Strategy 2017 - 2027</p>	

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Executive Key Decision?	No

Summary

The emerging Open Space Strategy 2017 – 2027 is being developed in alignment with the Council’s vision to make the borough a great place to live with healthy and supportive communities. As the population of the borough increases it will become more challenging to meet the demands for new space. To ensure that there continues to be access to high quality open space for residents and visitors we will need creative ways of delivering and maintaining open spaces and robust evidence will be needed to secure provision wherever possible.

The strategy is being developed in alignment with national, regional and local guidance and local priorities and sets out the strategic direction in relation to provision, and projected demand, for parks and open spaces in the borough.

This engagement paper sets out the key findings informing the emerging strategy and seeks input from Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure the final strategy aligns fully with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Recommendations:

The Health & Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

1. Note the key findings informing the emerging strategy as set out in section 3.
2. Consider and comment on how the Health and Wellbeing Board can contribute to meeting the challenges presented by the key findings, especially in identifying:
 - How we can manage demand for parks and open spaces as the population increases;
 - How we can make more creative use of open space, and increase quality to also increase use by local people.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is not to seek a specific decision. The report seeks to engage the Health and Wellbeing Board in the development of the emerging strategy.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 No alternative options were considered as input from the Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure the strategy aligns more effectively.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

- 3.1 Tower Hamlets parks and open spaces are popular with local residents and visitors to the borough with their broad appeal being reflected in high satisfaction ratings from residents, which have been steadily increasing for the past three years.
- 3.2 In the coming years the population of the borough is projected to grow and demand for existing open space will increase and competing demand from different user groups on these spaces will need to be managed. In the context of population growth and financial pressures the need for the emerging Open Space Strategy 2017 – 2027 is outlined as:
- To manage the impact of population growth on the provision of open spaces
 - To attract and guide investment in parks and open spaces to the best effect
 - To contribute to sustainable development
 - To address competing demands on parks and open spaces
- 3.3 The approach taken to development of the strategy comprises a range of activities including: research and review of best practice, consultation findings and strategic drivers. An independent quality and value audit and in-house analysis of all parks and open spaces and modelling of open space requirements in the borough were carried out. Consultation and engagement is also being undertaken with stakeholders through telephone market research, in-depth focus groups and workshops with external stakeholders to establish strategic priorities.
- 3.4 The strategy is one of a number of sport and open space related strategic documents that address separate but interrelated issues. The emerging Open Space Strategy focuses on ensuring that the network of open space and playing fields in the borough will be of sufficient quantity, quality, accessibility and suitability.
- 3.5 It sits alongside the emerging Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy and both of these documents are concerned specifically with physical assets. The

forthcoming Physical Activity and Sport Strategy will set out a vision for sports and physical activity and identify the outcomes we need to improve on, including participation and sports development.

3.6 The strategy is intended to align with and support the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, particularly the priority 'Creating a Healthier Place' which highlights the impact that our environment has on our health and wellbeing places and sets out our aims to ensure better and more creative use of open space, to see an increase in use and satisfaction with green spaces and increase in the quality and function of open space.

3.7 The key findings from the emerging strategy are set out below:

3.8 The need for an Open Space Strategy.

- The strategy will help to manage the impact of population growth on the provision of open spaces by robustly evidencing the need for provision. The evidence gathered will be used to affirm current principles for open space and inform planning policies and planning decisions through the Local Plan.
- Evidencing the need in the borough will also support attracting and guiding investment in parks and open spaces to the best effect whilst also contributing to sustainable development.

3.9 Open space demand in a changing and growing borough.

- The borough has a very high population density which is expected to increase by 25% during the lifespan of the strategy. It is reasonable to assume that demand for parks and open spaces in the borough will increase and the projected population increase will put further pressure on them.
- Younger age groups (16-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds) use parks and open spaces more, compared to older age groups and given the boroughs larger young adult population this can be expected to add pressures.
- Health indicators show there are still gaps between the health of the borough residents and the national average and it is also documented that households with the lowest income levels are also less likely to engage in physical activity.

3.10 Assessment of parks and open spaces.

- The assessment undertaken for the strategy is informed by national and regional guidance and focuses on publicly accessible open space as it offers all residents recreational opportunities.
- The overall provision of publicly accessible open space falls below the local standard. As of 2016/17 there was a total of 0.89ha per 1,000

residents in the borough which is less than the local open space standard of 1.2 ha per 1,000 residents.

- The quality and value of open space varies across the borough with 80 parks and open spaces scoring above the quality standard and 112 scoring below. This includes parks and open spaces both owned, and not owned by Tower Hamlets and the standards were based on Green Flag criteria, which set a very high standard. Therefore spaces below the threshold may still be of good quality or value but fall short of the high standards set for parks being awarded a Green Flag.

3.11 Stakeholder and resident consultation.

- Resident satisfaction with parks and open spaces is high and has been steadily increasing over recent years. Parks are frequently used by residents and 'spending time with family and friends' was the main reason given for visiting.
- Residents recognise that parks and open spaces have a valuable role for individuals and the broader community. Benefits that have been noted include opportunities to be physically active and bringing people of different backgrounds together, although there appears to be a gap between those who identify the opportunity to be active and those who use it.
- Some stakeholders would like more open space dedicated to organised sports, while a majority would prefer parks to be primarily a space for relaxation and socialising.
- Making parks safe and keeping them well maintained are viewed as important priorities for adult residents and other stakeholders, with some wanting to get involved in horticultural maintenance and support for wider community management arrangements.

3.12 Future demand for new open space.

- The increasing demand for land, especially for housing, in recent years has put pressure on the existing parks and open spaces in the borough, which cover a relatively small area.
- Population projections show that more wards will have open space deficiencies by 2013 and large parts of the borough, where significant population increase is expected, are beyond walking distance from parks above 2ha.
- There is limited scope to provide additional open space and it will be important to protect existing provision through effective Local Plan policies. The increasing demand on existing space also points to the need for more robust design and management approaches to ensure that higher levels of use can be sustained.

- Whilst outdoor physical activity is not the only factor that contributes to the improvement of wellbeing it is widely known that it improves people's physical and mental health. The provision of parks and open spaces in the borough can contribute to the improvement of the health of residents.

4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications emanating from this report which seeks to engage with the Health and Wellbeing Board in the development of the emerging Open Space Strategy. The Strategy will provide a framework for future investment in Open Spaces within the borough and any additional investment decisions will need to be made in line with the Councils overall Capital Strategy.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications emanating from this report as it seeks to engage with the Health and Wellbeing Board in the development of the emerging Open Space Strategy and whilst there is no statutory requirement for the Council to have an Open Space Strategy, the Strategy is an important reference document guiding investment in the Borough's green spaces and development negotiations for new or enhanced open spaces. This is an essential role, because as the assessment makes clear, the Borough continues to have an open space deficiency and the substantial increase in population density projected for the next 10-15 years is likely to place even more pressure on land.

6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The Open Space Strategy is about providing access to high quality open space within easy reach for all residents of the borough. The strategy identifies areas in the borough with the greatest open space deficiency, measured in terms of the quantity of open space and the limited accessibility to open space. These areas inform the areas of search for the purpose of the site allocation process, which will be contained in the new Local Plan. Securing new spaces will benefit the communities located in these areas of open space deficiency, helping to address the imbalance between those who live in areas with sufficient open space, and those who do not.
- 6.2 An equalities analysis is being prepared alongside the development of this strategy. Because this is a strategic document, any future individual site decisions will require separate Equality Impact Assessments, as appropriate.

7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Open Space Strategy will explore how to make the network of parks and open spaces in Tower Hamlets financially sustainable and efficient.

- 7.2 In the process of securing new spaces through capital investment, revenue need must be considered and options drawn up to mitigate the financial impact for the council. For example, where possible, securing arrangements in which ongoing maintenance costs for parks and open spaces to be met by an external organisation.
- 7.3 In response to increasing demands on existing parks and open spaces, solutions to increase the sustainability of existing infrastructure should be considered as part of improvement projects and as part of the design process for new spaces.

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 Open spaces are fundamental to the environmental and social health of the borough. By its very nature, this strategy supports council strategic aims in this area by evidencing the need for a continued focus on protecting, creating and enhancing open spaces in the borough, which will help to balance against rapid urban development in the next 10- 15 years. Specifically, open spaces help to mitigate the impact of climate change; tackle air pollution; contribute to flood mitigation; contribute to CO₂ reduction and, combat the 'heat island' effect.
- 8.2 Biodiversity was factored into the quality and value audit when assessing the current sites to establish areas for improvement. This audit can now act as an evidence base for the council when it considers individual site enhancements and improvements, to help establish whether sites would benefit from additional biodiversity. In addition, the council has recently refreshed its air quality plan, which identifies the role of greening projects in tackling pollution.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Risk is considered in the context of individual projects regarding parks and open spaces and is not within scope of this high-level strategic document.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The results of market research carried out to support the development of this strategy identifies that making parks feel safer is a priority for residents. Given this, the ASB review (which is currently underway) gives due consideration to ASB related to parks and open spaces in Tower Hamlets.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- None

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)
List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

- None

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