

June 2016

# **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

## **Community Involvement in Parks**

Report and Recommendations from the  
Scrutiny Challenge Panel

### **Members of the review group**

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Councillor Richard Almond

Councillor Michael Borio

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Councillor Susan Hall

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# 1. CHAIRS FOREWORD

First of all, on behalf of the Panel, I would like to express its thanks to all those who provided written information and who attended the Challenge Panel meeting to look at our parks, how they could be improved and how community involvement, especially with Park User Groups, could be strengthened. I would especially like to thank Gerry Bloomfield (Friends of Roxbourne Park) , Michael Sayer,(Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group) and Shahnawaz Kazi and Eugene Callinan (Friends of Kenton Recreation Ground) for the time, enthusiasm and commitment they give to making our parks better and for the positive ideas put forward at the Challenge Panel meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> June.

Parks and open spaces are important and much loved by all. They provide somewhere for us all to relax and enjoy, and for people to play, but they are much more than that, there are health benefits that spread across age and socio-economic status for all the communities in Harrow, there are education benefits, children who use green spaces do better in school, are more attentive and less likely to be disruptive. There are economic benefits and health, both physical and mental health benefits. They are also important centres for community cohesion. Groundwork estimate between 300,000 and half a million people volunteer in Parks and Open Spaces. Those who use parks are also less likely to be engaged in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Our Parks and Green Spaces are also good for the environment, whether it is in is encouraging bio-diversity and wildlife, mitigating climate change, or encouraging walking and cycling.

**Councillor Jeff Anderson**

Chair, Community Involvement in Parks Challenge Panel

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Challenge Panel gathered substantial evidence, heard from and questioned several key witnesses and considered evidence put before them to understand the current position and user involvement of Harrow's parks. The witnesses included the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime & Community Safety, Head of Service for Community Engagement and Consultant for Public Health. The Panel also heard evidence and best practice from members of three Park User Groups (PUGs).

The Panel heard many positive comments and found that parks are extremely important to the quality of life of our residents. They fulfil a number of different roles – providing peace and quiet; fresh air; opportunities to exercise, walk dogs, socialise and so on. They also contribute to the promotion of good health, education, biodiversity, community cohesion and many more strategic aims of the Council and its partners.

The Panel believe that it is important to maintain and improve Harrow's parks. It has therefore made a number of recommendations aimed at helping the Council to make best use of existing resources and to seek new sources of revenue and capital finance. The key findings and recommendations put forward by the Panel are presented in the report.

Despite the acute financial pressures facing Local Authorities, the Challenge Panel hopes that its recommendations put forward will be considered favourably and taken forward and adopted by Cabinet.

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We note the success of the Park User Groups and the energy and commitment they contribute to improving our Parks. We recommend that Council should continue to work with Park User Groups and the Parks Forum to ensure our parks are safe and secure environments in which all users feel safe and welcome, to promote the use of parks and open spaces by all sections of Harrow's diverse communities and to explore how sections of our community that do not use Parks can be encourage to do so.
2. That the Council works in partnership with Park User Groups in identifying projects, including capital, to improve parks and park facilities and works with those groups to apply

to funding sources. The Council will continue to manage projects but, where appropriate Park User Groups can be involved in project delivery.

3. That the Council should investigate potential funding routes, such as grants, that could be available to properly constituted Park User Groups that would not be available to local authorities.
4. That the Council should explore the use of existing buildings in Parks to maximise use/income, this should include an assessment of how existing buildings could be used to develop facilities that would include the provision of refreshments and toilets including community cafes run by Park User Groups as well as commercial lets.
5. We note the success of the existing Park User Groups and recommend that the Council should continue to work in partnership with Parks User Groups through the Parks Forums and that the Council should actively encourage the creation of further Park User Groups where they do not exist. We note the existence of properly constituted groups promotes good governance and allows such groups to apply for grants as appropriate.
6. That the Council should encourage schools to utilise Parks for School activities including a "Daily Mile" to promote health and to combat child obesity. This will also have the benefit of improving concentration and performance by pupils in schools.
7. Those Commercial opportunities to develop sporting facilities should be explored as possible but that such schemes should offer access at affordable prices to residents.
8. We note the success and popularity of the "Green Gyms" and these should be expanded as appropriate and as funding is available with a specific focus on parks in the most deprived wards, especially near family homes without gardens.

## **4. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE**

The Scrutiny Leadership Group (SLG) agreed to undertake a review of 'Community Involvement in Harrow Parks' in Harrow in the form of a Challenge Panel. The Challenge Panel took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The membership of the Panel consisted of eight (4

Conservative and 4 Labour) councillors and was supported by a Policy Officer from the Corporate Policy Team.

The main aims of the Panel were to:

- To examine the current levels of community involvement in Harrow's parks and benchmark against parks in neighbouring boroughs.
- To develop an understanding of what residents want from their local parks.
- To explore innovative practices in the delivery of park services by other councils and other initiatives demonstrating community involvement and volunteering in parks.
- To identify ways in which Harrow Council can best deliver 21<sup>st</sup> century parks for residents.
- To inform the development of Harrow's parks and open spaces strategy 2016-19.
- To develop the park users' forum so it is inclusive and representative of all park users across Harrow.
- To inform the progress of Project Phoenix and the commercialisation strategy for parks.

The formal scope for the project is attached at **Appendix 1**.

The Challenge Panel invited submissions and heard evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime & Community Safety, Council Officers, and from representatives of several Park User Groups.

## **5. GENERAL CONTEXT**

Open spaces which include parks play a vital role in our lives. Good quality green spaces and parks are an essential component of the urban fabric of Harrow and make a profound contribution to the quality of life of local communities. They are vital pieces of local infrastructure. The quality of parks and open spaces services has a proven effect on public perception of local authority performance.

Harrow has large green areas but this is unevenly distributed with less access from the deprived areas of Harrow in the south and east of the borough. As a result people living in these areas have less access to environments that support physical activity such as well maintained parks, open spaces or safe areas for play, and are more likely to have transport environments less amenable to active travel. This is likely to influence the amount of physical activity that households living in these areas undertake

Harrow is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in the country and 43% are from Asian/Asian British ethnic background. South Asian populations are at higher risk of type 2 diabetes at lower BMI.<sup>i</sup> There is some evidence that levels of physical activity are lower among South Asian groups than the general population which may contribute to increased risk of diabetes and coronary heart disease.

## 5.1 How active are we in Harrow?

*Harrow has higher proportion of inactivity and performs low in required levels of physical activity (including active travel) compared to the national and London average. Areas of low activity coincide with areas of deprivation, low access to green space and those areas with high obesity levels.*

Harrow is less active and more inactive than the London and the nation: Nearly one in three (31%) of the adult population in Harrow is classed as physically inactive falling into the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) "high risk" health category<sup>ii</sup>. This is higher than the London (27%) and the national (27.7%) level of inactivity. This means that 31% of the adult population in Harrow do less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week. Only 51.4% of adults (16+) report undertaking 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity compared to the national average of 57% and the London average of 57.8%.<sup>iii</sup> Women are less active than men therefore they are a risk group for developing health conditions related to the high levels of inactivity.

Harrow performs poorly for Walking and Cycling: The percentage of walking trips in the borough has dropped from an average of 30% between 2006/7 to 2008/9 to an average of 28% between 2009/10 to 2011/12 and the percentage of cycling trips has dropped from an average of 0.8% to an average of 0.6% over the same time period. Both walking and cycling rates are lower than the Greater London average, Inner London and even Outer London for cycling.

Harrow is below average in sports and active recreation compared to its statistical neighbours and other boroughs of London: The higher levels of participation in 2013 and 2014 may reflect what is known as the Olympic effect – generally these big sporting events are good for economic growth of a country but they also have a positive social impact

which governments often seek to capitalise upon when building a legacy which seeks to encourage the take up of sports in the general public.

*Source: Active Harrow – Harrow Physical Activity and Sports Strategy 2016-20*



## 5.2 Benefits of Good Quality Parks and Open Spaces

The UK has enjoyed a parks renaissance over the past 20 years with new thinking evolving about the role that greenspace plays in developing successful towns and cities. Today many recognise that good quality parks and greenspaces are not just 'nice to have' but are in fact essential to the creation of sustainable communities.

It is now accepted that urban parks deliver a huge range of benefits for towns and cities and the people that live and work in them. These benefits reflect many of the objectives that we have established for the economic success of the borough, the health of its citizens and the quality of the environment with which they interact on a daily basis. These benefits are both tangible i.e. they have direct and economically valuable effects and intangible i.e. they have effects that are socially beneficial and deliver benefits for communities, families and individuals.

These benefits can be broadly grouped into three categories

1. Economic benefits,
2. Social benefits
3. Environmental benefits.

There are a number of potential **economic benefits** that are derived from high quality parks. These include an enhanced local image helping to attract visitors and inward investment and to retain existing businesses; facilities for employees and opportunities to train young people and the long-term unemployed. Recent figures released by Savills Residential Research reveal that homes next to an open space can expect an uplift in value of 12% over properties in the same location with no park views. According to Savills,



even the presence of a park up to two streets away will result in an average 7% uplift compared to streets with the same type of property away from open space.<sup>1</sup>

Parks offer important **social benefits**. We have to address an obesity epidemic and combat diabetes and coronary heart disease and going to the park on a regular basis can help people to adopt active lifestyles and to stay healthy. The council's emerging 'Sports and Physical Activity' and 'Health and Wellbeing' strategies both identify parks as key to addressing significant health issues.

Research has established that people regard their local park as an important part of their neighbourhood. Parks can also support significantly enhanced educational attainment and there is much potential for a greater level of engagement between schools and greenspaces.

Research suggests that open space can contribute to social cohesion by helping to maintain or increase a sense of community, and by strengthening social networks. Open spaces within urban areas function as a shared community resource. They help to foster the development of social networks and a feeling of community cohesion and identity. They are places where informal social interaction can take place providing opportunities for groups of people to meet. They provide important meeting and recreational places for young mothers and are suitable places for young people to 'hang out' with less chance of being asked to move on.

It has also been shown that by involving communities in open space projects a sense of pride and ownership is engendered which also increases informal stewardship. If people are satisfied with local parks, they tend to be satisfied with their council. There is a strong link between people's satisfaction with their local parks and open spaces, and their satisfaction with their neighbourhood. Satisfaction with neighbourhood is one of the key things that affects people's perceptions of their council's performance.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly acute in the most deprived areas, where neighbourhood satisfaction is at its lowest.

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<sup>1</sup> Savills Residential Research, 2006, 'The impact of nearby open space on property prices', Savills Residential Research, London

<sup>2</sup> Local Government Association's (LGA) Reputation, Reputation Index Report, The Research Unit, 2010.

**Environmental benefits** are fundamentally linked with good quality parks and open spaces. As recent flood episodes have demonstrated, we will need to adapt to the impacts of climate change and parks should play a significant role in limiting the impacts of extreme weather, urban warming and air pollution. The borough's trees if protected will continue to absorb CO2 from the atmosphere.

### 5.3 Parks in Harrow – an overview



Parks are largely designed spaces that aim to provide a range of opportunities including exercise, a quiet place for reflection, social interaction, play, community events and to enjoy nature. Parks in Harrow are often multifunctional spaces that offer a variety of experiences to a range of participants. There are currently **88 parks** across Harrow's various wards. The definition of parks in this

context covers, parklands, greenbelts, open spaces, key parks, cemeteries and open spaces. Out of the 88, 9 of these are cemeteries, 19 are parklands and 26 are open spaces. From the 88 parks, 21 have basketball targets, 6 have basketball courts, 6 have bowls, 18 have facilities for cricket, 6 have tennis hard courts and 52 have football facilities.

There are **28 traditional parks** in the borough (excluding Stanmore Country Park, which is counted as natural green space), and a majority of people are satisfied with current provision; nevertheless a substantial minority would like to see more space of this type, particularly in the central sub-area.

Park quality varies, but Canons Park, which has Green Flag status, achieves high scores on the audit. Residents' perceptions give above average scores generally, but indicate room for improvement in areas like cleanliness, planting and amenities; toilets, seating, and safety after dark attract negative perceptions. The distribution of parks across the borough is reasonably even, but some attract more visitors than others; popular sites include Canons Park and Pinner Memorial. Most people walk to their local park, and make a journey of no more than 10-15 minutes to do so.

The quantity standard highlights lower levels of provision in the south and central parts of the borough, and is set at a level that tends to address the disparities in provision between different parts of the borough, rather than to achieve an overall increase in quantity. The quality standard sets a benchmark which would require parks to attain a level of quality similar to that of Chandos Recreation Ground. The accessibility standard aims to ensure that everyone has access to a park within reasonable reach, and indicates deficiencies in this respect in the south-eastern and south-western sub-areas in particular.

## 5.4 Green Flag

In England and Wales the recognised benchmark is the Green Flag Award for well-managed open spaces which has helped to drive up standards in the quality of spaces. A park or open space which achieves the Green Flag Award will be a welcoming place, with good, safe access, effective signage and offering something to everyone. In addition, it will be a healthy, safe and secure space. The park or open space should be well maintained and clean with litter removed and the grounds, buildings and equipment being well maintained.

The equipment and facilities must be safe to use, the site must be secure for all members of the community and the issue of dog fouling must be addressed. If the space is a park, it should have toilets, drinking water, first aid, telephones and access to emergency equipment.

## 6. WHAT DO OUR RESIDENTS SAY?

Although a summary of the key findings from a number of consultations undertaken on our parks and open spaces was presented to the panel (**Appendix 2**), it was acknowledged that most of these were a few years old. The most recent one being the **Environment Savings Options Consultation December 2014** – A public consultation was undertaken from December 2014 to January 2015 which included a number of questions relating to our parks. There were a total of 795 responses and a summary of the key findings is as follows:

- 134 people visit a park daily, 184 at least weekly, 154 several times a month and 69 people said they never visit a park
- The top six parks visited included Pinner Memorial Park (98), Harrow Rec (70), Headstone Manor (47), West Harrow Rec (46) and Canons and Roxbourne (46).

- The 5 most important reasons parks were used include walking (481), green space (382), relaxing (287), with the children (233) and play area (217)
- 531 of those who responded rated the parks either excellent or good and 59 poor or very poor
- Littering (32) and general maintenance (44) were the top two reasons for those who rated the parks poor or very poor
- 650 people said it was important Harrow parks had green flag awards

## **7. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Challenge Panel was presented with a range of useful and interesting evidence in the form of a briefing document as well as from a number of witnesses including the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime & Community Safety, Head of Service for Community Engagement and Consultant for Public Health and representatives from Park User Groups (PUGs). The panel were disappointed that the Environment were unable to arrange for an officer who could supply financial information and answer questions in this area to attend the Challenge Panel meeting, nor were all the answers to the questions subsequently asked fully answered. The Panel considered that this did not allow them to explore relevant financial aspects of Community Involvement in Parks fully.

The evidence presented highlighted the emergence of a number of key themes. The following section therefore looks at these highlighting the evidence provided and recommendations put forward by the Panel.

### **7.1 Operational Framework**

- Harrow Open Space Strategy was approved by Cabinet in October 2011 and includes a key objective to explore opportunities for stakeholders, including users and potential users, to become involved in decisions relating to the management and maintenance of open spaces.
- A key priority in Harrow Labour Party Manifesto (May 2014) was to set up park user group forums to give greater powers to local residents to decide how their local park is used

- Park User Group framework approved by Cabinet in March 2015 which was centred on having a clear and consistent structure and objectives. The Park User Group Forum was established in July 2015 and the election of officers will take place in Jun 2016.
- The Events Policy was agreed at cabinet in April 2016. The Council had no control over events/festivals taking place in our Parks before this and the policy protects parks and open spaces.

## **7.2 Management and Maintenance of Harrow's Parks**

The programme for parks maintenance is as follows:

- Grass cutting reverted back to 3 weekly from 6 weekly in June 2015
- Outfields are cut weekly
- Shrub pruning up to twice per year
- Weed control undertaken 2 times per year
- An additional 200 bins have been installed in the last 2 years
- Litter Clearance is done on a responsive basis and work with volunteers (Park Users Groups) who also empty bins in their parks

It was also noted that littering was the cause of the key reason for complaints in Parks. Findings from the Consultations on Harrow's Parks and Open Spaces Under One Sky Consultation - June 26th 2011 28% of the respondents highlighted poor maintenance the reasons for disliking an open space most frequently and one fifth reported lack of cleanliness and 6% cited dog mess as a problem.

Panel members raised concern about the frequency of litter clearance, especially overflowing bins with dog mess and asked how this will be addressed. The Portfolio Holder advised the panel there were responsive teams in place and bins were being cleared as and when required and volunteers such as PUG members were also taking responsibility for their parks.

A question put to all the PUG representatives was if they were 'happy with the level of maintenance and emptying of bins'. Representatives from the PUGs advised the panel, their members take pride in maintaining their parks including clearing litter and bins. The

representative from Friends of Kenton Recreation Ground said they litter pick every day including emptying the bins. They didn't experience dog fouling problem at all as they educate dog walkers.

"We are never satisfied, but if you don't have the money, you can't do it. The Council is doing it's very very best and are very helpful".

Michael Sayer, Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group

The Council also has a contract with Kingdom who enforces litter dropping in our parks. Over 6000 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) have been issued since the commencement of our contract in with Kingdom in July 2015. They work across the borough including parks and enforce during targeted times, evenings and weekends, seven days a week. The enforcement officers have a uniformed presence with body cameras and are supported by the police.

**Park Patrols** are officers, who work 365 days a year and are the eyes and ears for parks. They work with Environmental Compliance and Community Protection, inspect parks, educate individuals, challenge and can also issue FPNs.

### 7.3 Finance and Commercial Opportunities

The **controllable budget** for the current year for our Parks is £1,607,000, in 2015/16, controllable spend was £1,699,000 and £2,022,00 in 2014/15

**Capital Investments:** there is £1860k for parks infrastructure and buildings. Investments include:

- refurbishing pavilions to make them fit for purpose and DDA compliant
- Infrastructure repairs where intervention levels exceeded
- Proposed cafes and improvements to existing sports facilities as commercial opportunities
- Improvements to pitches to increase usage and service provided
- Green gyms

Improvements across the portfolio of parks is driven by intervention levels, commercial opportunities, service provision, location of existing facilities

**Revenue Income from Parks:** the revenue income budget from parks for this year is £380,000, in 2015/16 the income was £389,000 and £379,000 in the year 2014/15

### Community Festivals and Events

Each year, we also host a number faith festivals and community events in our Parks. These are usually organised by faith/community groups, Park User groups and charities. A summary of the annual key festivals and community events is outlined below with the approximate attendance.

Religious Festivals	Approximately 14 Religious Festivals including two Eid events, Zoroastrian, Sri Lankan New year, Milaad (Prophet Muhammad PBUH) Birthday, Yath Ratri and Processions. The attendance at these festivals is approximately 2,500.
Commercial	Fireworks and Summer Fun, - 2 events with approximately 5000 people in attendance.
Charity	Silver Star Diabetics
Park User Groups	Approximately 8 organised events including Canons Fun Day, Harrow Rec Fun Day, Roxbourne, Pinner Park, Bernays Gardens with about 3,200 people in attendance.
Council Events	Harrow Council organise 4 Tour de Harrow events with approximately 3,000 in attendance.
Sports	Approximately 6 Football / Cricket and basketball tournaments which are attended by approximately 4,000 people each year.

### Fees and Payments for Events

In February 2016 the Council agreed an Events Policy which includes fees and payments. Each application is subject to an application fee and other charges (Appendix 1). An 80% discount for events by community organisations, schools, places of worship and registered charities based within the London borough of Harrow that have free entry and are open to the general public.

Hire charges may be waived for Park User Groups. The waiver of fees will be at the discretion of the Corporate Director (or delegated to the Divisional Director) and Portfolio Holder following recommendation from the Community Engagement Team and considered on a case by case basis through the application process.

There will be no charge for specific civic events including, but not limited to, Remembrance Day.

The council has created a Community Fund and registered community groups including PUGs can apply for support from this Fund to facilitate events. This is the first full year of the fund and the allocated amount is £34,035

The panel were keen to explore other commercial opportunities to generate income, improve facilities such as pavilions and cafes in the parks, introduce more sports (outdoor swimming pools), increase user involvement and improve user experience.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Council should investigate potential funding routes, such as grants, that could be available to properly constituted Park User Groups that would not be available to local authorities.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Council should explore the use of existing buildings in Parks to maximise use/income, this should include an assessment of how existing buildings could be used to develop facilities that would include the provision of refreshments and toilets including community cafes run by Park User Groups as well as commercial lets.

**Recommendation 7:** Those Commercial opportunities to develop sporting facilities should be explored as possible but that such schemes should offer access at affordable prices to residents.

## 7.4 Accessibility

Harrow is continuously seeking to ensure our parks are as accessible and inclusive as possible for all users.

- Car parking – Blue Badge parking spaces are being provided in parks as car parks are relined or surfaced.
- Signage – Signs identifying facilities and exits are displayed at all entrances
- Toilets – All 4 park toilets are DDA compliant.
- Paths – Path network on district parks are maintained to avoid serious surface defects



- Parks pavilions - Currently being refurbished to include ramped access and DDA compliant toilet facilities
- Play Areas – all play equipment is considers accessibility and inclusive play including integrated swings and roundabouts and bright colours. For example, at Harrow Rec, the play equipment is accessible for children with limited mobility and visually impaired.

Evidence from the PUGs as well as the written information provided, indicated our parks were pretty good in terms of accessibility including entrances, parking, signage and being welcoming and inclusive. All the representatives also supported parks being unlocked and open at all times.

“Parks are for people, I don’t agree with locking up parks”.

Michael Sayer, Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group

## 7.5 Green Flag Parks in Harrow

There are **five** parks in Harrow that have achieved Green Flag status; these are Harrow Recreation Ground, Roxeth Recreation Ground, Pinner Memorial Park, Canons Park and Kenton Recreation Ground. In comparison, in Hillingdon 34 parks have been awarded the green flag, (Hillingdon Council have invested heavily to achieve Green Flag status to their parks) and 16 in Ealing. Although Barnet does not have any ‘Green Flag’ parks, ‘Green Flag’ assessment methodologies have been used in developing quality assessment criteria for Barnet’s parks. Four of Harrow’s parks have achieved the Gold Standard in the Mayors Safer Park Award. This represents 25% of the awards achieved by all London Boroughs.

A discussion took place regarding the sustainability of green flag status for the five Harrow parks. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that Harrow and Kenton Recreation Grounds had just been re-assessed and we were awaiting the outcome. Representatives from these PUGs were confident they would retain their green flag status. The panel also expressed a desire for more parks with a green flag status but it was acknowledged that the financial situation makes this aspiration difficult to achieve, or unrealistic, without additional resources.

## 7.6 Activities and User Involvement in Harrow Parks

One of the objectives of our **Physical Activity and Sports Strategy** is to 'Improve the degree to which Harrow as a place supports residents to be active as a routine part of daily life' with following key outcomes:

- *More people will access parks, green spaces and growing areas*
- *More people will take up active travel, walk and cycle more*

In order to achieve this objective and outcomes, a number of activities take place in our parks. A table providing a breakdown of **current** activities (2016) with the number of participants is available in **Appendix 3**. Some of the activities which take place in our parks include:

**Harrow Health Walks<sup>iv</sup>:** Harrow Health Walks is a well established exercise program with around 250 walkers taking part in organised walks every week. We have 22 trained volunteer Health Walk Leaders and 7 volunteer data administrators supporting the program helping it run each week. Total reach over a year exceeds 500 people. Many people with Long Term Conditions (LTC), disabilities and older people greatly benefit from the program. There is a big drive on health walks, where General Practitioners are encouraged to refer patients.

**Harrow Park Run:** This is a new initiative run by Harrow Athletic Club every Saturday morning at the Harrow Recreation Ground. Volunteers help run the program. Each week over 200 people take part. The program kick started with a small pot of public health money and now running with the help of volunteers and support from the Community Department. Separate Park run groups have also established at other parks.

**Our Parks<sup>v</sup>** run weekly group exercise program (Social Netball) at Centenary Park through London Sport funding. It promotes park use for group exercise through qualified instructors. 85 Percent out of the total 69 were inactive before coming to the sessions. They were all women aged between 25-40yrs.

**Daily Mile:** This initiative includes children running or walking a mile in distance each day. Recent studies have shown that children are more attentive, an improvement in behaviour and weight loss. This will be piloted in four schools initially before it is rolled out across the Borough schools.

The panel agreed it was important to continue the good work and encourage more residents, young people and especially those communities who are not as active and reduce health inequalities.

**Recommendation 6:** That the Council should encourage schools to utilise Parks for School activities including a 'Daily Mile' to promote health and to combat child obesity. This will also have the benefit of improving concentration and performance by pupils in schools.



**7.7 Outdoor Gyms** – outdoor gyms are a new way to look at health and fitness offering a lot of the same equipment you would find in an indoor gym, but in the great outdoors. Best of all, they're completely free! **Twenty three** parks in Harrow have outdoor gym equipment compared to **twelve** parks in the London Borough of Hillingdon and **six** in Brent.

Harrow also has volunteer **Outdoor Gym Activators**<sup>vi</sup> who can provide support to groups on demand. During (2014/15) we trained 12 volunteer activators, helping them access level 2 fitness instructors training, providing volunteering opportunities at outdoor gym sites. Through events and activities over 500 people were supported though guidance on how to use outdoor gyms and healthy lifestyle. Children centres and schools were key partners.

The representatives from the PUGs highlighted the outdoor gyms were very popular and well used throughout the day and right into the evening and sometimes had people waiting to use them. The panel agreed the gyms were very popular and consideration should be given to extend these to more parks.

**Recommendation 8: We note the success and popularity of the “Outdoor Gyms” and these should be expanded as appropriate and as funding is available with a specific focus on parks in the most deprived wards, especially near family homes without gardens.**

## **7.8 Park User Groups (PUGs)**

There are currently 21 active Park User Groups (PUGs) in Harrow. The purpose of PUGs is to represent users of parks and green spaces by working in partnership with Harrow Council in the management and maintenance of those spaces for the benefit of the whole community. They are responsible for making effective and efficient use of the resources available by working collaboratively and bringing together knowledge, expertise and resources for the long-term management of parks and green spaces in Harrow.

The Portfolio Holder for Parks highlighted the objective to have a PUG for every park in Harrow, with proper constitutions and Terms of Reference enabling PUGs to apply for other funding. The panel also heard PUGs were at different level of engagement, some were well established and others were at early stages of development. Work is now being undertaken to bring them to the same level and consistency which includes investing in training and development of PUG members.

The panel heard from representatives from three PUGs including Gerry Bloomfield (Friends of Roxbourne Park) , Michael Sayer,(Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group) and Shahnawaz Kazi and Eugene Callinan (Friends of Kenton Recreation Ground).

### **Friends of Roxbourne Park**

- Friends of Roxbourne Park are a fairly new group. A meeting took place with interested residents in November 2015 where a constitution was drafted, the committee was agreed and selected.
- The group has a one off £5.00 membership fee

- It has approximately 180 members who help to maintain the park so it remains an open public space
- The community and members are very active in keeping park clean and organising events
- Their first event (Clean for the Queen) attracted 30 members which was followed by a Park Walk which again attracted about 30 members and will be holding a family fun day in September this year
- The group raised over £450 for the Mayors charity

The panel heard the group had overcome the issue of littering and dog mess and they had not seen vandalism or anti-social behaviour in the park. The representative was also keen that parks remained open at all times.

There was a sense that a growing number of users were coming from Pinner Road but mostly from Rayners Lane and there were more Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) users than white using the park.

#### **Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group**

- The group has been in existence for 25 years and was set up by a group of dog walkers
- The group has a £3.00 annual membership fee per household
- It has approximately 320 members who are very active, and aim to bring as many cultures and religions together
- They look after the maintenance of the park including emptying bins
- The group organise community events with six events planned for this year
- The group also look after other parks and have donated funds towards benches

The Panel heard the park has the green flag statues. This has been reassessed and the group are confident of retaining it.

#### **Friends of Kenton Recreation Ground**

- The group was established over eight years ago and has 380 registered non-fee paying members, 60 volunteers and has a very strong emphasis on sports and activities for the community
- The group does a lot of engagement and outreach work and also has a website

- A number of activities take place in the park including dog shows, walking sessions and yoga
- There is a greenhouse for people with a disability which is well used throughout the year
- The group work with schools and have introduced planting projects
- Members of the group engage with communities and volunteer seven days a week
- The PUG works closely with enforcement officers and has 12 volunteers during the day who also pick litter and ensure the bins are empty
- The members also do most of the maintenance of the park themselves
- There is no crime, graffiti or fly tipping in the park or problems with dog fouling
- The park has never been locked and there is no issue with security

“The green gym is very well used, from dawn till dusk”.

Eugene Callinan, Friends of Kenton Recreation Ground

The Panel unanimously agreed the information and evidence provided by the PUGs was very positive and important for this review and agreed that PUGs play an important and valued role in the maintenance and encourage community use of our parks.

The panel thanked the representatives from the PUG for all their commitment, time and work.

**Recommendation 1:** We note the success of the Park User Groups and the energy and commitment they contribute to improving our Parks. We recommend that Council should continue to work with Park User Groups and the Parks Forum to ensure our parks are safe and secure environments in which all users feel safe and welcome, to promote the use of parks and open spaces by all sections of Harrow’s diverse communities and to explore how sections of our community that do not use Parks can be encourage to do so.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Council works in partnership with Park User Groups in identifying projects, including capital, to improve parks and park facilities and works with those groups to apply to funding sources. The Council will continue to manage projects but, where appropriate Park User Groups can be involved in project delivery.

## 7.9 Harrow Parks Forum

Harrow has also developed the Harrow Parks Forum to network for all the borough's local Friends groups for parks, nature sites, recreation grounds, community gardens and other green open spaces. The purpose of the Forum is to represent users of parks and green spaces by working in partnership with Harrow Council in the management and maintenance of those spaces for the benefit of the whole community. It will also be responsible for making effective and efficient use of the resources available by working collaboratively and bringing together knowledge, expertise and resources for the long-term management of parks and green spaces in Harrow.

"The Park Forum is a positive step forward which will help PUGs to come together and work together".

Eugene Callinan, Friends of Kenton Recreation Ground

## 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Panel appreciate the financial pressures on Local Authorities and the Public Sector as a whole. However, Parks are an important aspect of community life and bring many benefits to local residents including health and wellbeing, biodiversity and community cohesion.

Despite limited budgets and many competing priorities, Members have put forward a number of recommendations to increase user involvement in our parks and enhance user experience.

**Appendix 1 – Scope of the Review**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SEPTEMBER 2015**

**REVIEW OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PARKS - DRAFT SCOPE**

**VERSION HISTORY:**

- Version 1 – 27 July 2015 (NM)
- Version 2 – 17 August (NM/DC)
- Version 3 – 1 September (Cllrs)

1	<b>SUBJECT</b>	Community involvement in parks
2	<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
3	<b>REVIEW GROUP</b>	<p><b>Councillors:</b>            Councillor Richard Almond (C)            Councillor Jeff Anderson (L) - Chair            Councillor Michael Borio (L)            Councillor Susan Hall (C)            Councillor Ameet Jogia (C)            Councillor Jean Lammiman (C)            Councillor Kairul Marikar (L)            Councillor Jerry Miles (L)</p> <p><b>Co-optees:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tbc</li> </ul>
4	<b>AIMS/ OBJECTIVES/ OUTCOMES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To examine the current levels of community involvement in Harrow’s parks and benchmark against parks in neighbouring boroughs.</li> <li>• To develop an understanding of what residents want from their local parks.</li> <li>• To explore innovative practices in the delivery of park services by other councils and other initiatives demonstrating community involvement and volunteering in parks.</li> <li>• To identify ways in which Harrow Council can best deliver 21<sup>st</sup> century parks for residents.</li> <li>• To inform the development of Harrow’s parks and open spaces strategy 2016-19.</li> <li>• To develop the park users’ forum so it is inclusive and representative of all park users across Harrow.</li> <li>• To inform the progress of Project Phoenix and the commercialisation strategy for parks.</li> </ul>



5	<b>MEASURES OF SUCCESS OF REVIEW</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing community involvement in Harrow's parks.</li> <li>Informing the future development of Harrow's parks so that they best meets the needs of residents.</li> <li>Increasing the revenue generated in Harrow parks, to ensure their longer term commercial/financial sustainability and robust business models.</li> </ul>
6	<b>SCOPE</b>	<p>This review will consider current levels of community involvement in Harrow's parks and the schemes in operation to encourage more residents to be actively involved or volunteer in their local parks.</p> <p>Community usage of parks will be examined in terms of sports groups, access to grant funding, community lettings and events. The wider impact of parks in relation to community cohesion, public health and social benefits will be considered.</p> <p>In inputting into the development of the next open spaces and parks strategy for 2016 onwards, this review will in particular look at the plans contained within Project Phoenix and the commercialisation strategy for parks.</p>
7	<b>SERVICE PRIORITIES (Corporate/Dept)</b>	<p>This review relates in particular to the Corporate Priorities 2015/16 of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making a difference for communities</li> </ul>
8	<b>REVIEW SPONSOR</b>	Venetia Reid-Baptiste, Divisional Director Commissioning Services
9	<b>ACCOUNTABLE MANAGER</b>	Rachel Gapp, Head of Policy
10	<b>SUPPORT OFFICER</b>	Mohammed Ilyas, Policy Officer Nahreen Matlib, Senior Policy Officer
11	<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT</b>	Business Support Service / Policy Team
12	<b>EXTERNAL INPUT</b>	<p>The input of the following may be useful for the review:</p> <p><b>Stakeholders:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevant corporate/divisional director(s)/service managers</li> <li>Relevant portfolio holder(s)</li> <li>Residents</li> </ul> <p><b>Partner agencies:</b> Tbc</p> <p><b>Experts/advisers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representative interest groups</li> <li>Park users forum</li> </ul>
13	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	This review will involve three phases:

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Desktop research – including gathering evidence from local and national studies around community involvement in parks, the results of any recent consultation on Harrow parks, performance data, other written/oral evidence from senior managers, ward councillors, residents and experts. This will inform the structure and lines of questioning for the next phase of the review.</li> <li>2. a) Challenge sessions – to take evidence from key managers, relevant portfolio holders, parks user group/forum, residents. b) Visits to key Harrow parks that can demonstrate effective community involvement projects or have opportunities to develop them.</li> <li>3. Writing up of final report and recommendations - for the approval of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2016 for onward transmission to Cabinet on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016.</li> </ol>
14	<b>EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS</b>	<p>The review will consider during the course of its work, how equality implications have been taken into account in current policy and practice and consider the possible implications of any changes it recommends.</p> <p>In carrying out the review, the review group will also need to consider its own practices and how it can facilitate all relevant stakeholders in the borough to have their voices heard.</p>
15	<b>ASSUMPTIONS/ CONSTRAINTS</b>	The success of the review will depend upon the ability and willingness of officers, partners and stakeholders to participate and contribute fully in this work.
16	<b>TIMESCALE</b>	Timescales for the review to be decided.
17	<b>RESOURCE COMMITMENTS</b>	To be met from existing Policy Team budget. No significant additional expenditure is anticipated.
18	<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Mohammed Ilyas and Nahreen Matlib, as advised by the Review Group.
19	<b>REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS</b>	<p>Outline of formal reporting process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relevant Divisional Director (Venetia Reid-Baptiste) and portfolio holder (Councillor Graham Henson, Environment, Crime &amp; Community Safety Portfolio Holder) will be invited to the review group meetings as appropriate. They will be consulted in the drafting of the final report and recommendations.</li> <li>• Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2016.</li> <li>• Report to Cabinet on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016</li> </ul>
20	<b>FOLLOW UP ARRANGEMENTS (proposals)</b>	Implementation of recommendations to be monitored by exception on a 6-monthly basis by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

## Appendix 2 – Consultations on Harrow’s Parks and Open Spaces

### Under One Sky Consultation - June 26<sup>th</sup> 2011



The event was attended by 8,000 people and Harrow’s Parks and Greenspaces

Department took the opportunity of holding a consultation during which people were asked for their opinions on their local parks and greenspaces. One hundred and seventeen people responded to the questionnaire survey.

When respondents were asked about their favourite park or greenspace the most frequently mentioned space by far is Pinner Memorial Park with 34 or 29% naming this as their favourite park. Other parks mentioned as favourites are Harrow Recreation Ground (13%), Canons Park (11%) and Alexandra Park (9%). Other parks were mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents. (see **Table 1** below)

**Table 1- Favourite Parks**

Park	Number	%
Pinner Memorial	34	29.1%
Harrow Recreation Ground	15	12.8%
Canons Park	13	11.1%
Alexandra Park	11	9.4%
<b>Total All Responses</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

- Only 54 respondents named a least favourite park and numbers for each space mentioned are small. No park was cited by more than 5 people; Byron Recreation Ground and Queensbury Recreation Ground were each mentioned by 5 respondents and Chandos Recreation Ground, Headstone Manor and Alexandra Park were mentioned by 4. Fewer than 4 respondents cited any other park or greenspace.

### Least Favourite Parks and Greenspaces

- Fifty four respondents gave information about the park or greenspace which they like least and why they do not like it.
- The range of spaces was large with no more than 5 respondents naming one space. The results for the reasons for disliking the space have therefore been aggregated to include all parks and greenspaces.( see **Table 2** below).

**Table 2 -Least favourite park – what do you not like about it – all parks and greenspaces**

Attribute	Number	%
Poor maintenance / needs investment	15	27.8%
Lack of safety	14	25.9%
Dirty / dog mess	14	25.9%
Boring – nothing to do	11	20.4%
Dogs	7	13.0%
Play area inadequate	5	9.3%
Total	54	

N.B. Multiple responses

- The reasons for disliking an open space most frequently reported are poor maintenance or lack of investment (28%) and a perception that the space is unsafe (26%).
- One fifth reported lack of cleanliness and 6% cited dog mess as a problem. One fifth reported the space to be boring or that there was nothing to do there. Dogs are felt to be a problem by 13% and 9% feel that the play area is inadequate.

### The Perfect Greenspace

Respondents were asked to imagine the perfect greenspace and visualise what that would be like. Results are shown in **Table 3** below.

- One third of respondents see the perfect greenspace as having a good play area.
- Other important features are a pond or water feature, a café and some sort of sports provision – all cited by one quarter of respondents.

- Other forms of infrastructure which are important to people include seating (11%), toilets (8%) and a green gym (7%).
- General requirements are that the space should be clean (13%) and safe (9%). 7% would like a separate area for dogs. The same number would like “something for everyone” and a “large open space”.
- Smaller numbers wished for community events, walking or nature trails and animals. (all mentioned by 5%).

**Table 3 -What would the perfect greenspace be like?**

Attribute	Number	%
Good play area	34	34%
Pond / water feature	26	26%
Sports provision	26	26%
Café	23	23%
Clean	13	13%
Seating	11	11%
Safe	9	9%
Toilets	8	8%
Separate area for dogs	7	7%
Green Gym	7	7%
Large open space	7	7%
Something for everyone	7	7%
Walking/ nature trails	5	5%
Community events	5	5%
Animals	5	5%
Total responses	100	

N.B. Multiple responses

**Appendix 3 - A breakdown of current activities (2016) with the number of participants**

Activity	Number of people taking part	How often?	Impact on inequalities
Harrow Health Walks – organised walks led by qualified volunteer walk leaders	500	weekly	Inclusive to all Most are over 50yrs. Many with long term conditions, disabilities, mental health problems Three of the walks are wheelchair accessible One buggy walk organised through children centre
Outdoor Gyms	Approx. 6,000 weekly users in 23 different sites. (Approximation is based on observation at different hours of the day and times of the year)	Free and unlimited access at park opening hours	Accessible to 12+ yrs. Many from low income, unemployed, BEMA communities, disabilities, mental health problems, long term conditions (LTC).
Harrow Park Run	<b>Some stats that are visible on Harrow Park run webpage:</b> Number of events: 54 Number of runners: 1,358 Number of runs: 6,117 Number of first finishers: 47 Number of PBs: 1,566 Average number of runners per week: 113.3 Average number of runs per runner: 4.5 Biggest Attendance: 228	Every Saturday morning on Harrow Recreation Ground	Accessible to all
Children Centre family fun activities in parks	500	2-3 times a year	Parents with little children and toddlers
Fitness in the Parks	80 in 4 parks	10 weeks program in 4 parks	Open to all

Schools run sports and physical activity days in the parks	All the schools in Harrow benefit from using parks for their sports and physical activity day	Each school runs 2-3 events a year in the parks	Whole school community including parents
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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.harrow.gov.uk/downloads/file/7359/jsna\\_2015-2020](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/downloads/file/7359/jsna_2015-2020)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.ukactive.com/turningthetide/pdf/Turning%20the%20tide%20of%20inactivity.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://localsportprofile.sportengland.org/ProfileReport>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.harrowhealthwalks.org/when-and-where.php>

<sup>v</sup> <http://ourparks.tranquildigital.com/borough/harrow>

<sup>vi</sup> [http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/100010/health\\_and\\_social\\_care/911/outdoor\\_gyms\\_in\\_harrow](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/100010/health_and_social_care/911/outdoor_gyms_in_harrow)

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