

# Lambeth Cooperative Parks: A Programme of Transformation

## Rethinking our Parks for the Future

Since early 2013, Lambeth has been on a journey of transformation to improve our public green spaces and involve the community and local residents more in decision-making in parks, despite the financial challenges posed by the governments austerity programme. The cooperative parks programme has started to define this new way of working; paving the way for our communities and parks groups to either take the helm or take a seat at the management table.

To help us achieve our grand aspirations for parks, a set of community groups - our pioneers - have already come forward, ready to give a new form of management for their respective parks a go. And to demonstrate our commitment, we have made the leap and set several wheels in motion including:

- establishment of the three strand cooperative parks pioneer support programme which seeks to help parks pioneers develop their plans and capabilities to meet our public interest test requirements, as well as grow a new local parks provider market for pioneers to draw on;
- development of the first borough-wide parks and open spaces capital investment plan that sets out our intentions for improving all our green spaces and starts to open up new revenue streams to support everyday parks operations
- negotiation of new income arrangements from capital investment that will ring-fence income for reinvestment into parks to support communities taking on greater roles in parks. This arrangement is an increasing priority in light of future budget constraints
- continued positive working relationship with the Lambeth Parks Forum that has started putting the building blocks for greater local accountability in place.

### 2018: The End Goal

By 2018, we will see a very different landscape for our parks and open spaces. The financial climate in the public sector has led us to view parks service delivery through a more radical lens; one where there is less reliance on council funding and more on local leadership and devolution of services as detailed below.

### Successful Local Management Model Proposals

As a borough we have well over 60 parks and open spaces of varied size and usage. It is a measure of our residents' commitment to green space and their belief in their importance that every park in the borough is part of a new pioneer or partnership management arrangement. We aim to support this aspiration through our proposals for **pioneer parks** to control a greater share of income made in their park/s and for our **partnership parks** to influence how a smaller proportion of the income made in parks is used, albeit the partnership model should be in line with council policies.

We believe our innovative pioneer park models have the best chance of success if managed on a cluster or 'hub and spoke' basis with local groups independently managing parks and making all the related decisions on services and activities. By grouping parks together, we think there will be greater financial security as there will be more flexibility to share resources and any income generated; protecting the smaller spaces that have lesser ability to generate funds. Perhaps more significantly, there will also be economies of scale in spend and will help safeguard our parks services, in spite of the 50% reduction in budget. We also want to support an increased role for our ward members in our pioneer parks, in recognition of their elected representative role. This will help ensure that the services in our pioneer parks continue to reflect local needs and demand.

We view a cluster of parks as a set of parks that support and complement each other. For example, the Friends of Hillside Gardens empowered residents and local schools to become more involved in the everyday management of a cluster of varied, small-medium size parks in Streatham Hill/Streatham Wells area, including Hillside Gardens, Valley Road Playing Fields, Unigate Woods, and Palace Road Nature Garden.

Our hub and spoke proposal looks at a strategic park supporting a host of nearby smaller parks and open spaces. We are fortunate to benefit from some key strategic parks that have the potential to deliver increased revenue streams to recycle back into park operations. The rise of the community-led enterprise, the Streatham Common Cooperative (SCCoop), who took over the management of The Rookery in Streatham, followed by Streatham Common and Streatham Memorial Gardens, in association with Lambeth Council is another excellent example of a hub and spoke approach.

By 2018, where appropriate, we will have supported the development of these pioneer park arrangements, which will include bringing some of our smaller lesser used spaces into hub and spoke or cluster based arrangements. This may include exploring transforming the spaces into community gardens, allotments, orchards, or another use that meets the local communities' needs.

However we know independent management isn't for everyone. As such, we are proposing the remaining parks and open spaces become our partnership parks; demonstrating a new model of joint management that builds on our strong community foundations and enables local involvement in decision-making, whilst also offering the protection of the council. Our ward councilors will play a pivotal role in our partnership parks as the democratically accountable representative and will take the lead on setting priorities for the park as well as help monitor contractors; all as a means of ensuring an effective service. To support this transition we are proposing for our partnership parks to influence a proportion of the income made in their park is used, which may range from bedding or gardening activities to minor repairs, with the proviso that it is spent in line with council policies.

By 2018, we would have tried and tested this partnership model with specific parks of different sizes with different facilities and have seen it successfully rolled out across the borough.

Our pioneer and partnership parks will have also benefitted from the cooperative parks technical capacity programme, which was established to help guide communities through the public interest process and ensure groups are ready for their increased responsibilities. Some of our community-led groups may have even received a small amount of funding for their initial start up or organisational development needs as part of our pioneer business development fund.

We have used the changing landscape for the public sector as an opportunity to support the rise of our communities and local groups to take greater control of their local environment. The technical development programmes and grant funds available are the building blocks we have put in place to facilitate their success.

### **Grounds Maintenance Services**

High quality, well maintained parks and open spaces has a positive impact on a host of outcomes ranging from addressing anti-social behavior issues and injecting life into the built environment, to improving the local area and property value. We have been open with our residents about the budget pressures we're facing and with the help of our active Lambeth Parks Forum, agreed the priorities for the new grounds maintenance contract with this smaller financial envelope.

By 2018 we will have in place, appropriate grounds maintenance provision across all our parks. Our pioneer parks will have the option to source their own grounds maintenance services and our partnership parks will

be in a better place to help monitor contractors, with the support of our council officers, to ensure services are fit for purpose and meet local needs.

### **Enhanced Local Parks Provider Market**

Following the completion of our cooperative parks supply chain development programme, we have a growing market of local parks suppliers that are commissioned by the council and our pioneer and partnership parks to deliver services in parks. Not only is this stimulating our local economy but it is supporting local employment and job opportunities.

We will also explore the development of a new way of working for our parks service. We know there are certain services and technical knowledge elements associated with managing parks and we plan to look into how best to provide the support needed to fulfill our duty of care responsibilities (e.g. providing a safe and clean environment) as well as meet our obligations to our pioneer and partnership parks.

### **Enriched and Higher Quality Parks**

We know that when people have access to a better quality of park or open space, they tend to exercise more, have improved psychological health, and feel more connected to their local neighbourhood. By 2018 we will have delivered the improvement priorities listed in parks capital investment plan which aims to enrich all our green spaces for the benefit of our residents. We will have also taken the opportunity to invest our capital in a way that opens up new, or increases existing, revenue streams of which a proportion is ring fenced for reinvestment back into park operations.

Put another way, these increased income streams can be used to support our pioneer and partnership parks achieve their aspirations; to increase their level of responsibility in parks in the face of the governments austerity programme.

### **Starting the Journey**

We can see, perhaps self-evidently, that getting to where we need to be will take some work. We need to build strong partnerships, develop financially sustainable management models, and wrap sufficient support around our communities that enable them to take on these enhanced roles.

Although there are tough times ahead, we think this is achievable with the help of our communities. As proof, we have set out in the delivery plan below, an outline that describes how we intend to get to where we need to be.

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## Proposed Delivery Plan

Milestone/Activity	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End
<b>Successful Local Management Model Proposals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By 2018, roughly 15 parks and open spaces will become pioneer parks</li> </ul>								
Funding is made available for organisational development of community-led enterprises under the Cooperative Parks pioneer business development fund	Nov 2014					May 2016		
Cooperative Parks technical capacity programme is rolled out with active participation from groups	Feb 2015							Dec 2017
Streatham Common Cooperative (SCCoop) take on management of The Rookery, in Streatham in association with Lambeth Council	Feb 2015							
Myatt's Field Park Project (MFPP) group take on management of Myatt's Field Park			Apr 2015					
Explore transferring management of Stockport Playing Fields to Woodmansterne School and Brixton Bulls partnership			May 2015					
Community groups seeking independent management present their proposals at assessment panels			Sep 2015; Dec 2015		Sep 2016; Dec 2016			
SCCoop add Streatham Common and Streatham Memorial Gardens as part of a 'hub and spoke' model					Apr 2016			
MFPP group explore potential to include other parks as part of a cluster model					Apr 2016			
Pending viability, Hillside Gardens group explore independent management of a cluster of parks					Apr 2016			
Pending landlord approval and subject to public interest test, lease for Rosendale Playing Fields is reassigned to Rosendale Playing Fields Community Interest Company					Sep 2016			
Explore pioneer park models for the following parks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hatfields Green and Emma Cons</li> </ul>					Apr 2016			

Milestone/Activity	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens</li> <li>Archbishops Park</li> <li>Larkhall Park</li> </ul>								
<b>Establishment of Partnership Parks Proposals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>By 2018, the remainder of parks will become partnership parks</b></li> </ul>								
With community representatives, agree pilot parks to trial new partnership model, such as Vauxhall Park	Dec 2014	Feb 2015						
Develop governance arrangements for partnership parks, including terms of reference and membership for new partnership boards	Jan 2015			May 2015				
Engage ward members and council officers in their new role and agree remit of partnership boards			Apr 2015	Aug 2015				
Agree proportion of income for use by partnership park board in line with council policies			Jul 2015	Sep 2015				
Develop partnership agreements that describe outcomes and expectations for partnership parks			Jul 2015	Oct 2015				
Establish new partnership boards as part of initial trial period			Oct 2015					
Roll partnership parks model out to remainder of parks in the borough.  Green spaces without community groups will either be absorbed into pioneer or partnership park management structures as a hub and spoke or cluster model.					Apr 2016			
<b>Grounds Maintenance Services:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>By 2018, we will have appropriate grounds maintenance provision across all our parks</b></li> <li><b>Our pioneer parks will have the option to source their own grounds maintenance services</b></li> </ul>								
Prepare options appraisal to understand options and future scope of grounds maintenance services in light of reduced financial envelope	Dec 2014							
Engage Lambeth Parks Forum in grounds maintenance discussions	Jan 2015	Feb 2015						

Milestone/Activity	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End
Instigate process for grounds maintenance contract provision, including approvals process	Mar 2015			Jan 2016				
Appoint maintenance provider			Feb 2016	Mar 2016				
Grounds maintenance contract and services commence. Partnership parks have a stronger role in monitoring contractor/s					Apr 2016			
<b>Enhanced Local Parks Provider Market:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By 2018, we will have a new pool of local providers able to deliver services in parks from grass cutting and horticulture services to infrastructure maintenance</li> </ul>								
Cooperative Parks supply chain development programme is rolled out	Feb 2015							Dec 2017
Explore new model of delivery for Lambeth Parks Service	Feb 2015				Apr 2016			
New providers are established					Apr 2016			
Community-led enterprises and partnership parks commission new local suppliers to provide parks related services					Apr 2016			
<b>Improved Stock of Parks and Open Spaces:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By 2018, we will have delivered the improvement priorities in our parks capital investment plan and have an improved green spaces offer for our residents</li> <li>Through our capital investment, we will have opened up new funding streams to be recycled back into parks operations</li> </ul>								
Obtain approval for the first Lambeth Parks Capital Investment Plan	Apr 2014	Jan 2015						
Recruit two project support officers to work with communities to raise funding for schemes	Jan 2015	Mar 2015						
Prepare capital development compacts for each neighbourhood that profiles investment and group schemes together to generate efficiencies	Feb 2015			Apr 2015				
Deliver the projects in the plan in partnership with local communities			May 2015					