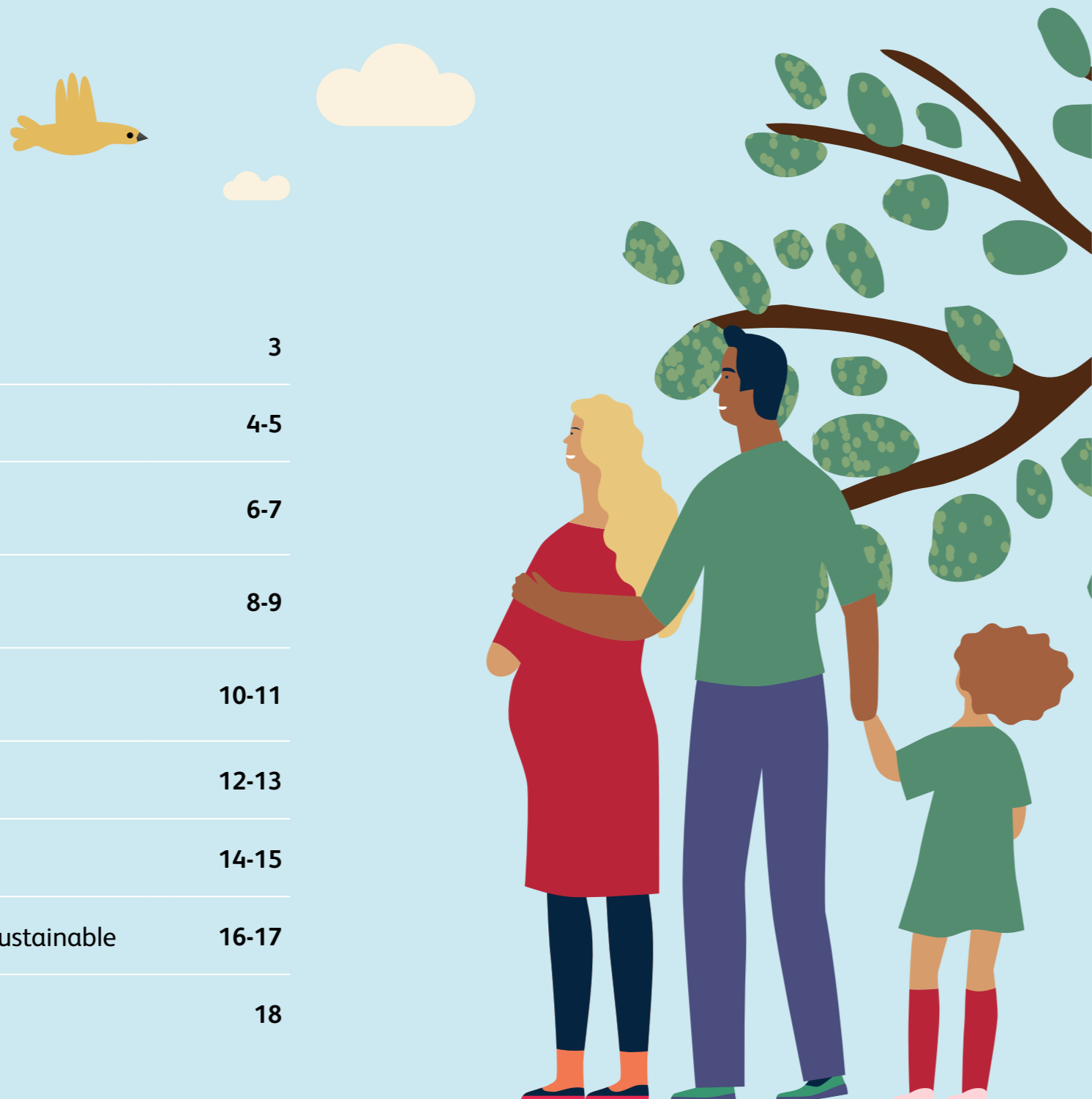


Hackney Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2021-31



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Introduction

People love our parks and green spaces. They provide much needed space to breathe, exercise, socialise and play. We are proud that our parks and green spaces are well used, that local people feel passionately about protecting them, and that they are seen by many as the jewel in Hackney’s crown.

Our parks and green spaces also face challenges. There is a growing deficit between the cost of maintaining our parks and green spaces and the declining resources that are available to improve and manage them. There are problems that affect our network of parks and green spaces as a whole and local issues that differ from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. We also need to fundamentally change how we deliver our service to respond to the challenge of the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis.

In addition, from 2021 Hackney’s 305 parks, green spaces and housing green spaces will all be maintained by the same team, so we will need to work hard to ensure that all our parks and green spaces look great, and are the inclusive, accessible, safe and welcoming places our communities need and deserve.

It’s difficult to predict the impact of these issues in the future, but what we do know is our parks and green spaces can’t and won’t thrive in isolation. In writing this strategy and speaking to young people, experts, user groups, staff, partners and stakeholders about these challenges, we have identified three key areas of focus to help guide our work and a set of commitments we will introduce to improve our parks and green spaces.



The three key areas of focus are:

- 1/ Working with communities
- 2/ Creating welcoming spaces
- 3/ Being more environmentally sustainable

Thank you to everyone who contributed ideas, ambitions and solutions to this strategy and everyone who responded to the public consultation. We look forward to working with you over the next ten years to ensure our parks and green spaces flourish at the heart of communities and continue to define the type of borough that we are.



Cllr Caroline Woodley,
Cabinet Member
for Families, Early Years,
Parks & Play



Mayor Philip Glanville



Hackney Youth Parliament

How we developed the strategy

Starting with a blank page, a focus group of residents, staff, young people and subject experts helped us discuss, debate and decide the topics the new strategy needed to cover. The focus group suggested who we should be speaking to, how and where we should be hearing from them, and the themes and issues we should be asking people about.

We then read everything that was shared with us, and organised over 50 meetings and focus group sessions with key staff, stakeholders and local people. The transcriptions from these meetings and the insight, feedback and ideas that were shared about Hackney's parks and green spaces helped us create a draft vision and set of commitments to guide the work of the service over the next 10 years.

We are grateful to everyone who contributed ideas, ambitions and solutions that helped shape the draft strategy.

Rethinking Parks and Green Spaces Focus Group



Research and Engagement



Public Consultation

The strategy we drafted set out a vision for parks and green spaces where communities were more actively involved, our parks and green spaces were activated, and the service was more environmentally sustainable.

We were really keen to hear what the wider public thought, and launched a public consultation on the draft strategy in December 2020.

The comments and feedback received during the public consultation helped us to shape the final strategy document you see here today.

Where you supported our commitments we have strengthened them. Where you told us there were gaps we have addressed them. We have redrafted the areas you were unclear about and updated the final set of 30 commitments.

We also asked you for your ideas, priorities and suggestions. The most popular things you told us are on the next page...



967 people took part in the public consultation

645 people completed the online survey

95% of online respondents were Hackney residents

270 Hackney residents took part in 15 focus group sessions and feedback meetings

52 people emailed feedback or filled in the survey over the phone or voted in a quick poll

Writing the final strategy



What you told us

96% told us they liked or loved Hackney's parks and green spaces

18% wanted more trees and biodiversity

11% asked us to make it easier to find out about volunteering, events and activities

12% wanted us to provide education, skills and events linked to food growing, gardening and nature

29% of you wanted to see wilder parks and green spaces with relaxed grass, dead wood and wildflowers.

13% shared views and ideas about connecting green spaces together

14% asked us to make parks feel safer

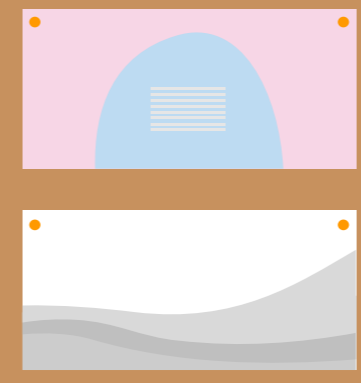


Your feedback

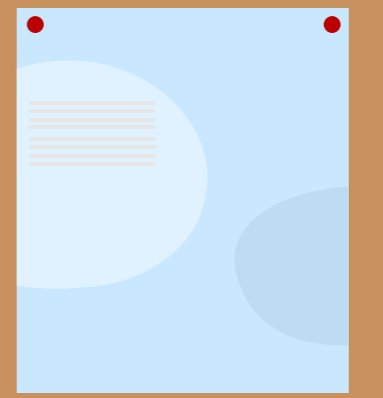
14% of you wanted to attend free community events, activities, walks & talks



9% of you would like us to make parks more inclusive and accessible for a greater range of residents

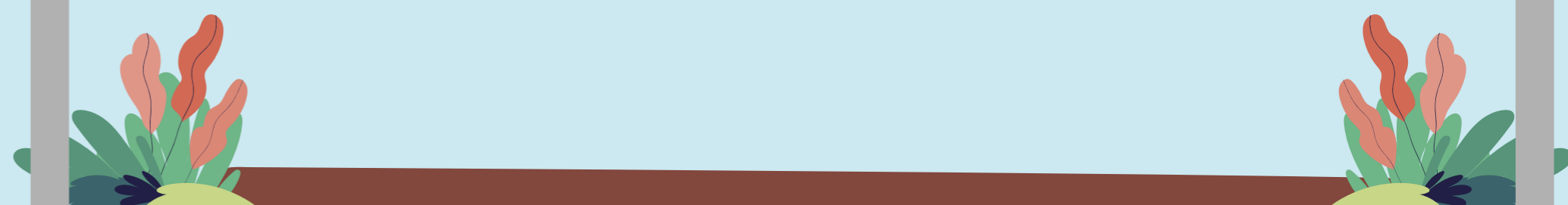


11% wanted us to improve the way we engage and involve people and prioritise engagement



The top 5 issues in your local park or green space were...

Litter	28%
Cyclists riding too fast	20%
Not enough natural areas	19%
Dogs and dogs mess	18%
No toilets / poor toilets	18%



In Hackney we have 58 parks and green spaces...

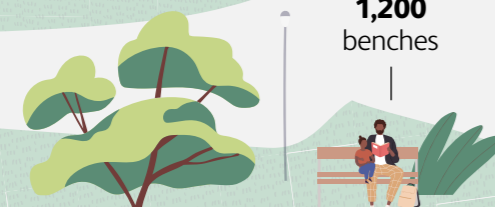
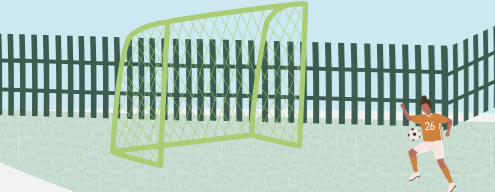
Hackney's Parks and Green Spaces Service are responsible for managing 58 parks and green spaces - ranging from the huge Hackney Marshes (82 hectares) to the tiny Levy Memorial Garden (0.02 hectares).

We are responsible for almost everything inside the boundaries of these parks and green spaces - picking up litter, cutting the grass, cleaning the toilets, inspecting the playgrounds, repairing the paths and everything in between.

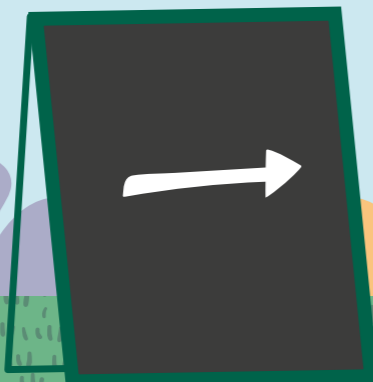
...and 247 housing green spaces

From 2021, the service will also be responsible for maintaining 247 housing green spaces. These green spaces are not public parks - their upkeep is paid for by the residents that live on the estate they are on. This strategy will not change the status of these housing green spaces in any way - they will remain green spaces designed primarily for the residents that live next to them, and who pay for their maintenance.

This strategy does not propose any major physical changes to parks or housing green spaces. We will consult local residents and park users before making any major improvements to either type of space over the next ten years.



To deliver your vision for Hackney's parks and green spaces by 2031 we will...



Work with communities

We will include a more representative range of communities in decision making, improvement projects and in looking after our parks and green spaces. A comprehensive volunteering programme will improve our parks and green spaces and provide opportunities for learning new skills.



Create more welcoming spaces

We will physically improve and maintain a network of welcoming parks and green spaces that are safe, well used, attractive and looked after. We will work with partners to deliver facilities and activities that improve people's physical and mental health and bring communities together.



Be more environmentally sustainable

We will be bold and ambitious in developing environmentally sustainable solutions, increasing climate resilience and improving the biodiversity of sites and the quality of life for our residents. We will identify opportunities to link green spaces to the wider public realm, as well as each other.

Communities would like more of a say in the big decisions affecting their parks and green spaces

We will work with communities

Hackney is a borough defined by its rich mix of cultures and communities. Over the next ten years we will engage with local people, volunteers and staff to improve our parks and green spaces, provide more opportunities for people to learn and develop skills and establish a comprehensive volunteering programme.

What you told us

A wide network of residents, volunteers, park user groups, resident groups, local partners and voluntary organisations already commit time to improving Hackney's parks and green spaces. They also help to shape and deliver events and activities within them.

You play an invaluable role and we couldn't do it without you. We will continue to support you and work to see a broader range of communities and age groups included in this work as you have asked.

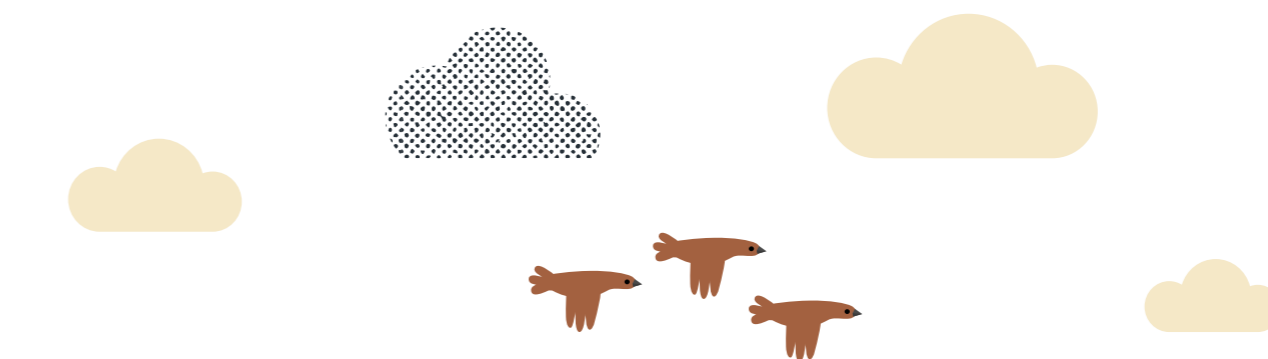


A dedicated Volunteering Officer will be appointed to establish, publicise and oversee a comprehensive volunteering programme across Hackney parks and green spaces. They will actively work to ensure our volunteers are more reflective of Hackney communities, programming a wider range of activities and making it easier and more appealing for people to get more actively involved in their local green space.

You also told us you'd like to learn gardening and growing skills and that we should involve Hackney's parks staff, local communities and volunteers in these opportunities.

You suggested ways to involve more children and young people in environmental activities in parks and green spaces and told us that, by getting involved at a younger age, our children and young people would be more likely to care for Hackney's green spaces when they are older.

We face significant financial pressures over the next ten years, and will start exploring whether a non-profit 'Hackney Parks and Green Spaces Foundation' could help raise funds to support our programmes and projects in parks and green spaces.



To work more closely with communities we will...

Engage with people and build skills

- 1/ Engage local communities, residents and tenants in improvements that affect their local parks and housing green spaces, with continued engagement from outset to delivery, with a special effort made to reach underrepresented groups
- 2/ Create a comprehensive training programme for our staff, with opportunities for structured career progression
- 3/ Introduce a series of skills sharing opportunities, gardening talks, lessons and workshops for communities
- 4/ Develop a work experience and apprenticeship programme and explore supported opportunities for people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- 5/ Involve young and older people in designing and improving our parks and green spaces to reflect the recommendations of the Hackney Young Futures Commission and Ageing Well Strategy

Invest in our volunteers

- 6/ Appoint a dedicated Volunteering Officer to oversee a comprehensive volunteering programme in Hackney's parks and green spaces.
- 7/ Explore the potential for a non-profit "Hackney Parks Foundation" to help raise funds to support Hackney's parks and green spaces
- 8/ Undertake a review of Hackney Parks Forum to ensure that it is fit for purpose, representative of our diverse local communities, and a useful network for Park User Groups to share learning and ideas around parks and green spaces
- 9/ Continue to support local groups to improve their parks and green spaces, and the Tree Musketeers to plan future tree planting in parks
- 10/ Set up regular volunteer 'clean up days' in our parks and launch a campaign to reduce littering



We will create welcoming spaces

Welcoming parks and green spaces are well maintained, feel safe to visit and are well used by all communities.

Over the next ten years we will physically improve our parks and green spaces so that they have the right balance of natural, social and active space for the communities that live around them and the wildlife that lives within them.

What you told us

You emphasised the importance of getting the basics right - you wanted parks and green spaces that are kept clean and feel safe. You wanted people to be more responsible with their litter, for cyclists to slow down and for irresponsible dog owners to be tackled. You also asked for more toilet facilities and for us to better maintain the ones we currently have.

You were keen to learn more about the nature and history of parks and would like more walks and talks programmes, better signage, interpretation and trails. You think we could make better use of the creative and artistic talent we have in the borough and would like to see more exciting public art bringing parks and green spaces to life.

You told us that parks and green spaces were a sanctuary and respite for young people, older people, and disabled people their families and support workers. You wanted spaces to meet and socialise, more places to buy food and drink in parks, active spaces for sport and many of you said you'd like more outdoor gyms in Hackney.

You'd like to see more community focused activities and events and wanted us to make it easier for communities to host small events in parks. You'd like more activities that provide opportunities to socialise and that enhance people's mental health and wellbeing. You told us how food growing projects on estates have provided opportunities for socialising, for communities to come together and for producing healthy and affordable food and you'd like to see more of them.



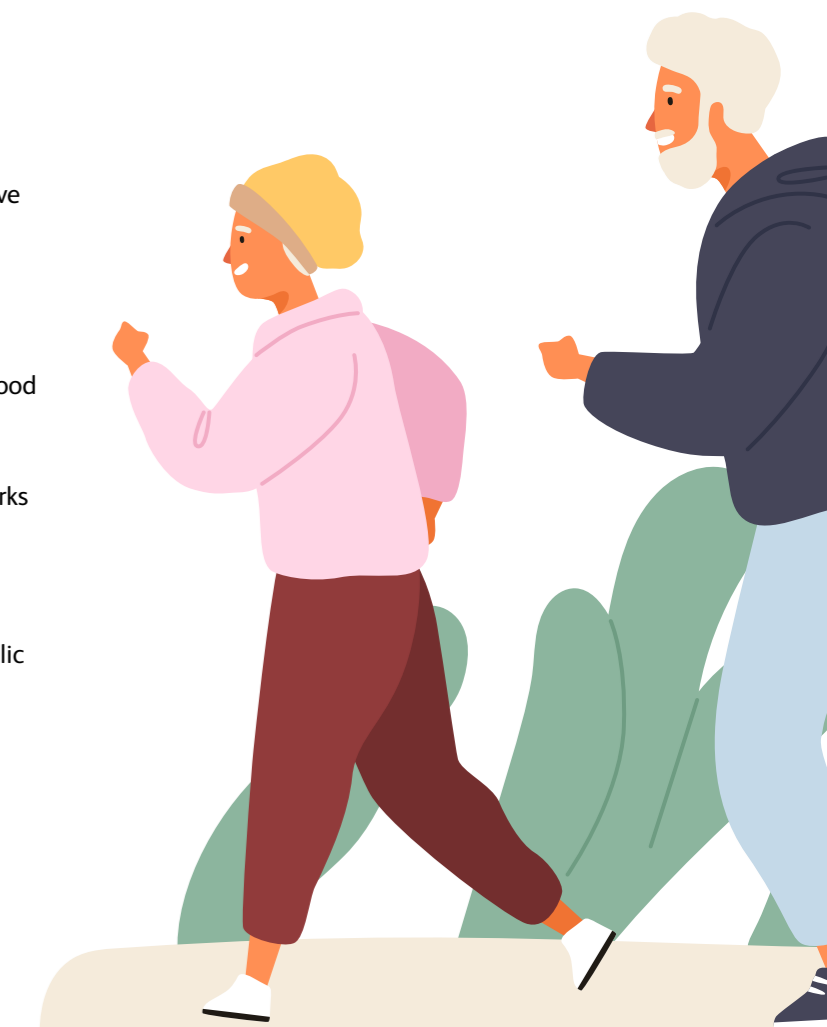
To create welcoming spaces we will....

Ensure they are well designed, clean and safe

- 11/ Create a design guide to inform the improvement and interpretation of parks and green spaces
- 12/ Refurbish all of our park toilets, and explore opportunities for additional toilets linked to new cafe facilities
- 13/ Continue to consult people on Hackney's Dog Control Orders / Public Space Protection Orders and byelaws to help parks feel safer
- 14/ Collate crime data from the community safety partnership to identify and tackle specific areas of vandalism, anti-social behaviour and crime

Create opportunities for people to come together

- 15/ Work with partners to prescribe and promote activities across parks and green spaces to improve people's physical, mental and social health and wellbeing
- 16/ Introduce three new food growing projects on housing estates each year
- 17/ Expand the provision of affordable and healthy food and drink in parks and green spaces
- 18/ Make it easier for residents to plan and host appropriate community and cultural events in parks and green spaces and better promote them
- 19/ Invest in a network of new, free, outdoor gym facilities
- 20/ Develop a Hackney Parks And Green Spaces Public Art Strategy and Policy to secure investment to deliver more public art



We will be more environmentally sustainable

We are proud of the proactive steps our staff, partners and volunteers are already taking to reduce our carbon footprint and tackle climate change across our parks and green spaces.

Over the next ten years we will make an even bigger commitment to becoming more environmentally friendly, engaging people with nature, making our parks and green spaces more connected, increasing natural areas and supporting a healthy ecosystem.

What you told us

Hackney's Youth Parliament, the children in our schools and a wide variety of interest groups, voluntary initiatives and charity organisations already contribute a great deal to improving the environmental sustainability of our parks and green spaces across the borough and would like to work with us to make these spaces even wilder, more resilient and more biodiverse.

You told us that having access to nature was really important for improving physical and mental health and you would like to see a more inclusive and accessible range of environmental activities and volunteering opportunities to improve wellbeing. You were also keen for us to provide opportunities for local people to learn about nature and the environment and to get involved in community food growing, gardening and tree planting activities.

You were excited about the work we are already doing, but would like to see us go further. You suggested extending green space into neighbourhoods, improving green connections between parks and creating more natural play. You'd like us to make roads, paths, park entrances and boundaries greener, create wilder and more biodiverse housing green space, and plant more trees to improve air quality.

Over the next ten years, we will treat our parks and green spaces as one interconnected green network as part of our 'Connecting Green Spaces' programme, identifying opportunities to connect them together to make Hackney feel greener and more natural.

To be more environmentally sustainable we will...

Respond to the Climate emergency...

- 21/ Work towards becoming a Zero Carbon service
- 22/ Aim to re-use more green waste within parks and green spaces
- 23/ Eliminate single use plastic from all of our park cafes and kiosks
- 24/ Replace all single use bins with dual use recycling bins
- 25/ Introduce new sustainable drainage solutions in parks and green spaces

...and the Biodiversity crisis

- 26/ Increase biodiversity across Hackney in line with the emerging Local Nature Recovery Plan, creating more wild areas across all parks and green spaces
- 27/ Eliminate all annual planting and replace it with more sustainable and drought tolerant planting schemes
- 28/ Significantly reduce the use of Glyphosate, and continue to explore alternatives
- 29/ Follow the recommendations of the emerging Green Infrastructure Strategy where they relate to parks and green spaces, including identifying opportunities to connect parks and green spaces together
- 30/ Develop and deliver an extensive training programme for staff around biodiversity and sustainability



The next ten years...

As we look ahead to the next ten years we remain committed to meeting the challenges and exploring the opportunities presented to us by better working with our communities, creating more welcoming parks and green spaces and becoming more environmentally and financially sustainable.

...and we're off to a good start. Our staff and volunteers are already rising to many of these challenges, thinking differently about how services are developed and delivered. They are addressing climate change in parks and green spaces, finding opportunities to generate income to reinvest back into the service, and continuing to explore the role partners, volunteers and young people can play in helping to look after and develop our parks and green spaces.

The 30 commitments we have made in this strategy will help us to develop and improve Hackney's parks and green spaces over the next ten years.

Each year we will produce annual action plans to outline how we will deliver the commitments and annual reports that will update you on progress. All annual reports will be published on the Council's website.

This strategy is dedicated to our hard working parks and green spaces staff and volunteers, who work so hard in all weathers to keep our parks and green spaces looking as amazing as they do. None of this would be possible without their dedication and they will be key to delivering this strategy over the next ten years.



