

To: London Borough of Bromley

5 January 2021

Dear Sirs

OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2021 – 2031

I am writing on behalf of Bromley Ramblers in response to the consultation document issued in November 2020

The Ramblers is a charity whose goal is to protect the ability of people to enjoy the sense of freedom and benefits that come from being outdoors on foot. Our local group has over 500 members spread across the borough and we are regular users of many of the open spaces.

Overall view of the draft strategy

We are generally supportive of the proposed strategy. In particular, we support the five key priorities in the 'Building a Better Bromley' plan, noted on p14. We think it is important that all proposals under the Open Space Strategy should be measured against these priorities (and only these priorities).

One of Bromley's great attractions, compared with some other London boroughs, is the quantity and quality of its open space. The value and importance of accessible local open space have been brought into special focus during the CoViD pandemic. More and more people have come to appreciate it during this period and it will continue to be important even when the pandemic is behind us.

We support the Key Strategic Strands KSS 1-8 on pages 15 – 22.

Issues requiring further consideration

Although the strategy is described as relating to 'Open Space' (singular), in fact the draft strategy and proposed actions concentrate on considering individual open spaces (plural). We believe that maintaining the overall area of open space is also very important and should be included in the strategic objectives. The forecast population increase of 19% between 2020 and 2030 (see p12) means, by definition, an increase in population density of 19%. This will make local and accessible open space even more important. It will also mean that it will become more heavily used. Any reduction in the overall area left as open space will reduce its attractiveness, as it is valued by many (including our members) as a way of getting away from crowds.

We note that in many places in the document there is reference to repurposing, reassignment, development and disposal. Strategic Objective SO1 is particularly revealing and we infer that the Council is contemplating a number of closures (for one reason or another) of open space. Another reference is on p13, which talks about the need to increase residential provision through development being balanced with open space provision.

Whilst we accept that some open spaces may not individually be of sufficient benefit to local residents to justify their upkeep, we would argue that for every piece of open space lost, there should be provision of new open space of equal area somewhere else in the borough. This may not be easy but there are ways

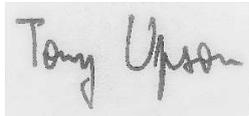
it can be done. Case Study 1, on Lewisham's changes to Beckenham Place Park, is a good example of making more space available to the general public for walking or recreation (in this case by closing the golf course). This has enhanced the space considerably. We are concerned that viewing each open space only on its own merits would inevitably lead to a reduction in the overall area of open space. We also believe that funds raised by selling-off open spaces should not be used for anything other than improving and maintaining the remaining open spaces in the portfolio

Another aspect of viewing open space in the aggregate rather than just one-by-one is considering its connectedness. At present, there are many places in the borough where one can construct a walk going through several open spaces, linking them together with minimal road walking. It is one of the particular attractions of living in the borough. Losing any link in such chains can significantly reduce the attractiveness of the whole walk, as most walkers prefer walking in open space to walking on suburban roads. This should be considered in decisions about any individual open space. Particular cases of this connectedness of open space are the London Loop and the Green Chain Walk, both of which pass through the borough. Nothing should be done to reduce the open space on these routes.

Conclusion

We would reiterate our support for the overall thrust of the draft strategy, subject to our comments above. We hope you find these comments helpful and would be happy to discuss them or to give further views if you would like. Contact details are given below.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Upson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Tony Upson
Bromley Ramblers Group Chairman

Email: enquiries@bromleyramblers.org.uk

Phone: 01689 873489