PARKS AND OPEN SPACES STRATEGY
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
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List of Abbreviations

ANGSt  Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard
CO2e  Carbon equivalent
CNCA  Corporate Natural Capital Account
GIS  Geographic information systems
LBBD  London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
MENE  Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment
NICE  National institute for Health and Care Excellence
ONS  Office for National Statistics
ORVal  Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool
OSA  Open Space Assessment
SEG  Socio-Economic Group
Executive Summary

Barking and Dagenham has a great collection of parks and open spaces. Whether these are associated with historic houses or were created at a time of rapid housing development in the 1920’s, these spaces are a vital part of the fabric of the borough. Parks are great places to get fit and healthy, to play, to walk the dog, to meet and make friends and to enjoy nature.

Barking and Dagenham is going to experience a period of rapid housing growth with over 35,000 new homes being provided at Barking Riverside, Castle Green and other sites over the next 20 years. As was the case in the 1920’s, new public open space will be at the centre of these new developments. However, we want to be sure that all of the borough’s existing parks and greenspaces are also benefitting local communities as much as they can.

Recent research has clearly demonstrated the range of positive outcomes that good quality parks can deliver. Everybody understands that parks are great places to become fit and active and enjoy sports, but parks are also places where people are employed, can learn new skills, volunteer and they play a vital role in absorbing pollution and preventing flooding and urban warming. In this Strategy, we’ve looked at a new way of assessing the value of these benefits (Corporate Natural Capital Accounting - CNCA). We can use the evidence that CNCA provides to support the case for more investment in the borough’s parks and green spaces.

We want Barking and Dagenham’s parks to deliver as many positive outcomes for the economy, for communities and for the environment as possible. To help us plan this, we have assessed the current quality of the borough’s parks and compared this with the quality assessment we carried out in 2003. This has told us that we have some work to do to improve the quality of our parks so that they can deliver in the way that we want them to. Equipped with this quality assessment and the CNCA report, we can look at ways in which we can improve our parks over the next 10 years. We’ll look at how we can use the council’s own resources and at what funding we can bring in from outside to pay for these improvements.

We think the best way to improve parks is to work in partnership with local communities and organisations. To prepare the strategy, we’ve consulted widely across the borough, gathering the views of residents, whether they use our parks or not. We’ve incorporated what you’ve told us into the strategy recommendations and want to continue to work with you to deliver these ideas by helping you to establish ‘Friends’ groups for parks and by supporting volunteering and training initiatives. We also want to work with you to implement a programme of immediate investment to fix some of the issues you’ve identified.

In common with many councils, the borough is facing a significant challenge in terms of funding and we need to consider the best way to deliver and sustain the benefits we all want to see. The strategy looks at new ways of doing things and considers if there might be different ways to run and pay for parks in future.

These are exciting times for Barking and Dagenham and we want parks to be a key part of the future borough just as they have in the past. By committing to this strategy and Action Plan, we can be confident that parks will continue to tell a great story about Barking and Dagenham as a place to live, learn and work.
Barking and Dagenham has some wonderful parks, open spaces, nature reserves and playgrounds. Barking and Dagenham’s parks are much in demand but some of the borough’s parks are not as good as they could be.

2.8 million

More than 2.8 million visits to Barking and Dagenham’s parks every year

[ref: ORVal, Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool]

The value of good quality parks and open spaces is now understood more clearly than ever before, so there are good reasons for investing in the borough’s parks. There is also a clear need — the population of the borough is set to increase by 48% between now and 2037. Most of these new residents will be living in high density housing with little or no access to private gardens. The borough’s parks and green spaces will help people to adopt a healthy lifestyle and will give free access to the outdoors and the natural world. Barking and Dagenham’s parks need to be ready to face this challenge.

13%

Over 13% of Barking and Dagenham’s surface area is set out as parks and greenspace

Barking and Dagenham is facing some immediate issues that good quality parks can help to address. The Action Plan section of the strategy will propose ways to address these issues.

- Barking and Dagenham has a very young population. The borough needs to have good quality play facilities in parks to encourage children to stay active and healthy.
- Barking and Dagenham has high levels of obesity and long-term illness. We need to make the borough’s parks more attractive to encourage people to adopt an active lifestyle.
- Climate change is an issue facing us all. Parks can help to limit the impact of flooding, of urban warming and of air pollution. We need to make sure that parks can continue to deliver these outcomes.

We want to develop an ambitious vision for the borough’s parks that can be delivered by a practical and realistic plan of action. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will look at how parks can benefit local communities identifying priorities for investment and management over the next ten years. We’ll base these decisions on an assessment of the current quality of Barking and Dagenham’s parks and open spaces.

To make sure that the strategy is delivering what residents want, we’ve completed a comprehensive residents’ survey and a broad programme of consultation and engagement. This has included school children, youth groups, individual parks friends and user groups, elected members, council departments and wider network of residents and stakeholders.

2.1 Enhancing place, identity and quality of life

97%

97% of people think that parks and open spaces make their neighbourhood a nice place to live

(Ref: GreenSpace. (2010). GreenSTAT visitor survey system)

Parks are a really important part of Barking and Dagenham’s heritage. The lands of Barking Abbey once covered the whole of the borough and in mediæval times, manor houses like Parsloe and Valence controlled country estates. In time and as London rapidly expanded, these former estates became the public parks we know today. Much of the borough’s housing was built between the wars and parks became the centrepieces of these new estates (refer to Fig.2.1).

Looking ahead, the borough has ambitious plans for growth. The population of the borough is set to increase dramatically and these new residents will need for better transport and community facilities.
Parks and open spaces can help people to become more healthy and active, are great places to relax, to play, to meet friends and to hold events. They also help to make urban life more sustainable by supporting food growing, biodiversity, improving air quality and controlling flood risk. Most important of all, parks are free.

We want to make sure that parks continue to be safe and welcoming to all, making the borough a great place to live and work.

2.2 The Council’s strategic vision

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy is one of a number of initiatives that the council is adopting to shape the future of the borough (refer to Fig.2.2).

2.2.1 The Borough Manifesto

Barking and Dagenham’s Borough Manifesto sets out the council’s long-term vision. The Manifesto suggests ways in which health, housing, education and the environment need to change over the next twenty years.

The Manifesto proposes:

- A much cleaner borough, and particularly its streets, parks and front gardens
- A borough of cohesive communities with a renewed sense of community spirit
- A great place to live and work and for businesses to settle and grow
- More facilities for young people
- More services for older people to keep them active

The Manifesto suggests that parks and open spaces can help to deliver these priorities.

- By maintaining parks to better standards
- By updating and repairing worn-out children’s play and leisure facilities
- By ensuring parks are safe and easy to use, particularly for children and young people.

This strategy will be looking at ways in which parks can deliver these outcomes and others besides.

2.2.2 Delivering sustainable growth – the Growth Strategy

The council’s Growth Strategy talks about creating neighbourhoods places with a clear sense of character. The borough’s parks have a fundamental role to play in this process.

The Growth Strategy identifies locations for new developments as well as a programme of estate renewal. Parks and open spaces will be at the centre of these projects (see Fig.2.3).

2.2.3 National and local planning policy

As a key document that will shape future planning, the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy also needs to reflect national and local planning policy:

The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) emphasises that parks and open spaces can deliver ‘a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities’. The strategy includes an up-to-date assessment of the quantity and quality of the borough’s parks and open spaces, giving us the evidence we need to decide how to improve the borough’s parks and how to deliver more benefits for communities.

The London Plan (2015) describes a hierarchy for the city’s parks and open spaces, seeks their protection and promotes the creation new spaces.

The Barking and Dagenham Local Plan (2011) refers to the council’s Strategy for Parks and Green Spaces (2004). This acknowledges that ‘there is a good level of public open space in the borough, but that public satisfaction with parks and other open spaces is below the London average’. The planning vision for 2025 proposes a major improvement in the borough’s environmental sustainability by connecting parks ‘by a network of tree-lined streets, wildlife corridors, and cycle paths’.

The specific policy for the Green Belt and Public Open Spaces (CM3) sets out the protection of a number of local public open spaces designated as District Parks, Local Parks and Open Spaces and Small Open Spaces. The protection of all of the borough’s existing parks and open spaces from development will be a principal aim of this strategy.
2.2.4 Responding to wider strategies

Parks can also help to deliver a range of other important objectives:

- The Housing Strategy\(^2\) emphasises the need to create and maintain popular and attractive neighbourhoods.
- The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment looks at ways in which parks can offer a variety of health programmes. These need to encourage more use of parks by every age group.
- Barking Riverside is part of NHS England’s Healthy New Towns initiative. This will look at ways in which green spaces and waterways can help to improve health.

2.3 Challenges facing public parks

Whilst it is clear parks and green spaces have an important role to play in making the borough a great place to live and work, funding for parks is under pressure. Across the UK parks budgets have fallen significantly and Barking and Dagenham faces similar pressures.

The council recognises the importance of parks to quality of life. In this strategy, we are looking at innovative park projects and models of good practice so these benefits can be secured in the long term.

NOTES

\(^1\) National Planning Policy Framework, 2012, page 52

\(^2\) Barking and Dagenham Housing Strategy 2012 – 2017
Over the past twenty years, there has been a revival in the quality of urban parks. Local communities have always valued good quality parks but there is now a lot of evidence that greenspace can contribute significantly to the quality of urban life in many different ways.

The benefits that parks can deliver can be grouped into three main categories:

**ECONOMIC BENEFITS:**
- Good quality parks make town centres attractive, helping to sustain their economic success and making them attractive places to work and set up business
- Good quality parks support the value of homes
- Parks are places where people work, run businesses, volunteer and gain skills
- Good quality parks are tourist destinations in their own right, boosting the tourist economy

**SOCIAL BENEFITS**
- Parks are free to use and diverse; parks are open to all irrespective of gender, age, ethnic background, or religion
- Parks can have a positive impact on some of the most serious health conditions affecting the UK population – coronary heart disease, Type II diabetes, stroke and clinical depression
- Regular contact with the natural world can significantly help children to achieve better results at school
- Parks are central to a sense of place and people strongly identify with their local park as an essential part of their neighbourhood

**ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS**
- Parks help to limit the impact of extreme weather events and can prevent flooding
- Parks absorb pollutants from the atmosphere
- Parks are cooler than the streets surrounding them
- Parks sustain biodiversity and forge stronger connections between the city and the surrounding countryside

Where greenspace occupies more than 50% of land surface, temperatures are up to 7°C lower than elsewhere. This effect can be experienced up to 300 metres from the park edge (ref: European Environmental Agency:2012)

**NATURAL CAPITAL ACCOUNTING**

Natural Capital can be defined as the world’s stocks of natural assets. These include the air we breathe and the water we drink but also the world’s geology its soils and all living things.

Natural Capital provides us with a range of ‘ecosystem services’ which make human life possible.

The most obvious ecosystem services include the food we eat, the water we drink and the plant materials we use for fuel, building materials and medicines. But there are many more.

Until now, the cost of maintaining parks and open spaces has been measured using a traditional accounting method. This does not capture the value of the ecosystem services provided by parks and open spaces or the value of the economic, social and environmental benefits that they can deliver.

In developing the Strategy, we have used a new form of accounting (Corporate Natural Capital Accounting - CNCA) to capture the value of the ecosystem services that are delivered by parks and greenspaces.

The CNCA balance sheet shows that when £1 is invested in parks, the return to communities in terms of the value of benefits delivered by parks is in excess of £27.

This will make it easier for us to make a strong case for investment in parks in the future.

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£35 million

The annual value of volunteering in Britain’s parks is up to £35 million


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**50% cut**

Take a daily brisk walk in the park can cut the risk of heart attack, stroke and Type II diabetes by 50%

(ref: Bird 2002: Green Space and our Health)

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1 tree

A single tree can compensate for 3,000-10,000 car kilometres a year in terms of carbon and nitrogen emissions

(ref: Trees and Design Action Group: 2010)