

# Greenspace Strategy 2024 - 2034



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF  
KINGSTON  
UPON THAMES

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## **Greenspace Strategy 2024 - 2034**

### **1. Purpose of the strategy**

The purpose of the Greenspace Strategy 2024-2034 (GSS) is to assist in ensuring that the benefits which can be derived from green spaces are maximised.

Increasingly green spaces are considered, in addition to their intrinsic value, to have the potential to add value and texture to a range of other services provided by the council, such as public health and wellbeing, sustainable transport, economic and place regeneration and environmental resilience.

The ambition is to encourage and support cross directorate and cross professional disciplines at all levels to maximise the benefits to be derived from these essential quality of life assets.

Many of the themes and benefits expressed within the strategy are strongly linked and multi stranded and therefore although considered separately for the purposes of clarity, connections can easily be drawn between the various themes. The strategy outlines a long term vision as well as a focus on targets and delivery, through an initial three year action plan.

The strategy document cannot realistically be all-encompassing document which expresses every detail or objective which could be derived from the subject matter. Similarly, and by necessity, this is published at a point in time, it is however intended to be a flexible document which can respond to changing internal and external factors and opportunities which may arise to enhance and/or extend provision and benefits to the wider community.

Equally by formulating a plan over a ten year time frame it acknowledges the length of time it can take to develop and research improvement initiatives with a range of partner organisations and engage community support for more fundamental changes to provision which may arise. As such it also has a partial alignment with the Kingston Local Plan timeframe.

This strategy is meant to be an easily readable and understandable document to as wide an audience as possible, to facilitate community feedback and answer any questions we have a dedicated area of the Council's website where questions can be raised and a response provided. (Link address here).

### **2. Introduction and summary**

Kingston's public green spaces have the ability to deliver a wide range of benefits to the local community and to those working, studying in or visiting the Borough. These benefits are broadly categorised within the principles of social, economic and environmental benefits.

We need to develop a clear vision through this strategy and related strategies for the future of these greenspace assets and to ensure that they meet the changing expectations of the community and align with broader policy matters such as health, place making, biodiversity and nature recovery.

The COVID-19 crisis generally exposed the weaknesses inherent in the UK across a number of related areas including health, economy and society. As well as weaknesses it also exposed latent strengths and the resilience of communities to adapt to enforced behavioural changes such as lockdowns on freedom of movement and social activities.

Population growth estimates and demographic predictions, for Kingston through to 2040 will increase use pressure on existing spaces and exacerbate current local deficiencies in provision. It is predicted that in order to meet housing demand that more dense flatted accommodation will be needed, this generally contains little private garden space with limited communal green space, making reliance on public green space more important.

As well as greenspaces, it is becoming increasingly clear that time spent in 'blue space' near water may also improve mental and physical health. Blue space includes the sea, coastlines, rivers, lakes, canals, waterfalls and fountains. In Kingston we are fortunate that the River Thames cuts through much of the borough and good public access is available for much of its length. Similarly the Hogsmill River, a chalk stream tributary is accessible along much of its length.

Current thinking and initiatives require a revised approach to the management and maintenance of green spaces if their full potential is to be realised. Many authorities are suggesting a 'Natural Capital' approach to these spaces, where the benefits provided by green space are assigned a monetary value.

It is perceived that in many cases management of these areas is often 'traditional' - based on a limited number of objectives, such as provision of 'amenity' space for recreation - and in many cases management and investment in improvements is not based on an analysis or understanding of the wider values of these spaces and what they provide for the environment, local economy, user groups and adjacent communities. Therefore they are underperforming against a wider range of natural capital, social and health factors.

The aims and priorities of the Green Space Strategy needs to support other key policy documents such as the Corporate Plan, Public Health Strategy and Climate Action.

Kingston's prioritisation of green spaces is fundamental in supporting the health and wellbeing of our residents. Kingston is a 'Marmot borough'. One of the main five recommendations of the most recent Marmot Review is to create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities <sup>1</sup>(Health Equity in England, The Marmot Review, 10 years on). The report highlights that mitigating climate change will also help mitigate health inequalities. It is recommended that this is done by improving green spaces, as well as active travel and other areas relating to housing and environment.

Whilst some of these benefits are obvious and clearly understood others are less so and need to be further developed if they are to be fully realised for example the benefits for mental health of visiting green spaces and connecting with nature.

The COVID 19 pandemic with its initial lockdowns and restrictions brought home to many people the importance of having access to green spaces within a short distance of their homes. This also catalysed the understanding of the mental and physical health benefits these spaces provided amongst national agencies such as <sup>2</sup>Public Health England. Managing greenspaces for health and wellbeing will be one of the themes within this strategy.

The importance of access to good quality green spaces to neighbourhood planning and place making within wider community planning parameters. Kingston's new draft local plan emphasises the need to protect, enhance and improve access to greenspaces.

One of the key changes since the preparation of the last strategy has been the significant growth in the number of Friends of Parks groups and the inauguration of a twice yearly 'Friends Forum' whereby the groups can network and learn from each other's ideas and experiences.

Inclusivity and access is not equal, as described by recent national surveys, many people face barriers to their access and use of public spaces. The aim of encouraging a wider and greater sector of the community to use greenspaces will be a key priority of this strategy. Recent research by the <sup>3</sup>University of Leeds, amongst others, has graphically highlighted the barriers to equal access faced by women and girls within green and public spaces.

In 2021 the <sup>4</sup>Institute for Outdoor Learning noted that 'the research and data reveal that the LGBTQ+ community is still met with resistance (perhaps more silently than before) and still struggles to be accepted (as are people of colour, women, people living with disabilities, and people living in poverty)'. It is important that this strategy works to overcome barriers to equity, diversity and inclusion within our parks and greenspaces.

Health benefits of exposure to green spaces are well documented. However, green space access is closely linked to health and social inequalities. The most affluent wards in England have five times the amount of parks and green space compared to the most deprived 10% (Public Health England, 2020). Therefore it is essential that colleagues across the Council prioritise and protect green spaces and support nature-based interventions for health (such as green walking for mental health, re-wilding and food growing projects) while reducing health inequalities.

The climate change emergency and the changing weather patterns alone require that the way greenspaces are designed and managed will need to change if they are going to remain valuable community assets. This might involve a new range of drought resistant plant species and materials which remain safe for use during periods of high temperature.

Biodiversity loss is a key international theme and greenspaces provide a valuable resource through which biodiversity can be enhanced. The habitat and species actions plans within the Kingston Biodiversity Action Plan will in large measure be reliant on green infrastructure for their delivery.

Due to their location and distribution green spaces have the ability to provide a range of ecology services, these can include flood resilience by remodelling green and blue infrastructure to better contain or ameliorate storm surges.

Despite the broad range of benefits and purposes which can be ascribed to green spaces it is important that this strategy is realistic and contained in its scope and ambitions. It cannot be everything to all people and the action plan will set out on an annual basis what can be achieved within limited resources.

The strategy, therefore, can also be viewed as the starting point for working with partners and the community to realise what can realistically be delivered.

### **3. Strategic scope and coverage.**

It is important to note that the aims and objectives of this Greenspace Strategy only applies to areas of land which are within the ownership and/or management of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. Whilst the main emphasis within the strategy will be on sites which are currently actively managed as parks and greenspaces and are freely accessible to the community. Other types of greenspaces contribute to the wider objectives of the strategy and short descriptions are provided for each category.

This strategy needs to be distinguished from an ‘Open Space Study’ with a planning context which would cover the review and assessment of all land ownerships within the borough and also cross borough boundary sites which may be accessible to residents of Kingston, for deficiency mapping purposes. (The last comprehensive Open Space Study for Kingston was completed in 2006).

### **4. Other key related strategies and plans**

There are numerous national and regional policies and strategies which have some influence on the provision and management of public green spaces, primarily policies which are concerned with the planning and protection of designated spaces. Numerous policies and strategies also exist which cover components and features of public green spaces which influence their management and maintenance, these include outdoor sports provision, trees and biodiversity.

There is currently no national strategy or policy document which covers Parks and Greenspaces as entities within their own right. Although there is an All Party Parliamentary committee which meets occasionally to discuss parks and greenspace matters this tends to make recommendations without the power to implement them.

The provision of public parks and greenspaces is a discretionary rather than statutory service which means that local authorities are not required to provide them, although almost all do, however the extent and quality of the provision varies across the country.

Some relevant external policies and strategies are indicated at Appendix xxx.

Within Kingston it is critical that this strategy supports and takes forward the priorities within the <sup>5</sup>Council Plan 2023-2027, Greener, Fairer, Safer, and Together. It is considered that the priorities for the Greenspaces Strategy have a vital contribution

to make towards each of the main themes of the Council Plan and these are described within the initial three year action plan.

Important sub or contributory strategies include the Tree Strategy, Allotment Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy.

## **5. Kingston's recreational parks and greenspaces in context**

Kingston has a reputation as a green and leafy outer London borough, which is true in some aspects. However it is also remarkably deficient in publicly accessible greenspace, in comparison to other London Boroughs.

In 2017 the <sup>6</sup>Natural Capital Accounts for public greenspace in London, calculated that Kingston was the 26<sup>th</sup> greenest of the 33 London Boroughs in terms of proportion of area under publicly accessible green space. The total area available to Kingston residents was 510 hectares, this can be compared to neighbouring borough Richmond which had 2,400 hectares. This statistic helps to illustrate the potential level of use and the pressure on individual sites in Kingston.

A 2020 study by <sup>7</sup>Friends of the Earth identified that Kingston was one of the 50 UK council areas which need to be prioritised for green space investment because they have the greatest number of green space-deprived neighbourhoods. These statistics for areas of open space deprivation are likely to only worsen if projected local population increases are realised.

There are many differing designations and typologies for parks and greenspaces, for ease of reference and for consistency with other policies, the Public Open Space Categorisation recommended by the Greater London Authority is used to describe the various Kingston sites, a full list of Borough Sites is provided at Appendix xxx..

Most of the publicly accessible parks and greenspaces are relatively small in scale containing limited facilities. There are no regional parks within the borough boundary and only one site which is large enough with sufficient facilities to meet the designation of a District Park, the majority therefore having a Local or Small Local Park designation.

In addition to resident's use of parks and green spaces within Kingston, there is a degree of use of site within neighbouring boroughs particularly larger sites which helps to overcome local deficiencies. Similarly within Kingston residents also visit larger sites which are outside their immediate neighbourhood or provide different attractions. Residents of other boroughs also visit sites within Kingston where these are close to their locality or provide features which their own areas don't have.

In a telephone survey of 1000 Kingston residents completed as part of the Open Space Needs Assessment 2006, '69% of respondents visit Metropolitan, Regional or large open spaces. These spaces appear to be especially popular with 25-34 and 35-44 year olds, with 73% of respondents from each age category using these spaces. Usage of large open spaces does vary according to geographic area of residence; respondents living in the areas farthest away from large open spaces (Surbiton and the South of the Borough) are least likely to visit them. 65% of respondents from Surbiton and 51% from the South of the Borough visit

Metropolitan, Regional or large open spaces, compared with 73% of respondents from Maldens & Coombe and 81% from Kingston Town. Richmond Park was the most frequently mentioned park, with 45% of respondents having visited it at some point, followed by Bushy Park in Richmond (13%), Beverley Park (6%), Alexandra Recreation Ground (4%) and Canbury Gardens (4%).'

Kingston's publicly accessible greenspaces are comprehensively mapped and recorded by the Greenspace Information for Greater London organisation. (GIGL). They produce a series of maps indicating the deficiency of access to the various categories of spaces. As can be seen from the maps below the most relevant category for Kingston is Local Parks and Open Spaces, the deficiency measure is to be within 400m of a space, as can be seen from the map the majority of the borough is deficient in access to local spaces.

There is only one purpose designed public open space in the borough dating back to the mid to late Victorian era. The majority of sites have been laid out initially during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and are recreational grounds in their characteristics and predominately designed to accommodate field sports. The designed features one would expect to find within public parks, gardens and greenspaces within such a historic borough are generally deficient as a result.

In addition many sites are naturalistic green space formed along undeveloped land on the river corridors and other land which was presumably unsuitable for built development during the expansion of the borough, although attractive and available for use, many of these sites have lacked even basic infrastructure to facilitate access. However recent investment programmes funded by the Borough and external partners in some instances are beginning to rectify historic deficiencies.

There are a number of parks within the Borough which are distinguished by being of a larger scale with a greater number of attractions and facilities which makes for a longer dwell time in comparison to a more local site. We would wish to encourage everyone to visit and enjoy as many of these varied landscapes as possible. A full site list with location maps and addresses is included at Appendices 2 & 3.

Details on some individual sites are outlined below.

### **Alexandra Recreation Ground**

The site for Alexandra Park, as Alexandra Recreation Ground was called when it first opened, was purchased in the late C19th/early C20th in order to provide public recreational facilities in the quickly developing town of Surbiton. The park provided various sporting facilities and it is the home of a number of clubs, including bowling, tennis and cricket. It also is a main centre for outdoor basketball with three courts. There is an extensive children's play area and outdoor gym equipment.

A fine avenue of trees leads towards the pavilion and trees line some boundaries including the main entrance on King Charles Road. Red Lion Gardens, just south of the gates, is a triangular area of formal planting by the main road.

Immediately adjacent is the Alexandra Millennium Green which was saved from development by local residents in the late 1990's. Today it is managed as a

naturalistic landscape providing an effective contrast to the more formal aspects of the recreation ground.

### **Beverley Park**

Beverley Park was laid out in circa.1890. The park has a pavilion and tennis courts, children's play area, football pitches and open grass, some mature trees and an extensive rose garden in the south west corner, now looked after by local volunteers.

The Beverley Brook flows along its eastern boundary and on the other side of the stream are school playing fields and sports grounds. An avenue of trees runs east-west across the centre of the park and there are various specimen trees including catalpa, ginkgo, oak, copper beech as well as conifers and a number of raised beds at the entrances.

### **Canbury Gardens**

This site was laid out in the 1890's, originally the gardens occupied a narrow area adjoining the River Thames towpath and was designed as a promenade walk which were very popular in Victorian times. A row of London Plane Trees were planted along the edge of the new park and these are now fully mature specimens creating an essential feature within the site today. In the early 1900's the site was extended to the east and a number of recreational facilities were added.

Today the gardens are much loved by the community with a range of features including a boathouse, bar and restaurant and café. The restored bandstand hosts free concerts during the summer months. There is a wonderful combination of blue and green infrastructure with excellent vistas across and long the river. There is excellent pedestrian access to the south into Kingston Town Centre and the Queens Promenade, to the north there is a riverside walking route into the neighbouring borough of Richmond upon Thames.

### **King Edwards Recreation Ground**

Formerly private land in agricultural use, the site was reserved for public open space when the small hamlet of Hook was growing as a result of the new railway line serving Surbiton in the C19th. Originally called Hook Recreation Ground, it was opened in May 1901 and renamed for the new King, Edward VII. In 1935 an adjoining plot of land to the north was donated and laid out as a rose garden commemorating George V's Silver Jubilee.

Today this is a much loved local park containing a number of recreational facilities including cricket and football pitches, outdoor gym and a circuit path for walking and jogging. There is a large children's playground catering to a full age range and a multi-use games area for informal sports activity.

### **Manor Park**

Manor Park is the largest of Kingston's formal parks and the only one designated as a 'District' Park. It came into public ownership in 1933, until 1953 it had been known as the Malden and Coombe Sports and Recreation Ground

It had previously been a privately owned sports ground and the layout of the parks still reflects that today with its numerous playing pitches, tennis courts and bowling green.

Recently a large extended children's play area has been installed and this has really increased the use of an already popular site. Other planned improvements include a new outdoor gym and footpath extensions. The site also contains naturalistic woodland and a small pond which provides biodiversity and wildlife interest.

### **Tolworth Court Farm Fields**

By contrast Tolworth Court Farm Fields in the south of the Borough is the largest green space in public ownership at over 40 hectares. As the name suggests this is former agricultural land. It is now also the largest Local Nature Reserve in Kingston and is managed to enhance its biodiversity.

The site contains important areas of woodland, hedges and meadows and there are many species of insects being surveyed and monitored on a regular basis. There are plans to develop a significant 'rewilding' project on the site which will introduce grazing and scything to enhance the diversity of the meadows, along with the restoration of a large wetland area which was lost when the site was drained for agriculture.

Other greenspace designations:

### **Allotments**

Although allotment sites are not freely accessible by the wider community, they are highly valued by their tenants as a source of food production and relaxation. Although much of the land is cultivated it still provides areas of green space which serve to break up the urban areas. Allotment provision has a long history dating back to the early 1900's, the use of the land as allotments has helped to protect many sites from being developed for other uses.

### **Cemeteries and Burial Grounds**

Kingston currently has two active cemeteries which are still used for burials and a number of closed churchyards which are used for green space purposes. Although their primary purpose is not to provide recreational green space nevertheless the two sites of Kingston and Surbiton Cemetery provide important green spaces for local residents, in densely populated areas of the borough.

Cemeteries and churchyards can provide a valuable contribution to the portfolio of open space provision. They provide a place for peaceful contemplation and often have wildlife conservation and biodiversity value

Less intensively maintained areas of the sites provide important biodiversity habitats for a host of native flora and fauna. Kingston Cemetery provides a safe route to school for children travelling from the Cambridge Road Estate. Volunteer activity is encouraged and the volunteers add considerable value to what can be achieved within the sites.

## **Highways**

Greenspaces within and alongside the highways form essential green infrastructure and can also assist in absorbing pollutants and rain water runoff. Street trees in particular provide large scale features within the highway. In general verges and wayside gardens which are more ornamental in nature help to break up hard surfaces.

Recently the frequency of grass verge cutting has been reduced in selected areas to develop a Wildways project to benefit biodiversity.

## **Housing**

Many of the council owned housing sites contain elements of green space including quite extensive areas on some of the larger sites. Most of the areas are managed as amenity green space for the benefit of tenants and residents rather than for the wider community. In some case children's play equipment and informal sports areas are provided for residents use.

## **Corporate sites**

These are sites owned by Kingston which contain elements of greenspace within their boundaries, this includes leisure and sports centres, libraries and civic buildings.

## **Leased sites**

Many of the sites which are owned by Kingston but leased to external organisations are used for predominately greenspace purposes, these include golf courses and sport pitches. In most cases leased sites are not freely available for community use.

## **Linear Walking Routes**

Kingston also has numerous networks which incorporate open and green spaces, ranging from local bridleways and rights of way, to longer distance routes such as the London Loop and the All London Green Grid based on the River Thames as it traverses through Kingston, adding an essential Blue Space dimension to these popular routes.

## **6. What you have already told us/ how this strategy was based on what you said.**

Previous community consultation and engagement exercises have broadly indicated the importance of parks and green spaces to many residents. Recent consultation for the Kingston Local Plan has indicated that there is, for example, concern about pressure on open spaces from an increasing local population, a wish to create new areas of open space, improve access and connectivity and enhance wildlife habitats.

There is however a need to complete a detailed user and non-user survey to understand in more depth and detail what the community currently use these facilities for, their likes and dislikes, and importantly for non-users, what they perceive as the barriers to their use. The intention is to complete this activity within the first two years of the life of this strategy to inform and enhance our actions.

## **7. The key strategic themes**

The key strategic themes identified for the future of the parks and greenspaces within Kingston are outlined below. It can be considered that similar to the three overarching criteria of Economic, Environmental and Social objectives mentioned in the introduction, that there is a degree of interrelationship and overlap between these themes.

These are presented as opportunities to improve parks and greenspaces over the next ten years, it is not something which those responsible for managing and maintaining these spaces on their own can achieve, or indeed for Kingston Council to achieve on its own, it will require the efforts of internal, external actors and the community to deliver these by working in partnership.

Eleven themes have been identified, at the start of each theme are the proposed actions we intend to deliver over the initial three years of the strategy between 2024 and 2027.

**Theme 1. Accessibility and Inclusivity**

**Theme 2. Public Health and Wellbeing**

**Theme 3. Community and Voluntary participation**

**Theme 4. Biodiversity, nature recovery and climate challenge.**

**Theme 5. Children’s Play Provision & Educational Opportunities**

**Theme 6. Quality standards, Management & Maintenance**

**Theme 7. Sport, Recreation and Adult Exercise**

**Theme 8. Heritage, Public Realm and Placemaking**

**Theme 9. Buildings & Facilities**

**Theme 10. Capital Investment and Income Generation**

**Theme 11. Publicity, Marketing and Promotion**

**Theme 1. Accessibility and Inclusivity.**

- Action 1.1 *Complete a detailed perception and use study of Kingston to understand current user and non-user attitudes and patterns towards parks and green spaces.*
- Action 1.2 *From the survey outcomes itemise the barriers to use, across a range of demographic parameters and develop solutions to overcome the barriers.*
- Action 1.3 *Commission the use of ‘Big Data’ sources to understand at a site based level current and historic patterns of use and movement within individual sites.*

Many people understand and enjoy the many and varied benefits of accessing their local greenspaces for a range of formal and informal recreation and it is important that these uses are encouraged. However the benefits are not enjoyed equally across the community. It is understood that many members of the community are likely to be non-users or less comfortable users of Kingston parks and greenspaces.

Although there has been no recent study of Kingston residents to understand what they currently use these facilities for and also the barriers for non-use, it is considered that national research and its findings can be applied generally to the local population.

Understanding barriers to use and participation and thereby encouraging wider use of the facilities by the broadest sector of the community, will be a priority within the life time of this strategy. This will require effective dialogue with internal and external partners and may require service and site redesign to accommodate these factors.

Barriers to use can be highly localised and can include distance from suitable sites, physical obstacles, transport factors, lack of facilities e.g. toilet provision, perceptions of safety, lack of awareness, ethnicity, cultural, age and ability related considerations.

The strategy seeks to ensure that all sectors of the community feel comfortable with accessing spaces and explore the need to focus on current non-user groups, groups with low participation levels and the need to work with a range of internal and external partners to open discussion, dialogue and the need to redesign sites in some cases.

Much recent research has been related to the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns which greatly restricted access to other forms of social activity. Although generally, the pandemic led to an increase in the number of visits and use of urban green space this was not spread equally across all sectors of the community.

In London it was found that <sup>8</sup>16–25-year-olds make proportionately fewer visits to urban parks and green spaces than other age groups. This meant, for example, that young Londoners were not realising the mental health and wellbeing benefits that London's vast array of green spaces can provide them.

<sup>9</sup>Groundwork UK's 2021 publication, explored further barriers including the barriers that particular demographic groups experience, that childhood habits in accessing natural areas persist into adulthood, issues of gender that girls and young women often report feeling unsafe when spending time in parks and green spaces and experience of harassment or abuse can prevent people from ethnic minority backgrounds from choosing to spend time in these spaces.

All these factors must also be relevant in a Kingston context to a greater or lesser degree and in common with many other aspects of this strategy there is a need to carry out detailed research and surveys within the community at a neighbourhood and local level to understand the issues in greater detail and apply appropriate solutions.

Existing use patterns; e.g. visitor numbers to a site, which parts of a site are most visited and the length of time people spend in an open space can be provided in

some detail through the use of Big Data, which is collected from mobile phone signals. This type of data would be a cheap and effective means of identifying some levels of use at a general level and would assist in preparing more local level surveys.

## **Theme 2. Public Health and Wellbeing.**

- Action 2.1 *Identify within the Public Health or other relevant strategies the health benefits which could be derived from positive community use and access to green spaces.*
- Action 2.2 *Prepare and promote health and lifestyle based guidance to encourage more use by those sections of the community less likely to access or be aware of the health benefits they could derive.*
- Action 2.3 *Co-design with key partners a Green Social Prescribing Programme as part of the public health strategy, with identified target groups and outcomes.*

Increasingly national and international research is realising the mental and physical health benefits derived from access and use of parks and greenspaces. A growing body of empirical research has connected exposure to green spaces with benefits to human health. Green spaces can provide physical and mental health benefits in several ways, such as presenting opportunities for exercise and other physical activity; reducing stress; and mitigating environmental harms, including air, water and noise pollution, flooding risks, and urban heating.

Public Health England notes that: ‘Health inequalities exist across socioeconomic levels, including in London, and this has been connected to lower levels of greening and lower levels of use of green spaces in more deprived neighbourhoods. In England, for example, residents in the most deprived areas are less likely to live near green spaces, thus they have fewer opportunities to realise the health benefits of green space compared to residents in less deprived areas. Similarly, black and minority ethnic groups in the UK experience health and environmental inequalities, including poorer quality of green spaces. The connection between spending time in nature and disparities in access was accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic.’

Research indicates green spaces contribute to the prevention, reduction, and treatment of chronic conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity. People who visit nature at least once a week are 1.9 times more likely to also report good general health.

Research also explores the impact that being in green space has on mental health and wellbeing. An expanding evidence base demonstrates how nature has positive benefits for conditions such as depression, anxiety, and mood disorder. Access to green spaces can also promote relaxation, improve sleep patterns, facilitate positive social interactions, promote improvements in an overall sense of happiness and self-worth, and contribute to the wellbeing of patients with diseases such as cancer.

In monetary terms, some recent studies suggest that nationally:

- The Wellbeing Value associated with the frequent use of local parks and green spaces is worth £34.2 billion per year to the entire UK adult population
- Parks and green spaces are estimated to save the NHS around £111 million per year based solely on a reduction in GP visits and excluding any additional savings from prescribing or referrals.

The benefit of these aspects to the physical and mental health benefits to residents in Kingston, in 2017, was calculated at £175m or £343 to each person annually. This extrapolation illustrates the potential value if all residents had equal access to these areas for health benefits.

In many ways the barriers to the community accessing public spaces to improve their physical and mental health are similar if not more acute than the reasons outlined in the preceding section. Overcoming these barriers will require a clear alignment with the Public Health Strategy for Kingston.

To achieve this will require a clear understanding of the local community and their health needs. This could be achieved by studying health and health inequality data to assist in identifying who might benefit most from accessing parks and green spaces to improve their health.

This information will greatly benefit and support the work of public health, health services and their partner organisations in strategic planning and making decisions on where to target interventions for maximum benefit. Public Health, health colleagues and partners are seeking to address these challenges with a range of initiatives in Kingston to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce the prevalence of obesity and physical inactivity. These include programs to promote healthy eating and active living in schools, workplaces, and local communities, as well as interventions to improve access to healthy food options and safe places to exercise.

Obesity and physical inactivity are important public health challenges in Kingston, as they are in many other parts of the UK. According to the most recent <sup>10,11,12</sup>data available, 57.2% of adults in Kingston are overweight or obese, compared to the national average in England (63.8%). In addition, 15% of adults in Kingston are physically inactive, which is still lower than the national average of (22.3%). The data also indicates that obesity levels are highest among the more deprived areas of the borough.

A recent healthy parks initiative underway in <sup>13</sup>Camden and Islington worked closely with their public health team, clinical commissioning group, primary care networks, GP and voluntary service link workers to develop their strategy.

Green Social Prescribing is a relatively new term which describes, the practice of supporting people in engaging in nature-based interventions and activities to improve their mental and physical health. This is seen as an alternative to the traditional prescribing practices of health practitioners. This type of initiative has several additional benefits in that it encourages wider use of parks and greenspaces by those who may not have previously used them, encourages community participation and provides opportunities for individuals to have a physical relationship with their greenspaces through practical projects.

The Camden and Islington project, previously referred to, advises the following; 'It is important that parks are active spaces to enable opportunities for people to improve their health. If you are planning to deliver a green social prescribing service, there

needs to be activities for link workers to prescribe people to. You can deliver these yourself or work with partners who use the park as a venue. These activities should be co-designed by organisations from the health and VCSE sectors as well as residents and those that manage the parks and green spaces. Talk to colleagues from Public Health, existing partners, local VCSE organisations and GP practices to work out who needs to be involved.'

The support of green social prescribing by the relevant organisations will be a key delivery method for the improvement of mental and physical health within this strategy.

### **Theme 3. Community and Voluntary participation.**

Action 3.1 *Continue to support and promote the development of Friends of Parks Groups and similar organisations through community development resources.*

Action 3.2 *Audit activity on a neighbourhood basis to identify and map current activity and identify opportunities to close gaps in volunteer and community group provision.*

Action 3.3 *Organise a twice yearly Friends Forum to acknowledge successes, share experiences and networking amongst the different groups.*

One of the biggest changes in recent years to the way in which parks and greenspaces are managed and delivered has been the growth of 'Friends of Parks' groups and volunteering by individuals, groups and corporate organisations to support their local sites.

Prior to the COVID – 19 pandemic, which greatly curtailed group participation, over 8000 volunteer hours were contributed to the management and maintenance of sites in 2019/2020.

Our Greenspace Services supplier is required to have a Community Development Manager as part of their core services to offer direct support and resources to assist groups and volunteers to get involved in the management and maintenance of parks, greenspaces and other communal areas under the management of the Council.

Friends of Parks groups are independent voluntary groups set up at community level that work in partnership with the local authority to enhance, improve and promote parks. It is important that these groups are fully inclusive and fairly represent the demography and priorities of the local community.

Friends and volunteers can deliver a wide range of activities including assisting with practical tasks, organising community events, promoting the benefits of individual sites, providing a source of information to council officers and assist with fund raising activities. Through their own media channels they can keep the local community directly informed about planned activities and initiatives.

The role of Friends Groups in supporting the resources of council activities is one of increasing national and local importance. Our intention is to support, diversify and grow this resource throughout the life of this strategy.

We have already developed a number of site specific management plans for the purposes of guiding effort and providing clear objectives and parameters for Friends Groups to work within, the preparation of these plans will continue for every site where a group is involved.

The number of groups involved with sites has grown from 12 to 20 over the last few years. To support and channel the energies of these groups we hold a twice yearly Friends Forum, where different groups can meet, exchange ideas and challenges they may be facing. Most groups are very local and site specific in their interests and therefore it is helpful for them to be informed about what is happening elsewhere in Kingston, and benefit from the experience of others.

In addition to these groups there are also a lot of volunteers who provide support and activity on a more ad hoc basis as part of smaller groups or as individuals. We support these activities by providing venues, agreeing tasks, access to tool, equipment and professional support where required.

Some volunteers are part of a borough wide group and therefore work on a number of sites and some are corporate volunteers, or local organisations through their employers to attend events as part of their employment.

#### **Theme 4. Biodiversity, Nature Recovery and Climate Challenge.**

- Action 4.1 *Assist and support in delivering the habitat and species priorities within the Kingston Biodiversity Action Plan through effective design and management of green spaces.*
- Action 4.2 *Support and facilitate climate change adaptation within suitable sites such as natural flood management, wetland creation and drought resistant planting.*
- Action 4.3 *Contribute and facilitate the Local Nature Recovery Strategy through effective partnership working.*
- Action 4.4 *Identify sites where practical projects to demonstrate improvements in biodiversity through Biodiversity Net Gain opportunities can take place.*

The Borough's parks and greenspaces are already a natural repository for biodiversity at habitat and species level and have a very important and vital future role. Already the last couple of years have seen a number of gains in this area: pollinator friendly planting, WildWays to allow grass and native species to flourish and the installation of standing water through wildlife ponds.

Such improvement activity requires changes to the way and frequency of how sites are managed and our green space services provider is assisting in this process.

Sites which are valuable for biodiversity can have several designations, these include; Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCS) 39 and Local Nature Reserves (LNRS) 12. These can apply equally to public and private sites, however

as previously noted this strategy is only relevant to sites which are owned and managed by Kingston Council.

An independent ecological assessment of the quality of SINC sites was completed in 2019. The purpose being to better understand the current ecological condition of each site to guide future management activities.

National Government through the Environment Bill 2021 is also formalising requirements for local government and their partners to contribute to biodiversity and nature recovery in acknowledgement of concern at the rate and loss of UK habitats and species.

This includes Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) where major developments have to provide a minimum of 10% increase in biodiversity as part of their proposals. Each local authority area also has to form a partnership to deliver a Nature Recovery Plan (NRP) for their area, and these plans will operate at 'county' level. The detail and timetable for these proposals will become clearer towards the end of 2023, and are likely to be mandatory rather than optional.

The recently published Kingston Biodiversity Action Plan (KBAP) has identified a long term vision for the habitats and species which are considered a priority to be enhanced and protected at local level. This has been developed and supported by a number of partner organisations and individuals and this cooperation will continue through a partnership board which will meet independently twice a year to review progress and guide priorities. The KBAP will align and support the realisation of BNG and NRP as those initiatives develop.

The detailed content of the habitat and species plan are an essential guide to what is already of high quality in terms of biodiversity and what improvements can be made. The KBAP priorities will guide what happens in parks and greenspaces to further these objectives and will form part of the annual action plan for this strategy.

In common with many local authorities, Kingston declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. This was to reflect the increasing concern and the pressing need to reduce harmful emissions which were contributing to climate change and based on the inevitability of harmful change occurring, to seek mitigation measures.

Some mitigation and adaptation can be supported and delivered through the parks and green space systems. The Borough's green and blue spaces are already important mechanisms for the absorption and storage of carbon generated through the burning of fossil fuels and other harmful emissions such as NOX. Carbon is stored within soils, trees and other living vegetation, wetlands and water.

Another important mitigation factor is the ability to absorb and redirect flood water to protect residential and commercial properties from expensive damage and disruption. This can be through the installation of sustainable urban drainage schemes (SUDS) whereby the flood water is contained within natural wetlands or within designed physical barriers to prevent flood water reaching properties until it is able to be drained into the natural ground water. Such redirection of surface water from grey to green systems also reduces pressure on drainage infrastructure and reduces down the line treatment costs.

Increasingly outdoor spaces with amenities for coping in hot weather are becoming a necessity as urban areas heat up, areas which are well shaded by trees and

naturally cooled through proximity to water bodies will be signposted for use by residents.

Such attributes for parks and greenspaces to mitigate climate change factors are often referred to as natural capital on the basis that a proxy financial value can be applied to their ability to remove carbon and assist other measures.

In operational practices maintenance activities will use electric vehicles and equipment where such alternative currently exists and will update other areas as, for example, when electric tractors become available of the market. Efforts will be made to increase the sustainability of buildings within parks and greenspaces as they are refurbished and repurposed through effective insulation, energy saving and energy generation measures.

In order to ensure that the most beneficial processes are adopted we are working to establish an accurate baseline of the current benefits and disbenefits so that the true environmental benefit of future interventions can be measured. This will be detailed and reported through the Climate Action Plan.

### **Theme 5. Children's Play Provision and Educational Opportunities.**

Action 5.1 *Continue to deliver playground improvement projects.*

Action 5.2 *Identify opportunities to provide facilities for older children and youths.*

Action 5.3 *Develop a pilot for female friendly multi use games areas and associated facilities to promote a more positive gender balance.*

Action 5.4 *Work with partners and internal colleagues to promote the positive use of green space sites for educational purposes including Forest School and Outdoor Classroom approaches.*

Greenspaces can provide an important role in the development of a child. They provide places for supervised and unsupervised play opportunities. The use of places for play can develop mental and physical health as well as social skills which are vital in later life.

Whilst the physical element of play is important, particularly with rising childhood obesity levels, play can also involve cognitive, imaginative, creative, emotional and social aspects. All our play areas are free to access and this is a very important aspect for encouraging repeat visits and supporting low income families.

Childhood obesity and excess weight are significant health issues for children and their families. Obesity is linked with a range of adverse physical, mental health and societal outcomes, and children living with obesity are at a greater risk of being overweight and having life-limiting comorbidities in adulthood. Obesity prevalence is highest among children living in the most deprived areas, with children in deprived areas more than twice as likely to be living with obesity, than those living in the least deprived areas.

The 2021/22 'NCMP' (schools height and weight measurement) data shows that in Kingston almost 1 in 5 children (16.8%) in the Reception Year (aged 4-5 years) were overweight or living with obesity. Levels of excess weight nearly double while children are in primary school. In Year 6, almost 1 in 3 children (29.8%) in Year 6

(aged 10-11 years) were overweight or living with obesity. While Kingston's children show better (lower) levels of being overweight than most other London boroughs, children being overweight is a significant issue for the borough.

A reasonable range of play equipment and facilities is provided throughout the parks and greenspaces. These tend to be equipment based within fenced off areas to provide a safe and secure environment where children can play uninterrupted. There are also some smaller dedicated play only spaces found within residential areas. The map at Appendix xxx identifies play areas and their distribution.

Although there are no designed purely naturalistic play areas, children make a wide use of natural features within their play activities which are not reliant on manufactured equipment.

Keeping older children occupied and engaged can be a challenge and many sites are equipped with more adventurous equipment such as zip wires and climbing frames which test physical ability and agility to a greater extent.

There is one dedicated skate park facility within Kingston, located in the South of the borough. This was a bespoke design installed over a decade ago and requires travelling from other areas to access it, as it is relatively remote from residential areas. Consideration will be given to methods by which some, albeit, limited skate provision can be provided within other neighbourhoods.

Older teenagers and children are also accommodated within Multi Use Games Areas located in a number of the larger greenspaces, which provides for a range of informal sports including basketball and football, some areas also provide youth shelters where older children can congregate and socialise. Recent research has advised that the traditional design characteristics of these areas are not gender friendly, proving unattractive to girls and young women and those who are less confident. Future designs will take these factors into account with the aim of creating a more gender friendly environment.

Since 2017, Kingston has made considerable capital investment to improve the range and quality of existing play provision, including extending existing sites to accommodate a wider range of features and to include older age groups. This investment has been broadly welcomed by the community and there is still some unmet demand. The plan is to continue this targeted investment wherever possible.

Where wider improvements are planned we ensure that the community is effectively engaged in the design process. This includes seeking comments and suggestions at the draft design stage through the Kingston Let's Talk process. Where possible suggestions and modifications are used to prepare a finalised design which meets community needs.

In general our design process through our suppliers follows that of Play England: Design for Play Principles, which ensures that we are following best practice guidance.

The Outdoor Classroom and Forest Schools approach is growing in popularity and practitioners consider that some children thrive educationally in an outdoor setting in comparison to a traditional classroom.

The development of these facilities will be supported in appropriate locations where they do not disrupt or interfere with existing uses.

### **Theme 6. Quality standards, Management and Maintenance**

- Action 6.1 *Develop applications to the Greenflag Award scheme for parks and green spaces, submitting a site in each of the four neighbourhoods.*
- Action 6.2 *Continue to develop effective working relationships with our greenspace service supplier to ensure that a wide range of key performance indicators and outputs are met.*
- Action 6.3 *Examine options for working with 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partners and identify new organisations to extend the scope of activities including volunteering.*
- Action 6.4 *Monitor and review the delivery of Social Value targets as an outcome of the greenspace services contract, managing and modifying these as required as targets are met and/or new opportunities arise.*
- Action 6.5 *Complete a quality assessment of the key parks and greenspaces identifying deficiencies against an agreed scoring matrix based on Greenflag Award criteria.*
- Action 6.6 *Prepare individual management plans for selected sites with an active Friends Group to guide and support their activities.*

Well managed and maintained public spaces have a positive impact on their locality through their appearance and providing a clean welcoming space which encourages use by a wide range of the community.

Previous resident satisfaction studies have indicated that approximately 60-70% (2017-2018 survey?) of the local population are satisfied with the quality and maintenance of their public parks and greenspaces. Kingston aims for a median level of maintenance quality and uses an external measure of benchmarking developed by the Parks for London organisation. In most cases the aim is to achieve a good standard as measured by their guidelines.

Poor maintenance of sites can have a direct impact on residents and discourage use of sites. Factors such as anti-social behaviour, littering, graffiti, vandalism, dogs and broken equipment which remains out of commission for long periods of time is detrimental. It is considered that these aspects of poor maintenance can also have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing.

Recently the increased use of sites by a wider audience as a result of the Pandemic, has in some cases led to an increase in poor behaviour which has increased maintenance costs and damaged sensitive sites through overuse. The increased volume of litter generated has on its own been a significant challenge.

The Greenspaces Service has had to respond to these challenges and their aftermath in a proactive way to ensure that site quality was maintained. Generally, levels of site use has settled back to pre-pandemic levels.

The funding of parks and greenspaces within Kingston has been relatively stable in recent years, although it has declined in comparison to budget provision in comparison to the Mid-2000s. This has been due to budget austerity measures introduced by Central Government and a growth in competing priorities for budgets within the council itself. It is likely that the current national economic factors and the measures to control inflation and the budget deficit over the next few years will mean that budgets will at best be static and declining in real terms.

This backdrop will clearly be a challenge to the current service and there will be the need to further maximum efficiency and effectiveness in order to maintain service quality. This is likely to mean more focus on activities such as litter collection rather than traditional horticulture and a move towards less intensive maintenance techniques.

Kingston is supported in its management and maintenance activities through its Greenspace Services Contractor, a large scale commercial organisation, which specialises in delivering this type of service to mainly local authority clients. Glendale, the current provider has been in place since 1 November 2021 and the contract will last for an initial period of 7 years until 2028.

Kingston took the opportunity during this re-commissioning process to introduce and develop features which will be of long term benefit to the community as the service progresses. This includes a maintenance specific website which can be accessed to find a range of up to date and post code specific maintenance information, the use and roll out of electrical equipment and vehicles to reduce noise and harmful emissions and a dedicated Community Support officer to assist with developing volunteering and Parks Friends of Group Activities.

The performance of the services are measured through a selection of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) which ensure that the service is delivering what it is meant to and if not work in partnership to resolve any defective performance.

Related to service delivery, an overall qualitative and quantitative assessment of Kingston's parks and greenspaces has not been independently conducted for a number of years, and there is an ambition to complete a new study within the lifetime of this strategy. This will assist in directing future investment and maintenance activities on the basis of greatest need.

In the meantime, as part of this strategy Kingston will be re-engaging with the Green Flag Award Scheme, this is an internationally accepted standard for measuring the quality of a park or greenspace against a range of criteria. The process includes the preparation of a detailed management plan for each of the sites put forward for a Green Flag Award and a site judging visit by independent judges. The aim is to submit one site a year to the scheme up to a maximum of four sites.

Another important role in the management of greenspaces is to prevent and reduce behaviour by groups and individuals which other users might find intimidating and also to prevent nuisance being caused to residents of neighbouring properties.

This type of behaviour is often referenced as being Anti-Social Behaviour of ASB in short. ASB can affect communities in different ways and have negative impacts on people's lives. It is defined as 'behaviour by a person which causes, or is likely to

cause, harassment, alarm or distress to persons not of the same household as the person’.

ASB can often occur within parks and greenspaces, and is often sporadic and transitory in nature. The Council’s Community Safety Team can help to deliver intervention activities in response to known problems, individuals or hotspots as they occur. Working effectively with other agencies and all parts of the local community to promote safety and increase awareness is a key priority in this respect.

### **Theme 7. Sport, Recreation and Adult Exercise.**

Action 7.1 *Assist in the delivery of the Outdoor Leisure and Playing Pitch Strategy priorities, developing new opportunities for sport and recreation.*

Action 7.2 *Survey existing playing pitches working with a range of external partners, identify improvement plans and potential funding streams.*

Parks and greenspaces are important venues for a range of sports which require larger scale pitch facilities, by size and number. There are a number of areas managed and maintained as formal sports pitches and facilities. Council owned pitches are provided for football in winter and cricket in summer.

Historically these sports have been mainly played by adult males through organised team structures and the venues and changing facilities, where these are provided, tend to reflect the historic nature of this provision. In general, teams have to pay a booking fee for use of formal pitches and changing rooms. The Council’s Greenspace Services contractor uses a dedicated sports pitch booking system to facilitate this use.

Recent years have seen the development of ‘football mini leagues’ on a number of sites, and this involves mainly primary school age children, again this tends to focus on boys rather than girls.

There are currently no hockey or rugby pitches provided directly by Kingston Council on sites which are under their management.

Other sports currently catered for include basketball and tennis, a very successful community tennis programme is supported through leasing tennis courts to a number of partner organisations.

Free facilities are also provided including access to five artificial grass cricket wickets designed for community use and particularly to encourage younger people to try the sport for themselves.

In recent years new footpaths have been provided in a number of sites to encourage walking and running and to provide a traffic free route to access other local facilities, in some cases. Similarly a number of new and upgraded outdoor gym and exercise rigs have been provided within sites to encourage adult exercise along with a number of table tennis tables also free to use.

In general there has been a trend in recent years for people to move away from organised team sports to individual activities such as running and individual exercise. Numerous personal fitness trainers hold activities within parks and greenspaces for their clients, and we will be seeking to licence these activities where possible.

The current outdoor sports provision within Kingston has been mapped and analysed through a recent Playing Pitch Strategy process which is compliant with 'Sport England' guidelines. As well as Kingston Council's pitches this study also includes private, educational and institutional provision. This has the benefit of providing a much more accurate position related to supply and demand for current and future sports.

Clearly there is a limit, given the overall deficiency of public green space in Kingston, to the extent to which land can be given over for use as formal sport pitches and in some cases this may also be detrimental to the natural environment which needs to be factored into any decision.

We have an Outdoor Sports Development function within our greenspace services provider and our intention is to deliver an enhanced range of sports activities within our sites based on the supply and demand characteristics of the study.

This could include the rationalisation of existing pitch provision and the introduction of new low impact sports such as softball and rounders, options for touch rugby and encouragement of individual fitness training through appropriately licenced training providers.

## **Theme 8. Heritage, Public Realm and Placemaking**

Action 8.1 *Support and contribute to corporate initiatives to improve the sustainability, quality and appearance of the public realm and places.*

Action 8.2 *Promote the natural heritage of the borough through signage and interpretation.*

Recent initiatives have highlighted the importance of heritage in shaping the quality and success of Kingston, both in its past and for its future vision. Whilst heritage is often associated with artefacts, monuments and historic buildings, it is important to recognise that parks and greenspaces are one of the most important features of cultural heritage, and particularly the people's heritage.

Parks and greenspaces hold historic value and offer opportunities for people to engage with and interpret the historic environment, fostering a sense of community identity.

Many formal Conservation Areas rely on greenspaces as important components these features often serve as the cohesive glue which binds different areas together, creating a strong sense of place and capturing the Genius Loci – the spirit of the location.

Certain parts of the Borough's natural heritage have remained largely unchanged, offering a glimpse into the past when the area was characterised by pastoral and agricultural landscapes in nature. Remnant meadows, ancient woodlands, disused farmland and wetlands showcase this rich natural heritage.

The proposed vision in the New Kingston Local Plan emphasises the importance of respecting and enhancing this rich character and heritage for current and future generations. Highlighting the importance of integrating aspects of heritage into new developments and regeneration projects. As well as the promotion of exemplary place making through high quality sustainable design of buildings and public spaces, to create greener, safer and accessible places.

This strategy aligns with the vision of the New Local Plan and seeks to collaborate positively with internal colleagues and external partner organisations. By doing so it will help to ensure that parks and greenspaces make the fullest possible contribution to realising these outcomes and thereby honouring the borough's heritage.

### **Theme 9. Buildings and Facilities.**

- Action 9.1 *Identify the priority for investing in sports changing facilities to help ensure that sport and recreational activities are supported and can be accessed equally by different user groups.*
- Action 9.2 *Commission a marketing approach for built assets which are no longer required for operational purposes, to include consideration of community and commercial uses where ancillary to open space designations.*
- Action 9.3 *Ensure effective contractually based facility management and routine servicing and maintenance to ensure that buildings are fit for purpose and meet the needs of user groups.*

There are numerous buildings located within parks and greenspaces which provide for a range of functions some of these are operational in nature such as maintenance depots, others support parks and greenspace uses including sports changing pavilions and public toilets, other are let to private service operators for use as cafes, for example.

The majority of the buildings located within these sites are historic in nature, having been provided for a variety of original purposes over the years, some of which are now obsolete and have been directed for other purposes.

In considering alternative uses where there are proposals to re-purpose buildings located within parks and green spaces, the Planning designation for such sites would normally or often require that any purposes are ancillary to the use of the land as public open space. This requirement to comply with planning policy can often limit the uses to which such buildings can be put.

There are different interpretations of ancillary use, and these also move according to planning policy priorities, however ancillary has been recognised as something which facilitates the open air recreational use of the site, therefore sports changing accommodation would be acceptable, but not a use which relied on the internal space for its purpose and was unrelated such as a library or office accommodation unrelated to the management of the open space service.

Increasingly there is a level of community interest in taking over underutilised buildings with an ambition of providing a facility of greater value to the community. The difficulties, however, which can be encountered by community groups and indeed the commercial sector, in transitioning from an ambition to providing a positive sustained use, to the reality of achieving an enhanced facility should not be underestimated.

However there have been successful transitions and these include Canbury Community Pavilion based in a redundant bowls pavilion, Canbury Secret Café house in an ex toilet block and Latchmere Recreation Ground where part of the toilet block has been converted to a café and managed by a local Friends Group.

The letting of some buildings has a financial benefit through leasing income and defraying of maintenance costs to the occupier. These options are further highlighted in the Capital Investment and Income Generation section of this strategy.

The management, maintenance and servicing costs of these buildings require regular expenditure and it is important that such expenditure can be fully justified. Many of the building are also in a poor condition, by modern standards, and need to be substantially upgraded.

A strategic review of the Council's property assets has recently been completed and the green space service priorities for the buildings have been indicated and these needs will be aligned also with priorities arising from related strategies such as the Playing Pitch Strategy which will determine the priority for investing in sports changing facilities.

## **Theme 10. Capital Investment and Income Generation.**

### **Capital Investment**

- Action 10.1 *Identify priorities for investment in greenspaces following the strategic considerations within the Greenspace Strategy 2024-2034.*
- Action 10.2 *Identify external sources of funding which could be utilised for greenspace improvements.*
- Action 10.3 *Support and facilitate corporate initiatives which are transformative and entrepreneurial in nature to extend and increase the number of income generation streams within parks and greenspaces.*

Since 2017 Kingston has been making regular capital investment in the improvement of sites and facilities. Where design options are available or physical changes are proposed we follow a community engagement process, to seek views and suggestions from the local community. Regular communication is maintained with Ward Councillors, Portfolio Holders and Neighbourhood Managers which assists with identifying local priorities and needs.

The type of projects delivered are of direct and immediate benefit to the community once they are installed, these include; upgrading of children's play areas, new and extended footpath systems, outdoor gyms and exercise areas, sports surfaces and equipment and enhancement of buildings to facilitate community use.

At a more prosaic but equally essential level we have been investing in maintaining the infrastructure and fabric of these important sites, which although robust eventually deteriorate beyond the ability of maintenance budgets to keep them in good condition, such items include boundary fences, pedestrian and vehicles gates and car park and entrance road resurfacing.

Funding has been made available from a variety of sources, the most important and large scale being through the RBK capital programme. Additional sources of funding have come from planning contributions to support infrastructure improvements Section 106, Community Infrastructure Levy and external grant funding bodies.

The 10 year Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) 2022 – 2023 has identified the greenspace sites and related facilities which are a priority for community infrastructure levy funding and this will support the investment ambitions of this strategy.

Whilst it is planned to continue with investment, where it is most needed, the national constraint on public sector expenditure predicted to continue until at least 2027, is likely to restrict what can be achieved.

### **Income Generation**

Nationally over the last two decades as a consequence of previous financial austerity measures and consequent funding constraints experienced by the public sector, there has been a reduction in the level of funding provided for discretionary services like parks and greenspaces. These services had hitherto been funded through direct taxation and the standard spending assessment provided by central government.

As a result there have been a number of studies which examine the potential for alternative sources of funding to replace that provided by government for core costs and also to examine the extent to which greenspace resources could generate income to supplement or replace other forms of direct funding.

Most recently there have been pilot projects through the Rethinking Parks and Future Parks Accelerator project funded by NESTA, HLF and Department for Levelling Up, amongst others. The following is a quote from a NESTA source examining the question of funding.

*“Parks are a fundamental ‘public good’, when our parks thrive, people thrive. Of course, all of this says nothing of the environmental benefits of greenspace in terms of biodiversity, flood management and contribution to tackling the climate crisis. Rather than ‘nice-to-haves’ whose funding is pressured, discretionary or*

*de-prioritised, a rounded and balanced understanding of the incredible and multi-faceted value that parks offer will see them recognised as net contributors to healthy, productive urban living, which are more than worthy of taxpayer funding”.*

However such worthy sentiments are unlikely to change the short term and potentially worsening realities of the availability for public sector funding.

There are many challenges present in seeking to increase or maximise the amount of income generated from parks and greenspaces. In many cases the community support and use these facilities precisely because they are not commercial or mercantile in nature, this is before any consideration of affordability or of the community feeling pressurised to spend money which they can't necessarily afford.

In many cases there is a historic legislative presumption against indiscriminate commercialisation.

It has also been noted that parks and greenspaces are the ultimate democratic spaces: there is no entrance fee or barrier to access, no need to spend money once there and generally places which people from all backgrounds can use and value equally.

Historically the potential for income generation within these sites were a by-product of the open space nature of the site, often provided by and at a subsidy to the user. These would include the ability to hire equipment, features could include bowling, boating lakes, mini golf and tennis. In more recent years this type of public provision has disappeared along with the staff who would support and operate these facilities. Beyond that, the potential for income generation in parks was not particularly explored as a priority matter as the cost of managing and maintaining the facilities were met from adequate budget provision supporting a public service.

These types of income generating activities tended to be located in larger destination parks and greenspaces where higher visitor numbers were experienced and there were ancillary facilities to support visits, like car parks and toilet provision. There was and is generally limited income to be gained from smaller more local sites.

In considering potential options for income generation it should be noted that in many cases this requires expenditure to upgrade facilities and purchase equipment and to pay for marketing and promotion which has to be recovered from the income generated.

Current income generation sources within Kingston's parks and greenspaces include the following: Cafes, tennis courts, football and cricket facilities, commercial events e.g. fairgrounds and ancillary use of buildings for community based purposes.

In most cases the type of uses are commensurate with the nature and scale of the sites themselves and are not overtly commercial in characteristic. It is important to recognise that there can often be conflicts between the open and free nature of parks and the need to close them off for commercial events, or to charge people for doing things that you want to encourage them to do, such as exercise. There is in most cases a resistance within the community to close off areas of land to which they have previously enjoyed free and unrestricted access, for example, the privatisation of land for particular purposes like sports clubs or adventure activities.

In general any activities or use of buildings located in parks and greenspaces can only have uses which are considered ancillary to the use of the land as public open space, i.e. which rely on access to the open space for their viability. This requirement to comply with planning and legislative policy can often limit the uses to which such buildings can be put.

Through the course of this strategy Kingston Council will work with its partners to identify opportunities for increasing income and/or reducing management and maintenance costs where this can be done sensitively and without damaging the intrinsic value of the site.

Options which will be considered include:

- Advertising & Sponsorship
- Commercial Events
- Café & Ice Cream Concessions
- Building letting & rentals
- Licensing of personal fitness trainers and exercise classes
- Extending the range of chargeable sport and recreation activities
- Seasonal activities – winter fair, ice rink & markets
- Renewable energy & environmental services
- Biodiversity & carbon credits
- Forestry Schools and Outdoor Classrooms

### **Theme 11. Publicity, Marketing and Promotion**

Action 11.1 *Prepare and promote an annual campaign to increase knowledge and use of Kingston's greenspace and the activities which they support.*

Action 11.2 *Prepare location and route maps which encourage the community to explore a wider range of sites, linked to walking and cycling routes.*

Action 11.3 *Develop digital methods for improving internal and external customer responsiveness and maintenance information through websites, internet of things, QR coding and similar benefits.*

Action 11.4 *Promote good news stories through the web and social media on a regular and routine basis.*

Some members of the community already have a very good knowledge about parks and greenspaces, the facilities and benefits they contain and how to access them. However many people remain unaware of what is available to them even in quite

close proximity to their residences. For example, a community survey carried out in Tolworth in 2019 indicated that only 5% of the community were aware of Tolworth Court Farm on their doorsteps, which in fact Kingston's largest green space.

To assist in overcoming these information barriers it is important to ensure that people know more about where the parks and greenspaces are, what they have to offer, what facilities exist and knowing that they will be safe and welcome when they get there. This will be achieved through effective publicity campaigns using a variety of media.

Essentially understanding the market for parks and greenspaces will be related to priority theme 1 of this strategy. This will help in understanding the current users and audience for these facilities; e.g. what they currently use them for, where do they come from to get there, how long do they stay and what is their gender?

As stated we want to serve as broad a sector of the local community as practicable, the current non-user groups and those less likely to visit or spend time in a local park and open spaces.

The answers to some of these questions, if not all, will assist in developing the marketing strategy to emphasise the benefits. Once we know the target audiences publicity and promotional campaigns can be developed accordingly.

Promotional campaigns during the school holiday periods can be used to target children and their carers about the specific activities available for them to enjoy. The use of less obvious venues for promotion such as notices in GP surgeries stressing the health benefits.

In general public parks and greenspaces in Kingston are not in competition with other venues, particularly where local facilities are concerned. In terms of larger sites the presence of the Royal Parks of Bushey and Richmond Park may be preferred by visits by some sectors of the community, research about which sites are used most frequently by Kingston residents will assist in understanding the demand metrics and what can be done to make local sites more attractive to those residents.

All of the sites are free at point of access and affordability is unlikely to be a factor. Where facilities do require a payment, e.g. formal pitches for team sports these are at a competitive price level in comparison to other boroughs and private venues.

Improving physical accessibility and awareness is also a key factor and related to many of the other key themes in this strategy. If the location of sites is a barrier, in some case due to lines of severance or local open space deficiencies, there may be wider public realm improvements which could assist in improving the situation.

Communication to get people to the sites in the first place and increase their confidence when they get there is a key aspect. Fortunately Kingston is well served by community noticeboards throughout the neighbourhoods and these can be used to promote local events and venues by traditional communication methods.

Similarly the advertising boards and screens within public buildings can be used to promote local and more general messages. Social media is a key tool in modern messaging and there is a regular stream of items circulated. The further distribution of these messages through community and special interest groups greatly enhances their uptake and feedback.

Increasingly, linking with community based organisations and specific Friends of Parks Groups (FOPS) who have their own social media networks can be a more effective means of getting messages directly to the community, through personal Facebook pages and similar.

There is also a regular slot supported by the library service, currently Wildlife Wednesdays which promotes the natural characteristics, habitats and species found within parks and greenspaces and this has a regular online audience. The use of this mechanism will be supported and enhanced through this strategy.

The Biodiversity officer organises a series of walks and nature surveying events which are enthusiastically supported and attended by the local community, bat and hedgehog walks being a great favourite.

Once visitors have physically arrived at a site they can be communicated with through on site notice boards and routine signage contains further information about how to contact the greenspaces service and raise any concerns about site conditions.

Further work is required to update signage and noticeboard, potentially through the use of symbols and images to communicate information rather than blocks of text, whilst someone may read closely worded text in an open environment if the weather is good and they are not in a hurry, this is much less likely in poor weather with limited time. Other aspects such as language barriers and visual impairments also need to be considered to reflect the increasingly diverse population.

On larger sites, site maps, interpretation boards and way marking will encourage use and exploration of the site. It is not always obvious to a new user how long it will take to walk through a site and where linkages may be found, such as traffic free routes to other destinations. Sites where this will be particularly valuable include the Hogsmill Valley Park and Tolworth Court Farm.

Lastly, having a supported and diverse programme of events and activities will provide opportunities for promoting and bringing new audiences into parks and green spaces, these are developed and delivered through the council's own efforts, partner organisations and a number of community groups. Where planned in advance these form part of the annual events programme.

## **8. How will the strategy be delivered?**

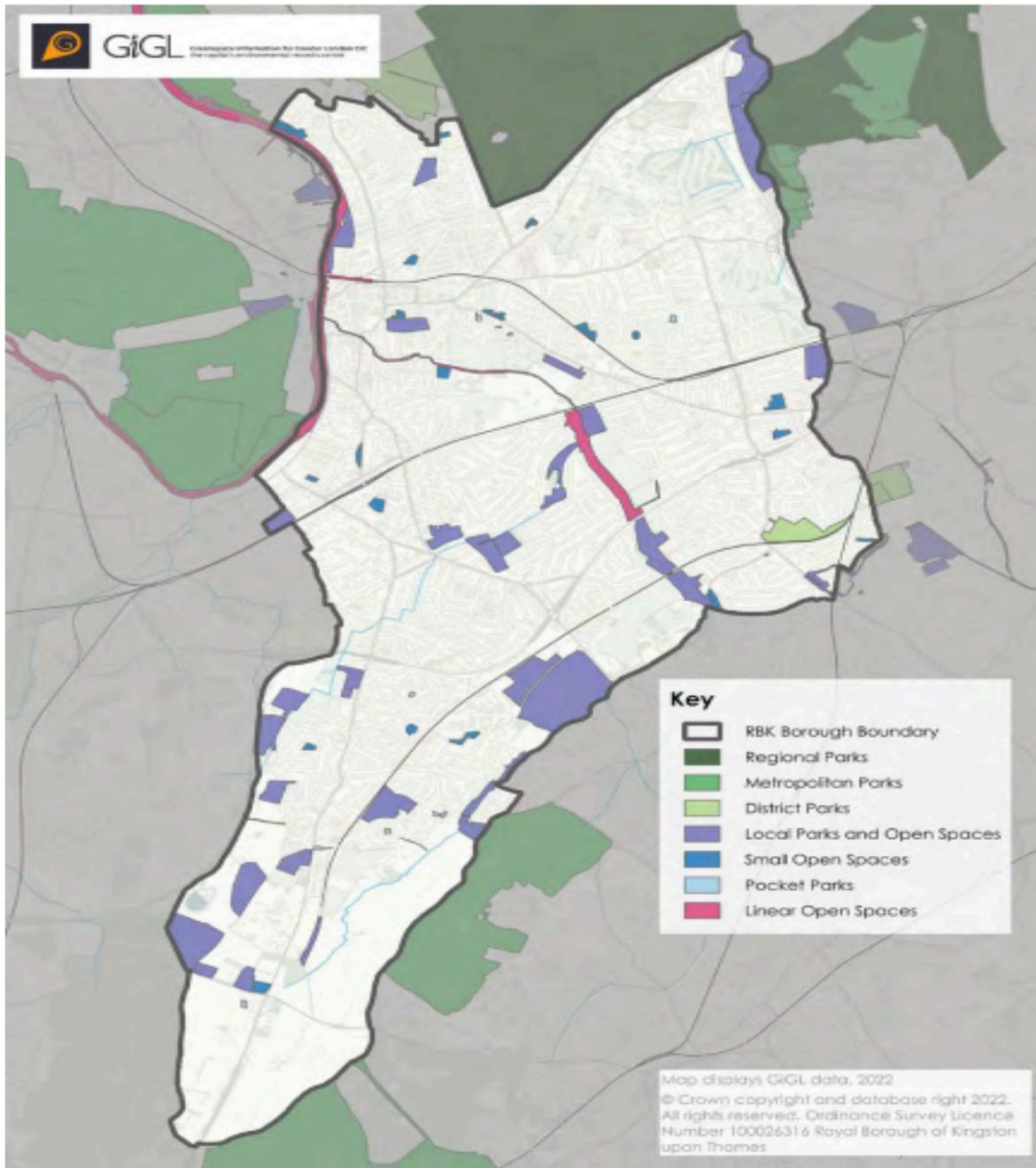
An action plan covering the first three years of the strategy from 2024-2027 has been prepared. This will guide the delivery priorities based on the 11 key strategic priorities.

The progress of the action plan against the targets will be made available as an update to the strategy document on an annual basis as part of Climate Action.

The need for flexibility within the plan to meet changing priorities and opportunities which may arise will be an intrinsic characteristic of the strategy and approach to delivering the many benefits which can be realised.

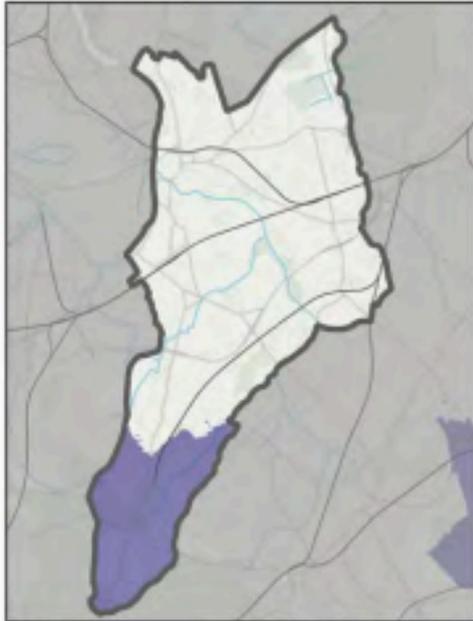
## 9. Appendices

### 9.1 Map showing the main classifications of Public Open Space.

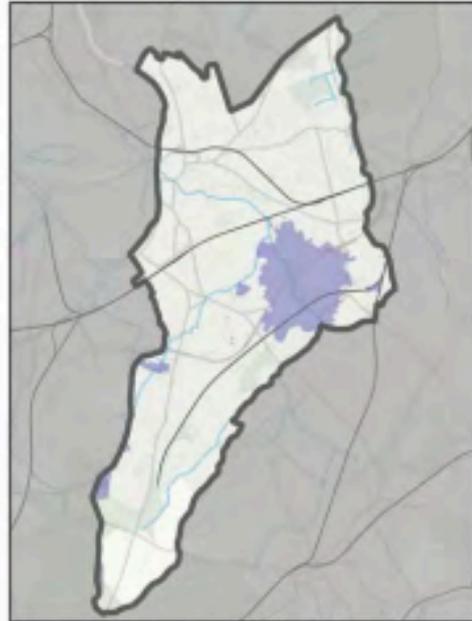


## 9.2 Map showing areas of deficiency in Access to Public Open Space Categories.

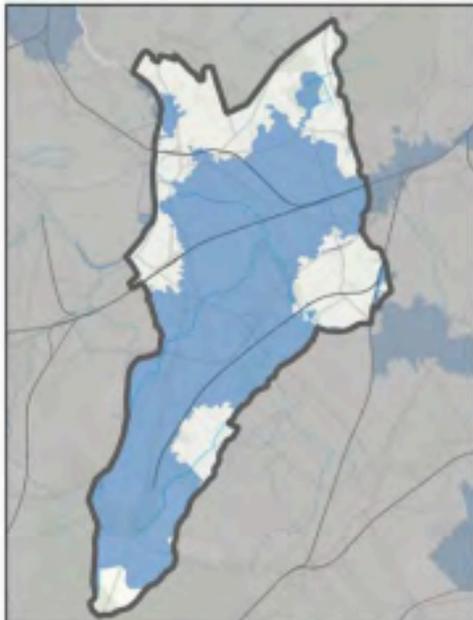
Areas of Deficiency in Access to Regional Parks



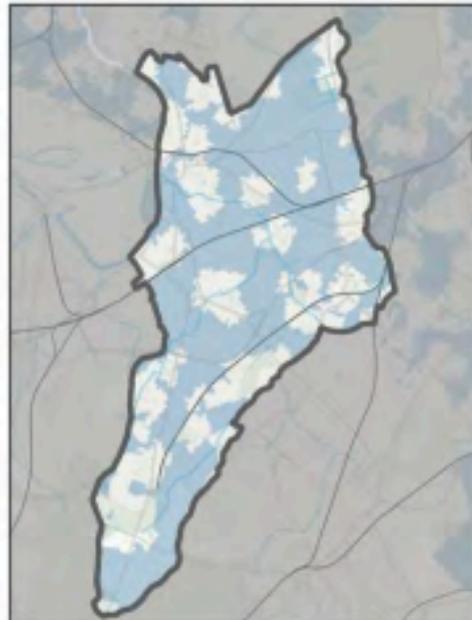
Areas of Deficiency in Access to Metropolitan Parks



Areas of Deficiency in Access to District Parks



Areas of Deficiency in Access to Local, Small & Pocket Parks



### Key

-  R&K Borough Boundary
-  Areas of Deficiency in Access to Regional Parks
-  Areas of Deficiency in Access to Metropolitan Parks
-  Areas of Deficiency in Access to District Parks
-  Areas of Deficiency in Access to Local, Small & Pocket Parks



GiGL Open Access Information for Greater London and The London's Environmental Modelling Agency

Map displays GiGL data, 2022.

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## 9.3 London Plan 2021 – Open Space Policy

### Policy G4 Open space

A Development Plans should:

- 1) undertake a needs assessment of all open space to inform policy. Assessments should identify areas of public open space deficiency, using the categorisation set out in Table 8.1 as a benchmark for the different types required.<sup>136</sup> Assessments should take into account the quality, quantity and accessibility of open space
- 2) include appropriate designations and policies for the protection of open space to meet needs and address deficiencies
- 3) promote the creation of new areas of publicly-accessible open space particularly green space, ensuring that future open space needs are planned for, especially in areas with the potential for substantial change
- 4) ensure that open space, particularly green space, included as part of development remains publicly accessible.

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<sup>136</sup> Areas of Deficiency in Access to Public Open Space, GiGL, <https://www.gigl.org.uk/open-spaces/areas-of-deficiency-in-access-to-public-open-space/?highlight=open%20space%20deficiency>

B Development proposals should:

- 1) not result in the loss of protected open space
- 2) where possible create areas of publicly accessible open space, particularly in areas of deficiency.

## 9.4 Public Open Space Categories used in London Plan

**Table 8.1 - Public open space categorisation**

Open Space categorisation	Description	Size guideline	Distance from homes
Regional Parks	These are large areas, corridors or networks of open space, the majority of which will be publicly-accessible and provide a range of facilities and features offering recreational, ecological, landscape, cultural or green infrastructure benefits. They offer a combination of facilities and features that are unique within London, are readily accessible by public transport and are managed to meet best practice quality standards.	400 ha	3.2 to 8 km
Metropolitan Parks	These are large areas of open space that provide a similar range of benefits to Regional Parks and offer a combination of facilities at a sub-regional level. They are readily accessible by public transport and are managed to meet best practice quality standards.	60 ha	3.2 km
District Parks	These are large areas of open space that provide a landscape setting with a variety of natural features. They provide a wide range of activities, including outdoor sports facilities and playing fields, children's play for different age groups and informal recreation pursuits.	20 ha	1.2 km
Local Parks and Open Spaces	These provide for court games, children's play, sitting out areas and nature conservation areas.	2 ha	400 m

Open Space categorisation	Description	Size guideline	Distance from homes
Small Open Spaces	These include public gardens, sitting out areas, children's play spaces or other areas of a specialist nature, including nature conservation areas.	under 2 ha	less than 400 m
Pocket Parks	These are small areas of open space that provide natural surfaces and shaded areas for informal play and passive recreation that sometimes have seating and play equipment.	under 0.4 ha	less than 400 m
Linear Open Spaces	These are open spaces and towpaths alongside the Thames, canals and other waterways, paths, disused railways, nature conservation areas and other routes that provide opportunities for informal recreation. They can often be characterised by elements that are not public open space but that contribute to the enjoyment of the space.	N/A	N/A

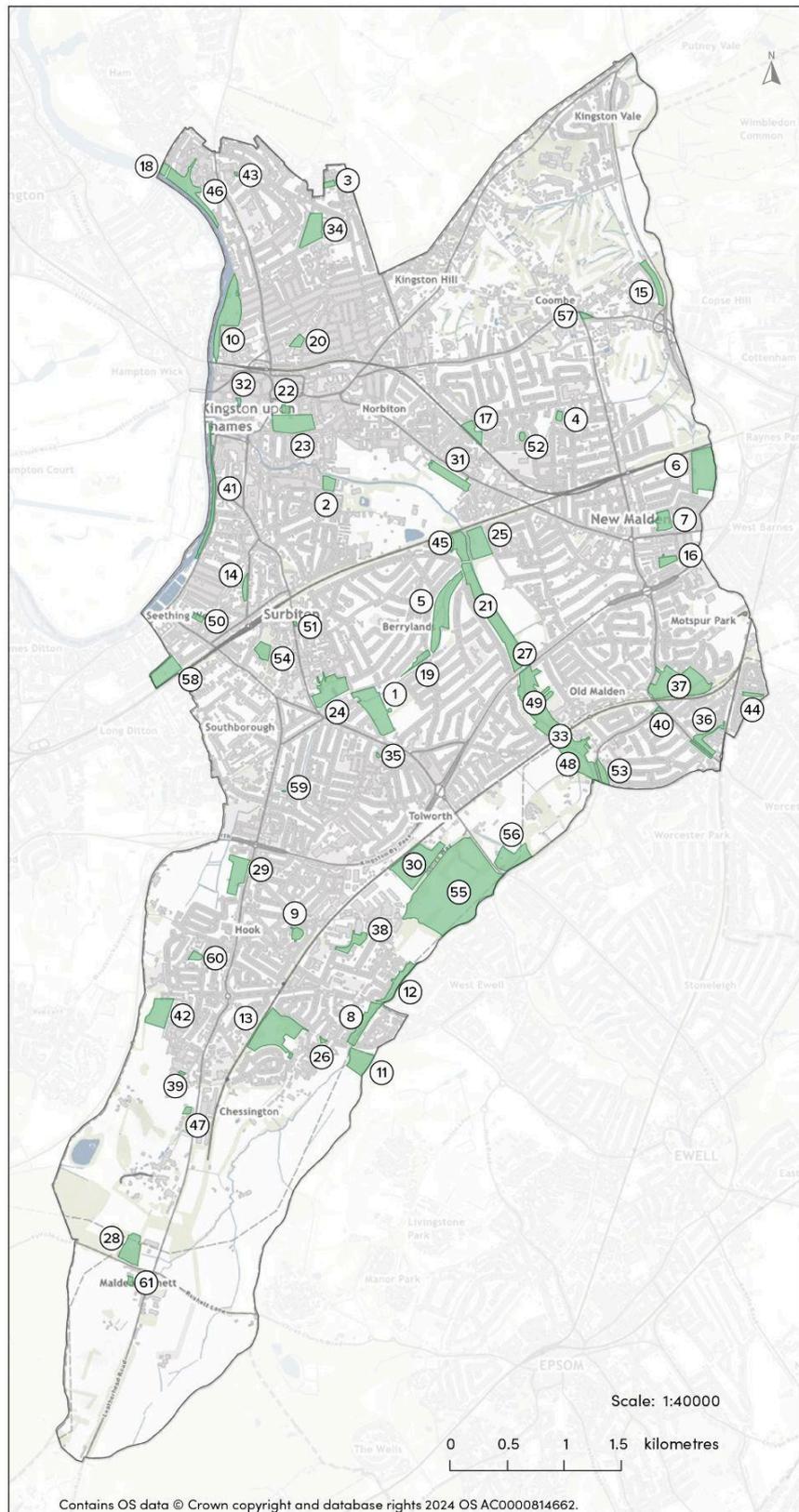
This table gives examples of typical open space typologies in London; other open space types may be included to reflect local circumstances

## 9.5 Map of Kingston Parks and Greenspaces

### Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames - Parks and open spaces

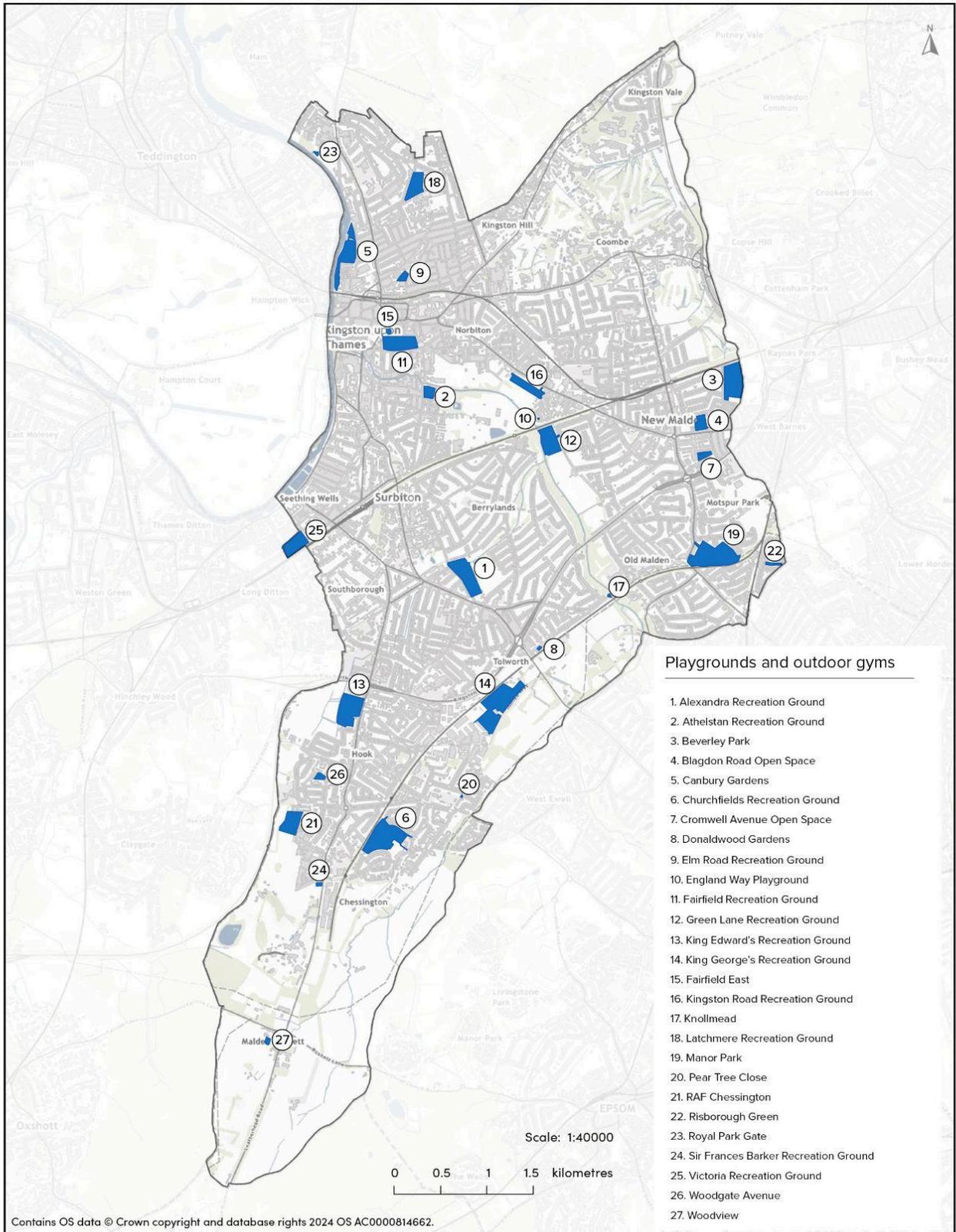
#### Parks and open spaces

1. Alexandra Recreation Ground
  2. Athelstan Recreation Ground
  3. Barnfield Open Space
  4. Barton Green
  5. Berrylands LNR\* (Raeburn Open Space)
  6. Beverley Park
  7. Blagdon Road Open Space
  8. Bonesgate Open Space LNR\*
  9. Bullwhips
  10. Canbury Gardens
  11. Castle Hill LNR\*
  12. Chessington Hill Park
  13. Churchfield Recreation Ground
  14. Claremont Crescent Gardens
  15. Coombe Wood LNR\*
  16. Cromwell Avenue Open Space
  17. Dickerage Recreation Ground
  18. Dysart Open Space
  19. Edith Gardens LNR\*
  20. Elm Road Recreation Ground
  21. Elmbridge Meadows LNR\*
  22. Fairfield East
  23. Fairfield Recreation Ground
  24. Fishponds Park
  25. Green Lane Recreation Ground
  26. Hemsby Road Open Space
  27. Hogsmill Wood LNR\*
  28. Jubilee Wood LNR\*
  29. King Edward's Recreation Ground
  30. King George's Recreation Ground
  31. Kingston Road Recreation Ground
  32. Kingston Memorial Gardens
  33. Knollmead
  34. Latchmere Recreation Ground
  35. Lenelby Gardens
  36. Malden Green
  37. Manor Park
  38. Mount Road Open Space
  39. Nigel Fisher Way
  40. Plough Green and Pond
  41. Queen's Promenade
  42. RAF Chessington
  43. Richmond Road Pocket Park
  44. Risborough Green
  45. Rose Walk LNR\*
  46. Royal Park Gate Open Space
  47. Sir Francis Barker Recreation Ground
  48. Six Acre Meadow
  49. Southwood Open Space LNR\*
  50. St. Andrews Square
  51. Surbiton Memorial Gardens
  52. The Green
  53. The Hollows
  54. The Wood and Richard Jefferies Bird Sanctuary
  55. Tolworth Court Farm Fields LNR\*
  56. Tolworth Court Farm Moated Manor
  57. Trapps Lane Open Space
  58. Victoria Recreation Ground
  59. Waterside Close
  60. Woodgate Avenue
  61. Woodview
- \* Local Nature Reserve



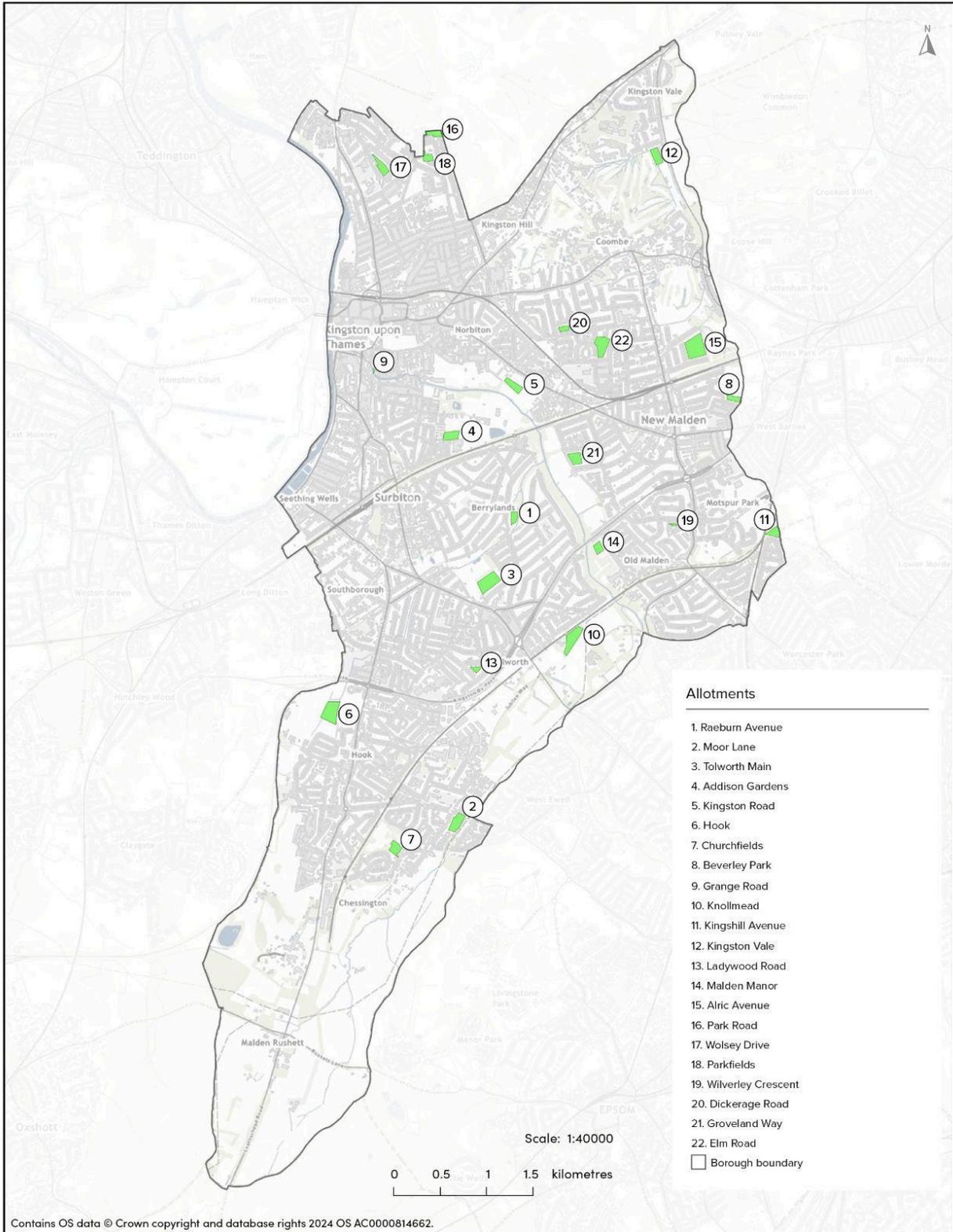
## 9.6 Map of Children’s Playgrounds

### Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames - Playgrounds and outdoor gyms



## 9.7 Map of Allotment Sites

### Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames - Allotment sites



## 9.8 Parks and Greenspaces Site List

Site Name	Address	Neighbourhood	Post code
Bullwhips	Coutts Avenue	South of the Borough	KT9 1BN
Chessington Hill Park open space	Chessington Hill Park	South of the Borough	KT9 2BS
Churchfields Recreation Ground	Compton Crescent	South of the Borough	KT9 2HG
King Edwards Recreation Ground	Hook Road	South of the Borough	KT9 1PL
King George's Recreation Ground	Jubilee Way	South of the Borough	KT9 1TR
<b>Sir Frances Barker Recreation Ground</b>	Leatherhead Road	South of the Borough	KT9 2NB
<b>Woodview</b>	Woodview	South of the Borough	KT9 2NU
RAF Chessington	Coppard Gardens	South of the Borough	KT9 2GZ
<b>Pear Tree Close playground</b>	Pear Tree Close	South of the Borough	KT9 2BB
Woodgate Avenue	Hereford Way	South of the Borough	KT9 2QH
Bonesgate Open Space	Filby Road	South of the Borough	KT9 2DA
Hemsby Road/Stokesby Road open space	Hemsby Road	South of the Borough	KT9 2EA
Mount Road open space	Mount Road	South of the Borough	KT9 1JL
<b>St Mary's churchyard</b>	Church Lane	South of the Borough	KT9 2DH
<b>Moor lane roadside area - Melford close junction and outside the allotments</b>	Moor Lane	South of the Borough	KT9 2AB
Nigel Fisher way - strip opposite medical centre	Nigel Fisher Way	South of the Borough	KT9 2SN

Athelstan Recreation ground	Viller Road	Kingston	KT1 3GZ
Kingston Road Recreation ground	Kingston Road	Kingston	KT3 3RY
Queens Promenade	Portsmouth Road	Kingston	KT64HN
Canbury Gardens	Lower Ham Road	Kingston	KT2 5AJ
Kingston War Memorial Gardens	Union Street	Kingston	KT1 1NZ
Elm Road Recreation Ground	Elm Road	Kingston	KT2 6HR
Fairfield Recreation Ground	Fairfield Road	Kingston	KT1 2PY
Barnfield	Park Road	Kingston	KT2 5RN
Kingfisher Playground and grounds	Fairfield Road	Kingston	KT1 2PY
<b>Dysart Open Space</b>	Dysart Avenue	Kingston	KT2 5RA
<b>Half Mile Tree</b>	Lower Ham Road	Kingston	KT2 5BD
Latchmere Recreation Ground	Latchmere Road	Kingston	KT2 5TT
<b>Richmond Road pocket park</b>	Sury Basin	Kingston	KT2 5NZ
Riverside footpath - between Kingston Bridge and Queens Promenade		Kingston	KT1 1QN
<b>Riverside footpath - Rear of St Johns School</b>	Portland Road	Kingston	KT1 2SG
Royal Park Gate	Northweald Lane	Kingston	KT2 5GW
Dickerage Recreation Ground	Dickerage Lane	New & Old Malden	KT3 3SG
Barton Green	Elm Road	New & Old Malden	KT3 3HU

Beverley Park	Park View	New & Old Malden	KT3 4AX
Blagdon Road Open Space	Blagdon Road	New & Old Malden	KT3 4TA
Cromwell Avenue Open Space	Cromwell Avenue	New & Old Malden	KT3 6DN
Green Lane Recreation Ground	Green Lane	New & Old Malden	KT3 5BX
Malden Green	Malden Road	New & Old Malden	KT4 7NH
<b>The Hollows</b>	Church Road	New & Old Malden	KT4 7RY
<b>Leyfield Open Space</b>	Church Road	New & Old Malden	KT4 7LZ
Long Meadows	Manor Drive North	New & Old Malden	KT3 5PE
Manor Park	Malden Road	New & Old Malden	KT3 6AU
England Way Playground	England Way	New & Old Malden	KT3 3RV
Risborough Green	Kingshill Avenue	New & Old Malden	KT4 8DE
<b>Plough Green</b>	Church Road/Malden Road	New & Old Malden	KT4 7RD
<b>The Green</b>	The green	New & Old Malden	KT3 3LD
<b>Trapps Lane open space</b>	Traps Lane	New & Old Malden	kt2 7DE
Alexandra Recreation Ground	King Charles Road	Surbiton	KT5 9AA
St Andrews Square	St Andrews Square	Surbiton	KT6 4EG
<b>Surbiton Memorial Gardens</b>	Ewell Road	Surbiton	KT6 6AF
Victoria Recreation Ground	Victoria Avenue	Surbiton	KT6 5DN
The Wood	Oakhill Grove	Surbiton	KT6 6DS
Knollmead	Knollmead	Surbiton	KT5 9QN

Rose Walk	Surbiton Hill Park	Surbiton	KT5 8EN
Elmbridge Meadows	Elmbridge Avenue	Surbiton	KT5 9HF
Reaburn Avenue open space	Reaburn Avenue	Surbiton	KT5 9HG
<b>Donaldwood Gardens playground</b>	Donaldwood Gardens	Surbiton	KT5 9NW
<b>Southwood Drive open space</b>	Southwood Drive	Surbiton	KT5 9PL
St Mark's churchyard	St Marks Hill	Surbiton	KT6 4LS
Waterside Close	Waterside Close	Surbiton	KT6 7TT
Lenelby Gardens	Lenelby Gardens	Surbiton	KT6 7BG
Claremont <b>Gardens</b>	Claremont Road	Surbiton	KT6 4RF
Fishponds	Ewell Road	Surbiton	KT6 6BE

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