

Parks and open doors

Green for Victory

This is the first of Periscope’s research publications. However, this is by no means the first research project that our studio has undertaken. Research is and always has been deeply ingrained within our everyday. It is the way we think, talk, design and act.

The *Green for Victory* series stems from our work over recent years with local authorities and public bodies across London; from the increasingly frequent conversations we have regarding quantifying and qualifying green space, and the simply impossible expectation that this can be done in one succinct line. From the green ‘war’ we find ourselves fighting daily.

We would like to thank Dan Epstein for his infinite knowledge of London’s parks, and for being our critical friend for the project; our park storytellers for their generosity and time, and finally, a big thank you to our beloved parks for their perseverance.

Green for Victory: Parks and open doors

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Periscope is a design practice skilled in the fields of architecture, landscape and urbanism, seeking to meet the challenges of our and future generations. We design and deliver resilient projects that work for people and planet, grounding our interventions within their greater ecological, topographic and social fabric.

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Foreword

It's an ordinary Saturday afternoon and my desk seems to have morphed into a drain, slowly sucking away any scraps of motivation I have left. What would you do to seek relief? Perhaps you would open your window, sit in your garden or go for a walk?

I get up, put on a jacket (there's no pressure to fuss about how presentable I look) and leave for my local park. It's a five minute walk if I take the shortest route or about twelve minutes if I detour through the Edwardian suburbs.

For those of us who have this opportunity, this may seem mundane but our pursuit of this kind of quietness is essential. Green spaces are spaces to get away, to contemplate, to be silent or to simply be in relation with the natural environment around us. Our verdant spaces are our lungs, they help us breathe both literally and metaphorically.

Environmental activists such as Donelle N. Dreese state that place is inherent to how we nurture a sense of wellness through the establishment of a community. So what happens to a community's sense of self when there is a lack of access to nature?

It is time we start viewing our parks as necessary basic rights and not luxuries. It is obvious that the provision of adequate green space directly reflects the existing structural inequalities of a city. Contemporary urban life in cities like London is often linked to chronic stress and insufficient physical activity. So it is no coincidence that this lack of nature manifests as both mental and physical ill health and is found to be higher among those who come from low income households and vulnerable communities like refugees.

Green for Victory is a call for policy makers to take responsibility in maintaining a meaningful relationship of reciprocity with local people and their green spaces. How can we conjure emotion, meaning or memory from bureaucratic mediums like maps and graphs?

It turns out that it is the subtleties found in each of our individual stories that make a difference. The multiplicities found in personal experiences, from the honest Google reviews of Trent County Park to the sensitive care taking of Barking Park by the local cafe owner Marina Sanduleac, show us the richness of the in-between and the everyday that we as readers can find familiarity in. This intimacy is realised in local culture and is something that we can lose once we're out of its sphere.

As you make your way through this research, you may recognise that it's not just about ticking off the number of times you see the colour green on a map. Perhaps it's about reconfiguring or expanding our understanding of communal care-taking. To see green space as cultivating ecological communities using languages of care. After all, as we continue to permeate other organisms and environments, we human beings are only one component of the ecosystem. A relationship that will always be mutually necessary and sustaining.

Nasra Abdullahi
New Architecture Writers

Introduction

London is growing both greyer and greener. More dense and more intense. In our time of radical urbanisation, environmental and economic crisis, and daily battles against social, mental and physical illness, we are lucky to find ourselves living in the heart of one of the richest, lushest and most cared-for National Parks in the world.

Statistically, London claims to be the greenest major city in Europe - at 47% green it is the third-greenest of its size in the world. It is home to almost as many trees as people; it is the first National Park City, the world's biggest urban forest.

Yet Londoners still desperately lack access to nature. In 2016, government statistics reported that 1 in 9 children in Great Britain did not set foot in any natural space - park, beach, forest or likewise - for over a year; and our capital's urban growth rate continues to radically outstrip the provision of new green spaces. As the sheer demand put on parks during the COVID crisis in 2020 highlighted, however green London may claim to be we still find ourselves in a mounting green space crisis.

So how can London be so statistically green, yet the equivalent natural benefits not be felt on a personal level? If we are to transpose the claim that our capital is almost 50% green into our daily London life, then shouldn't the average rush-hour commute down Old Street be at least half as verdant as a roam across the rugged fells of the Lake District? If London is truly a mighty forest then shouldn't the air be at least a fraction as fresh and mind-clearing as a stroll across the Brecon Beacons?

Unfortunately, the disparity lies in that much of London's 67.5 million hectares of green space remains inaccessible and disparate, either over-sanitised or poorly maintained. Our urban nature is not revered with the same wonder as a truly natural landscape. It is there sure enough, but we remain disconnected.

This gap between the amount of available green space versus the actual integration of it into daily London life escapes statistical analysis. Although a multitude of initiatives exist to quantify green space through data and stats, few go so far as to interrogate or measure true landscape value - to understand what parks really mean to people, and understand our true connection (or lack thereof) to urban nature.

But how could they even begin to quantify this? Nature is not an asset, nor subject to the financial 'developer' vocabulary of urban green space. The inherent benefits of connecting with nature are subjective, personal and felt. They differ from person to person, from day to day, or are discernible across prolonged timescales - such as in health and the combatting of stress. The value of nature encompasses an entire ecosystem of issues and reasonings. As Natalie Bennett, former leader of the Green Party said, "true value is just beyond valuation".

The International Green Flag Award is currently the closest that Britain has to assessing quality or value of our green spaces. However the award focusses primarily on the provision of facilities rather than the real reasons why people love parks, or the true benefits of nature to society. If the Green Flag Award criteria were applied to a National Park, a forest or a range of mountains, they would more than likely fail. People do not visit National Parks for their toilets.

It is time to establish a planning system that understands its green spaces through a more natural and less quantified method of valuation. A system that, to paraphrase David Attenborough, acknowledges humans as ‘being part of nature’ as opposed to ‘apart from nature’. One that appreciates nuance, change, locality and specificity of place. Such subjective qualities are hugely undervalued - difficult to analyse, easy to blow away. Yet they are how we live, and to start to understand these qualities is the only way we can begin to explain the disparity between our city’s apparent abundance of green, and the absence of nature in our everyday urban life.

Green for Victory tackles London’s current lack of a sufficient natural value system, by interrogating the gap between the stats and the stories. It collates a multifaceted, collaborative and purposefully subjective assessment of London’s parks - a methodology that looks to embrace subjective views and individual stories on an equal footing to government statistics.

Across four issues, we tackle four core challenges that disconnect London’s people from their parks, and that are not explained through stats alone. We move through scales from the citywide, to tread through four boroughs in the far North, South, East and West. Visiting the publicly ‘top rated’ parks of each borough, we talk with the people who know the parks best. We bridge the gap between statistics and the personal experience, to discuss what qualities our parks both have and lack, and what really keeps nature at arm’s length.

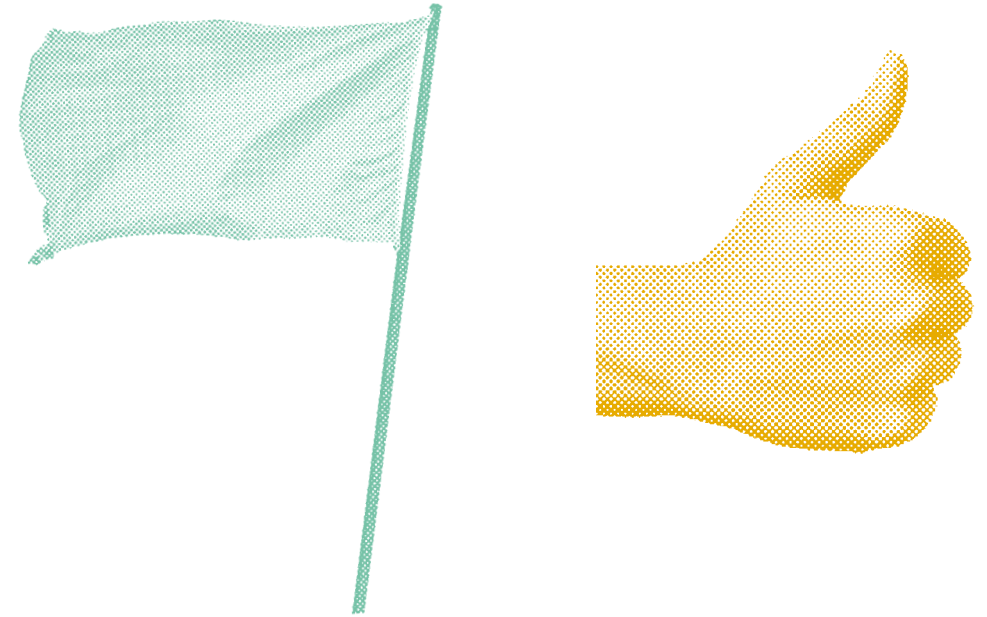
Finally, from our collected tales we take up arms, identifying the issues that the stats sweep over and perceiving our parks through the eyes of their people. In quiet protest against numeric quantification, we draw a communal portrait of each park, addressing each core issue. The park portraits reframe our relationships, calling for re-connection between people and parks, and insisting we re-establish ourselves as ‘part of nature’.

Green for Victory

- Issue 01 Parks and the wild**
Richmond Park, Richmond upon Thames
- Issue 02 Parks and open doors**
Barking Park, Barking and Dagenham
- Issue 03 Parks and money**
Trent Park, Enfield
- Issue 04 Parks and responsibility**
Wandle Park, Croydon

01 Green flags vs yellow thumbs

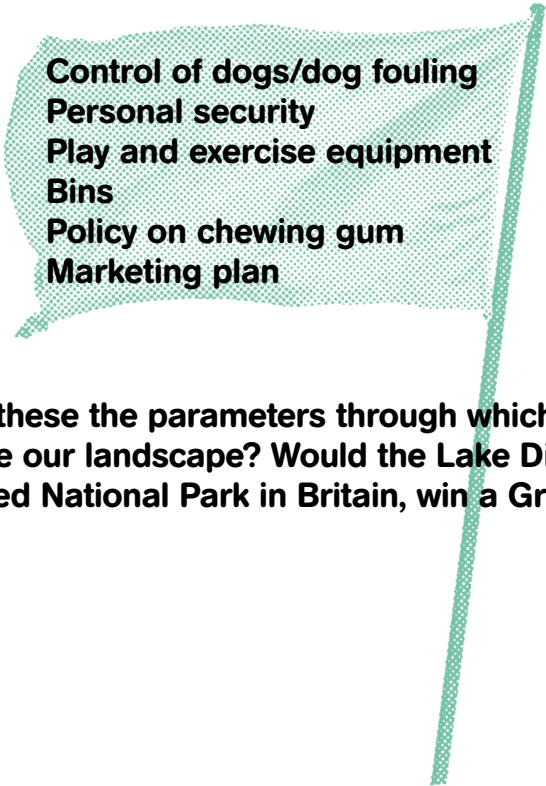
On putting a value on nature



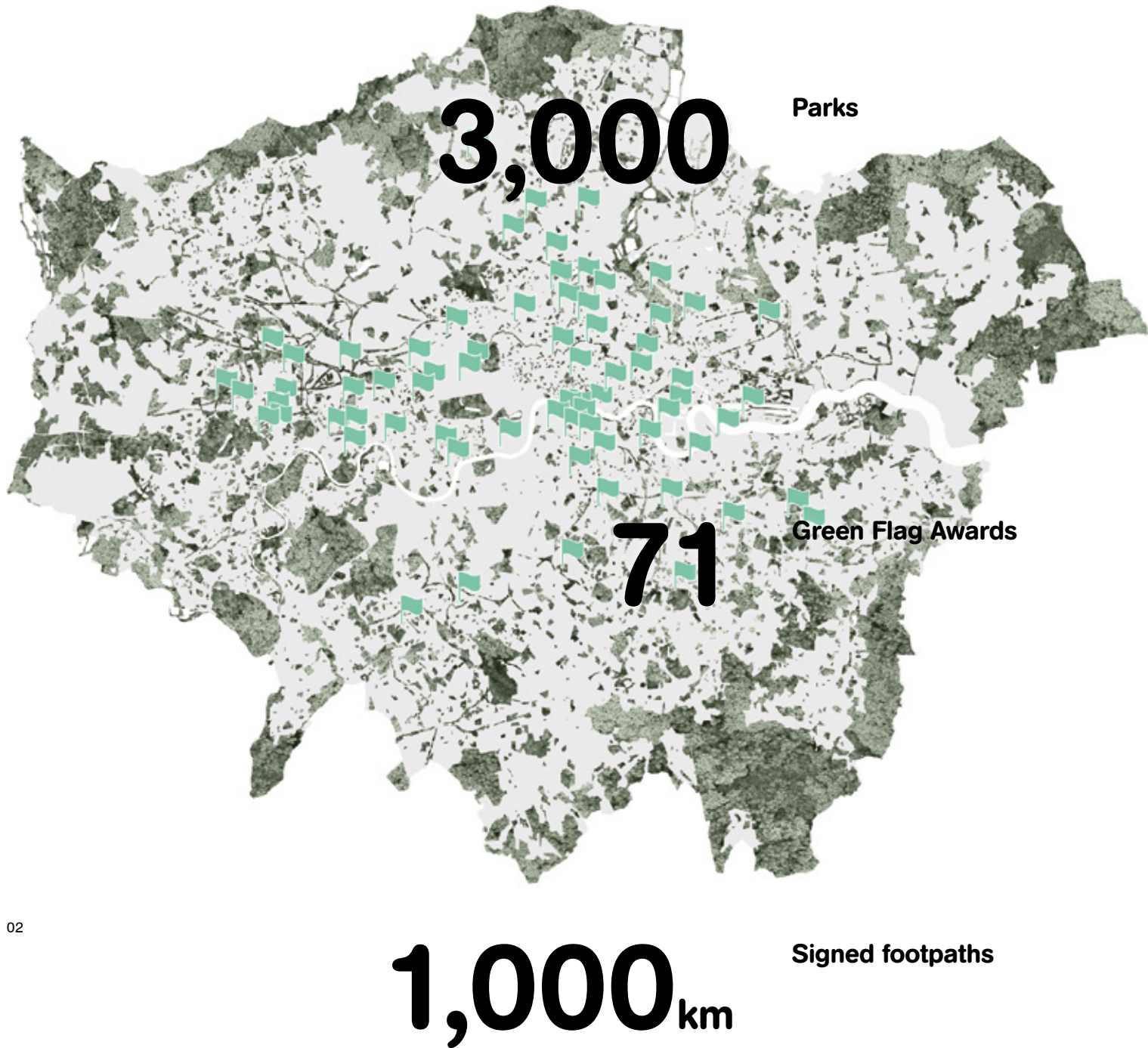
01

How do we assess nature in the city?
The Green Flag Award is the most widely recognised standard we currently have to gauge park quality. The international accreditation rewards well-managed green spaces with an ‘international mark of quality’, assessed against an extensive set of criteria, supplemented by a management plan. Green Flags have recently been awarded to university campus lawns clipped and mown on a bi-weekly basis, and retail spaces with an abundance of litter bins and fairground rides.

The Green Flag award focusses on facility provision rather than natural, experiential or ecosystem values. It is primarily a tick-box exercise, the same criteria being applied locally as they are nationally as they are globally.



Are these the parameters through which we really wish to value our landscape? Would the Lake District, the most visited National Park in Britain, win a Green Flag Award?



02



03



04

03 The Lake District, England

04 Snowdonia National Park, Wales

The Green Flag award may be extensive but it does not go far enough. If we are to take seriously that London really is the first National Park City, we need to approach it with the same mindset and set of expectations as we do a true National Park. This does not focus on quanta or provision of facilities, but rather on the inherent qualities of place. Measuring value through a universal list of tick-boxes is simply not an appropriate approach. It is not how nature works. Similarly, a single uniform measure cannot be used across the whole globe, without relating to local conditions, cultures and contexts.

A WELCOMING PLACE

● **Welcome** ● All major entrances should be visited, and all of the facilities where possible. For large sites such as country parks and waterways, judges should be shown a representative variety of entrances and facilities, and during each subsequent visit their tour should take in a different cross-section ● The welcome given should be appropriate to the site ● Every element of management combines to give a sense of welcome, or otherwise ● Well considered and innovative, yet practical, design features can really encourage people to enjoy using the site. Incorporate elements such as interesting planting, varied textures, and natural and built features that can be explored in play and used for relaxation ● **Good and Safe Access** ● Presence of clear sightlines in and out, and welcoming entrances (but practical ones – vehicular barriers can be used) ● Public transport links and whether they can be improved ● **Pedestrian routes** – whether they are logical, useful and suitable for the whole range of users. For example, are they wide enough for the likely combinations of cycles/pedestrians/prams/wheelchairs/children/dogs to use safely together? ● Cycles within the site – whether to encourage them with appropriate provision or provide safe storage at entry points. Are cycle routes designed to be complimentary and minimise conflict? ● **Vehicles on site** (including service vehicles), appropriate signage, control and safety measures, including how shared access between vehicles and pedestrians is managed ● **Car parking** – if provided, appropriate provision for the quantity and range of visitors ● **Equality of access** including disabled access – the site should adhere to relevant national legislation and the standards set in the UK Equality Act 2010 as a minimum. On site and online as appropriate, provide clear information on the accessibility of the various routes and areas to different users. Where appropriate, an access statement, a marketing document providing detailed information on the accessibility of your site, could be drawn up and published ● **Public access and the safety of residents** either on the site (e.g. canals, housing estates, hospitals) or local residents in the immediate vicinity ● **Signage** ●

Sites attracting visitors from a distance may benefit from installing signs from major routes; for others with mostly local and repeat visitors a sign at or near the entrance is enough; for some rural sites, very minimal signage may be appropriate ● Signs should be placed only where needed, for example at entrances, or ‘honeypot’ sites ● Consideration should be given to where they are sited, for example at what angle to approach routes and at what height, so that they can be seen and read easily ● Sign design should be coherent and complement the overall ‘feel’ of the green space ● The information should help users to have an enjoyable visit ● **Knowing your visitors**, use appropriate maps, accessibility information, infographics, other languages, and display lists of events and activities, by-laws, regulations, and interpretation boards. All of the information should be current ● Messages should be friendly, welcoming and clear ●

● **Equal Access for All** ● Consider the whole community – who is using it now? Are they well served? Who might use it but currently are not? How can it be made safer for them? Are there cultural issues that need to be considered? One of the ways of assessing this is to invite different groups to visit and use the site and provide feedback ● Is the placement of facilities well thought out with a range of busy and quieter areas if the space allows? Are there areas where dogs are prohibited? ● Not all areas have to be made physically accessible to all visitors – but provide information on site where appropriate as well as off-site so that visitors can look up accessible areas in advance. You may consider publishing an access statement, a marketing document providing detailed information on the accessibility of the site ● **Staff and contractors on site** should be identifiable, helpful and courteous ●

HEALTHY, SAFE AND SECURE

● **Appropriate Provision of Quality Facilities and Activities** ● Play and exercise equipment, trim trails, active volunteering programmes, health and fitness activities and suitable sporting facilities ● **Provision of seating**: for contemplation, physical rest, solitude, and enjoyment of nature ● **Healthy eating options** in the cafe ● **Lifelines** by open water (if deemed appropriate) ● **First aid facilities** ● **Appropriate toilet provision** – toilet facilities should be provided where the size of the site or extent of the facilities demands them, and should comply with national disability access regulations ● **Safe Equipment and Facilities** ● This criterion examines whether the equipment and facilities provided on site are safe to use, and that any events or activities held on the site are safely managed ● This might include policies and records on health and safety, risk assessments, food hygiene, noise and pollution levels ● **Personal Security** ● Consider the need for on-site staff presence. Where appropriate, and in line with good practice, there should be permanent staff on site at least during peak hours. Contact details should be clearly provided on signage for out-of-hours problem reporting. Staff should be readily identifiable, approachable, trained and with the responsibility to deal with security situations. Ideally, each staff member should be in telephone or radio contact with base. Where possible, organise grounds maintenance activity to ensure that the same staff are present at particular times, making them familiar to the community ● Consider whether there are clear sightlines and views in and out of the site. Ensure that shrubbery and trees are properly maintained or removed where necessary to avoid creating secluded areas or pathways, and where possible have paths connect with places where people congregate. Consider installing lighting along paths and in car parks used by the public when it is dark. Play areas should be informally visible where possible and ideally overlooked by housing ● **Review issues** that cause fear for different members of the community – for example, inclusivity, racism, drugs, bullying, vandalism, and vagrancy ● **Risk assessments** should consider the site as a whole and movements around it, not individual areas ● **Carry out disclosure checks** on staff where necessary ● Where possible, incorporate the green space into a Police or Community Support Officer beat;

seek powers for designated local authority officers to deal with statutory nuisance from individuals; build safety inspections into the regular staff walk-round; and set up a “watch” group with a monitored telephone number to enable Friends’ and Residents’ groups to report problems easily and provide an early warning of increases in anti-social behaviour ● **Any hazards** should be clearly marked and adequate steps taken to protect the public ● **An Incident Log** should be maintained and reviewed on a regular basis, and should form the basis for future decisions ● **Control of Dogs/Dog Fouling** ● Maintain a sound understanding of relevant national legislation and use it as necessary to control dogs on the site. Good practice is to keep dogs out of children’s play areas and off sports’ pitches, and consider making fenced and gated dog-free zones on grass so that children can sit and play with confidence ● **Dogs** can be excluded or requested to be on a lead at certain times of the year if it has an adverse effect on wildlife ● **Consider holding events** aimed at dog owners ● **Are there strategies** in place to handle dog walkers with multiple animals if they cause a problem? ● **Liaise** with local authority dog wardens and engage with local dog walking groups ● **Consider using legislative powers** were appropriate ●

WELL MAINTAINED AND CLEAN

● **Litter and Waste Management** ● Both users and staff have a responsibility in keeping a site free of litter and fouling ● **An organisational culture** should be developed whereby every staff member is prepared to pick up litter when they see it rather than waiting for the routine visit of a maintenance team ● **Managers** should study the patterns of littering throughout the day, week and year, and should deal with them accordingly ● **Consider a specific policy** on chewing gum – once it hardens it is costly and difficult to remove, detrimental to wildlife and a blight on the area – and smoking litter, if required ● **Where appropriate**, bins should be provided on site, with consideration given to providing separate recycling facilities, cigarette stub plates and dog fouling bins. Managers should regularly evaluate the overall provision, location, position, maintenance and emptying of bins. Bins should be carefully and securely positioned and emptied regularly to encourage proper use by the public ● **Campaigns** and events could be used to reduce particular problems, if appropriate ● **Managers** should understand and use relevant national legislation to tackle problems ● **Managers** should be aware of their legal duties under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to keep their relevant land clear of litter and refuse, and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations. These standards apply internationally as a minimum requirement for any Green Flag Award site ● **Site waste storage areas** should be positioned out of sight of the public and arrangements made to ensure that waste is transported off-site as quickly as possible ● **Consider composting horticultural waste** for use as a replacement for peat-based products. For example, can you chip clippings and use them as mulch? ● **Horticultural Maintenance** ● There should be evidence that good standards of horticultural practice are being maintained across all areas of the site, e.g. shrub beds, flower beds and grassed areas ● **Sites** must demonstrate appropriate management of other features, such as water bodies ● **Work specifications** should emphasise the quality of the end product and new tenders should include assessment of horticultural expertise and staff experience as well as cost ● **If not done in-house**, smaller contracts could be awarded for specialised items of grounds maintenance, such as shrubberies, lakes and ecology areas ● **Can you involve volunteers** (through, for example, Friends’ or Conservation Groups, Tenants and Residents’ Associations or green gym programmes) in looking after small areas of a site? It is vital that a dedicated, skilled member of staff is present to provide assistance and oversight and to ensure safety as well as the quality of the finished job ● **Arboricultural and Woodland Maintenance** ● **Zoning** the site according to levels of use to inform likely levels of risk ● **Establishing regular informal inspections** (by individuals familiar with the site) and formal (expert) observations at an appropriate frequency. Any problems should be reported, acted upon and these actions recorded ● **Identifying any potentially problematic trees** and developing an action plan to ensure safety and effective maintenance ● **Making plans** for replacement of the tree stock over time ● **Site managers** should have knowledge of key specimen trees and understand how to ensure their upkeep ● **Taking suitable biosecurity actions** relating to tree stock and measures to avoid the spread of tree diseases, including thorough cleaning of equipment and reputable stock sourcing ● **What to do with dead wood** on the site – for example, where and when it is left to provide a habitat for bats, hole nesting birds and invertebrates, where and when it is taken away for health and safety or aesthetic reasons ● **Building and Infrastructure Maintenance** ● This section broadly includes the buildings, fences, gates, paths and roadways on site. They should be well maintained and clear of graffiti, flyposting, weeds and potholes as relevant. The management plan should refer to schedules for maintenance, repainting and renewal, and policies for dealing with vandalism, fly-tipping, graffiti and fly-posting. ● **Equipment Maintenance** ● This criterion looks at the policies and procedures in place to carry out checks and maintenance on: the equipment used by staff, the equipment used by the public ●

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

● **Managing Environmental Impact** ● Judges will be looking to see that, where possible and where relevant, measures have been taken to reduce impact on the environment as the opportunity arises – usually when replacing old features or creating new ones ● **Water efficiency** – installing features to reduce water consumption and reuse rainwater where possible, in building, infrastructure and water bodies whether that be across whole canal systems, large water bodies or individual ornamental water features ● **Energy saving or efficient features** installed within buildings, in new vehicles and machinery ● **Renewable energy generation** on site or procurement of off-site power ● **Measures taken to improve air quality** ● **Measures taken to stop pollution** into water ● **Measures taken to reduce noise pollution** ● **Purchasing choices** give equal consideration to sustainable and socially and environmentally sound sources, alongside value for

money ● **Waste Minimisation** ● Have all facilities on the site been considered – cafes, concessions, sporting facilities, site operations? ● **How is green waste handled?** Is it mulched and put back on site? Is compost made from clippings? ● **Recycling facilities** should reflect the collection facilities available locally and be suitable for the type of litter generated and for the site itself ● **Chemical Use** ● Where are pesticides and fertilisers used? ● **What would happen if there was no treatment?** Is there a problem? ● **Is there a way of altering the environment** to prevent the problem? ● **What physical or mechanical control methods** are available? ● **What biological control methods** are available that can supplement the environmental, physical and mechanical methods in use? ● **What are the least toxic chemical controls** available that can supplement environmental, physical, mechanical and biological methods ● **Peat Use** ● **Avoid purchasing plants** grown in peat or products containing peat. Request relevant information from your suppliers ● **Use alternatives to peat** such as appropriate recycled waste, or coir ● **Make your own compost** from cuttings ● **Climate Change Adaption Strategies** ● **Likely impacts** of climate change and some of the mitigating factors ● **Torrential Rain: Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS)**, re-naturalising of modified water courses and flood plains and other flood reduction strategies, soil binding ● **Drought: adaptive vegetation**, rain water harvesting and soil mulching ● **Wind: tree layout and design**, and public safety ● **Heat: suitably tolerant vegetation**, shade and waterbodies for cooling off ● **Opportunities to enhance ecological networks** and habitats or populations of species so that they are better able to adapt to a changing climate through, for example, choices for planting or their positioning ●

BIODIVERSITY, LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE

● **Management of Natural Features, Wild Fauna and Flora** ● Potential for sites to form part of a network for wildlife, as natural floodways or open spaces, to buffer and enhance ● **The presence of any ancient trees**, or historic tree or plant collections and how they are identified, managed and promoted ● **Local historical or social links** with types of biodiversity or particular habitats ● **Links to wider local and national strategies** – including Local Nature Partnerships, National Pollinator Strategy, health and wellbeing and nature, natural play, forest schools, involving people in ‘growing their own’, green infrastructure and climate change adaptation ● **Conservation of Landscape Features** ● The management plan should contain a statement, recognising: ● **what landscape features** are present and their relationship to each other (natural and landscaped features; trees – individual, groups, avenues, plants and planting; geological; important view lines; open areas) ● **where they came from** (social and cultural importance) ● **what has come since** ● **specific reference** to any conservation designation applied to the landscape (registered park or garden, conservation area, scheduled ancient monument and local designations) ● **Conservation of Buildings and Structures** ● The entirety of the estate is important and managers should recognise the whole setting even if it isn’t within their remit. For cemeteries, canals, areas of social housing and large campuses for example, the buildings and structures physically dominate the site and they should be part of the management plan, even if only to ensure ongoing consultation with the relevant stakeholders ● **Key developmental stages** in the history of the place can be represented through enhancing structures and buildings from different eras ● **Buildings** should be in use where possible, ideally by groups involved in the life of the site ● **Friends’ groups** could be encouraged to take over or look after some of the heritage features and improve or extend their use ● **Buildings or structures identified as in need of maintenance or restoration** should have a vision and a plan to maintain them. The site should be safely contained, kept unblighted, and signage erected to let the public know what is happening ● **Ruins** shouldn’t be allowed to be dangerous but they can be managed appropriately. For example, cemeteries often contain memorials that are in a ruinous condition. The approach to management is important. Heritage England publish guidance on managing ruins ● **Not all buildings** have to be kept: ongoing community consultation is important, and even if it is a relevant part of history but the community are happy if it goes and is either replaced with a better alternative or it is no longer needed, then it doesn’t need to stay. Judges will be interested in the decision-making process and appropriateness of the outcome for the people using it, rather than the outcome itself ●

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

● **Community Involvement in Management and Development** ● A variety of methods could be used to involve communities, including: forums, questionnaires, surveys, as well as outreach work to schools, youth organisations, faith groups and organisations that represent people with disabilities. Particular consultation should be aimed at the 13–19 age group, often one of the hardest groups to engage with ● **Providing evidence of active engagement** with, and understanding of, communities might be the analysis of survey results or outcomes or decisions made at community forum meetings, ideally summarised and referenced in the management plan ● **It is important** that groups are fairly represented and conflicting demands are equitably balanced when decisions, particularly those involving significant redesign and investment, are made ● **It can be better** to approach representative groups individually, rather than try to bring them together. However, where groups are disproportionately interested in one part of the site, a quarterly meeting of all interested parties can be useful. Use methods as appropriate to seek to identify and resolve conflicts between user groups ● **Groups** should be approached and supported in developing their vision for different use of the space. Where it is unachievable, clear feedback should be given and alternatives explored where possible ● ‘Friends’ Groups’ are often an indication of community engagement, but there doesn’t have to be one – judges are looking to see regular engagement across the whole community – those geographically local to the site and its existing users ● **Some sites** will have obvious bodies for consultation, such as allotment associations, student bodies, residents’ groups, sporting committees, historical societies or friends’

groups. Also involve others with impact on or who are impacted by the site – other site departments or contractors, local residents, businesses, faith or interest groups and people running events or facilities on the site ● **Reflect the local multicultural community** – try to get representation from all groups in the locality. It may mean going out to some groups as they wouldn’t engage with more traditional techniques ● **Properly supervised** by a dedicated member of site staff, groups can be involved in the day to day running of the site, and can sometimes leverage additional funding, providing great benefit to all ● **Community involvement** in some sites, such as cemeteries and crematoria still in use, may not comprise the traditional groups. It might be better to engage with users through feedback via funeral directors. Friends’ groups could be established for historic cemeteries and may be able to carry out supervised works on the site ● **Appropriate Provision for Community** ● **Is there potential** for any conflicts between user groups that need to be managed? Could the area be better zoned? ● **Is there fair provision** – for all ages, sectors of the community, and all types of activities that the site encourages? ● **Play equipment** should be physically challenging, functional and imaginative, catering for a range of ages and physical abilities, located in a safe area away from main roads, dogs excluded. Opportunities for wild and free play are equally valuable and develop imagination, connection to nature and stimulate senses. Can you link better to existing facilities, events and programmes already underway to encourage wider engagement with them? ● **Would it help** to make a study of patterns of use across the day, week or year? ● **Have you considered** what people do when they visit the site? ● **Can the site provide informal space** for community events or social get-togethers?

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

● **Marketing and Promotion** ● There should be an appropriate marketing plan for the site, referenced in the management plan, which at its most basic level ● **The extent and depth of this plan** should be appropriate to the type of site. For example, a major heritage attraction drawing visitors from across the globe would have a very different marketing plan to that relating to the grounds of a housing association or campus, small local park or recreation area, a sensitive nature site, or an active cemetery or crematorium ● **It could be part of a larger organisational strategy**, but there should be specific detail on this particular site - understanding the site and it’s current and potential users ● **Events** are not always the best idea. There might be better ways engage visitors. It may be best to take expertise out of the site, for example into schools or local groups, especially those that would otherwise hesitate to engage, perhaps because of age or culture ● **Appropriate Information Channels** ● There are a range of methods for marketing green spaces, which might include: ● **Publication and distribution of annual reports and management plans** (have these available to leaf through in the cafe, reception or other public buildings) ● **Online visitor information sites**; those with facility for reviews and comments make a good monitoring tool ● **Social media** ● **Events calendars** – on notice boards, online, in newsletters ● **Local and free press** ● **Local radio** ● **Well trained and approachable staff** – rangers, contractors or other staff, all of whom should be clearly identifiable ● **Printed media** – posters, banners, leaflets, flyers or reverse sides of parking/bus tickets ● **Links to Green Flag** – use your achievement of a prestigious international award to promote the site. Fly the flag and use the Green Flag Award website to promote the site; a free, fully updatable web page is available for every winning site ● **Share others’ communication channels**, for example those of the managing organisation, and partner organisations ● **Local noticeboards** – physical and online ● **Sometimes, marketing is done practically** by taking the experience of the site to others – for example taking plants or animals, giving talks on growing vegetables or wildflowers, or on the history of the site, to schools or local groups rather than them coming on to site ● **The marketing of cemeteries and crematoria** has to be carried out in a very sensitive way and might comprise a leaflet detailing the history of the site and any interesting historical features. It should also contain useful numbers – where to go for support after a bereavement, how to register a death and a list of local Funeral Directors, for example. This could be completely financed by an Undertaker ● **Sensitive sites** that are actively seeking to control visitor numbers, for example to protect the environment, could decide their marketing strategy was to approach schools or other groups to arrange scheduled visits and promote events taking place at other sites ● **Appropriate Educational and Interpretational Information** ● Signage and interpretation boards on site and online information detailing the social and built heritage and unique biodiversity features of the site ● **Nature walks**, green gym programmes, healthy activities, creative conservation, or links with local history or other interest groups ● **Welcoming or providing Forest Schools or equivalent outdoor learning experiences** for local schools ● **Promoting growing your own food** – allotment provision or healthy eating areas or guidance on growing at home ● **Establishing links** with local groups for people with disabilities

MANAGEMENT

● **Implementation of Management Plan** ● Applicants need to have a management plan and be using it. Judges will be looking for evidence that it is used in practice. They will be interested to know how familiar people are with the management plan and may ask members of staff and community representatives, as well as assessing overall how well-run the site appears to be ●

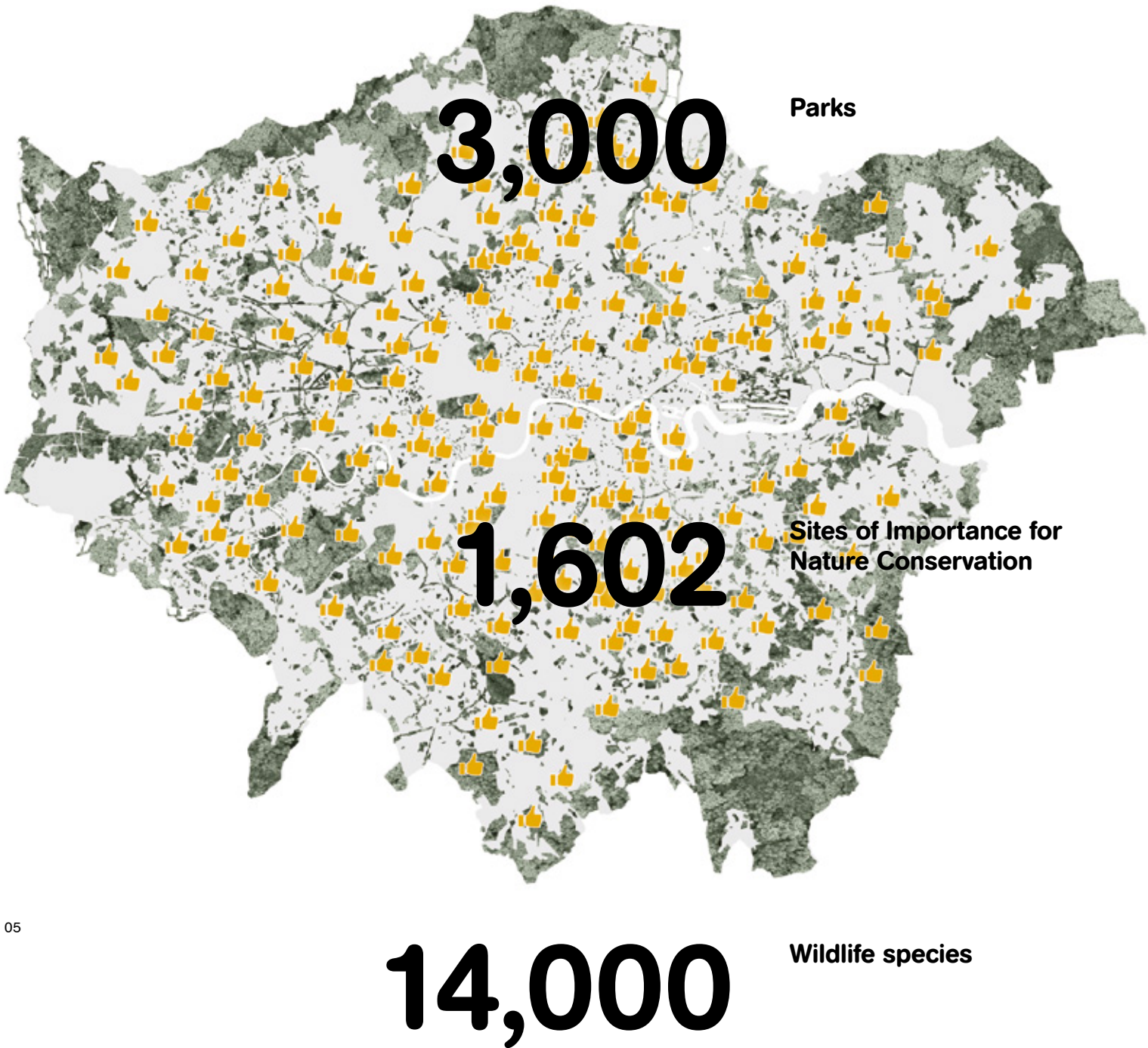
A fundamental shift in perspective is vital in order to take nature seriously within an urban context, and to evaluate its potential. We need to develop an approach similar to that adopted when immersing ourselves in true, vast natural spaces, rather than reducing nature to numeric standards, or treating urban parks as imitations of the ‘real thing’.

A truly natural value system would be subjective, personal, communal. It would be formed from the voices of plants, animals and histories as well as from human voices. It would not be an architectural structure, it would be an ecosystem of which, it would recognise, humans are only one part.

The following chapters begin to evaluate parks through a set of more natural values, replacing the dictatorial, finite methodology represented by the ‘green flag’ with a communal, multi-perspectival concept of the ‘yellow thumb’. We look towards understanding parks as a piece of the wild as equally as they are a piece of the city. To values beyond valuation.



05



02 Who are our city parks for?

On accessing London's parks



06

According to a recent study by Public Health England with The University of Exeter, there is a noticeable positive effect on health and wellbeing evident from spending at least two hours in nature per week. This equates to a recommended 17 minutes per day. But for over 12,000 Londoners, it takes over 20 minutes just to get to the nearest public green space and back.

A quick glance at the green map of our capital reveals that most of its parks and gardens are clustered in distinct areas, leaving great gaps in the urban forest and entire neighbourhoods devoid of green space. Unfortunately this more often than not correlates with wealth and ethnicity - with less green space in lower income areas, and areas with higher Black, Asian and ethnic (BAME) populations. London's nature is apparently not for everyone.

Provision of green space and access to it are not the same thing, and both are needed to achieve good green space equity. Londoners' likelihood to spend time in nature as part of a daily routine is not only a result of amount of parks and closeness to them, but also a complex blend of social factors and personal tastes. These include how welcoming and safe a park feels; what there is to do when you get there; whether you feel a part of its community, its culture, its social fabric; and simply if you like how it looks.

To be a truly democratic space, a park must provide something for everyone - satisfying needs that are often in fundamental conflict. Teenagers need space to gather

unwatched, lone walkers may feel endangered. Older people likely seek peace and quiet, dog owners and families need space to run and shout and throw a frisbee. It must nurture conditions enough for everybody to do as they please. If a park doesn't cater for everyone simultaneously, no matter whether you live next door to it or a 20-minute commute away, it can unwittingly hold bias and close its doors on entire communities.

Barking and Dagenham is one of the East London growth boroughs - an area of significant rapid development and population change. In the last twenty years, the borough has experienced the largest decrease of the 65+ population, and the second-biggest decrease of white British population in the country. It is dense and diverse - its parks are under significant pressure to do a lot for many, and to adapt with the needs of a changing population.

If Barking and Dagenham is representative of where our city expansion is heading, are its parks big enough, close enough and integrated enough to allow us to live a sufficiently healthy lifestyle? Are our park gates truly open to welcome our ever-changing and diversifying communities?

Analytics from the independent British parks charity Fields in Trust, benchmark a 10-minute walk (800m) as a gauge of appropriate proximity to public green space. Their data finds that 12,000 Londoners lack public green space within this radius. To delve deeper, the London Assembly uses a gauge of 5 minutes walk (400m) and states that by this measure, half of London households live too far away from the nearest park.

Fields in Trust have developed The Green Space Index (GSI) as a measure of how much green space our city requires. London is far from meeting its minimum standard, scoring 0.55, where a score of 1 is the acceptable baseline. Areas considered below the minimum are distributed throughout our capital, and alarmingly comprise the majority of London boroughs.



07

● Above the GSI minimum standard
● Below the GSI standard

According to the Fields in Trust, 2.69 million people live more than a **10-minute walk** from a public park in Great Britain. This number is predicted to rise by 5% over the next five years, and progressively more thereafter.

What if it was an official public health requirement for every home to be located within 10 minutes of a natural space?

215_k
hectares

Public green space
in Great Britain



32.9
m²/person

Public green space
in Great Britain

1 in 8
households

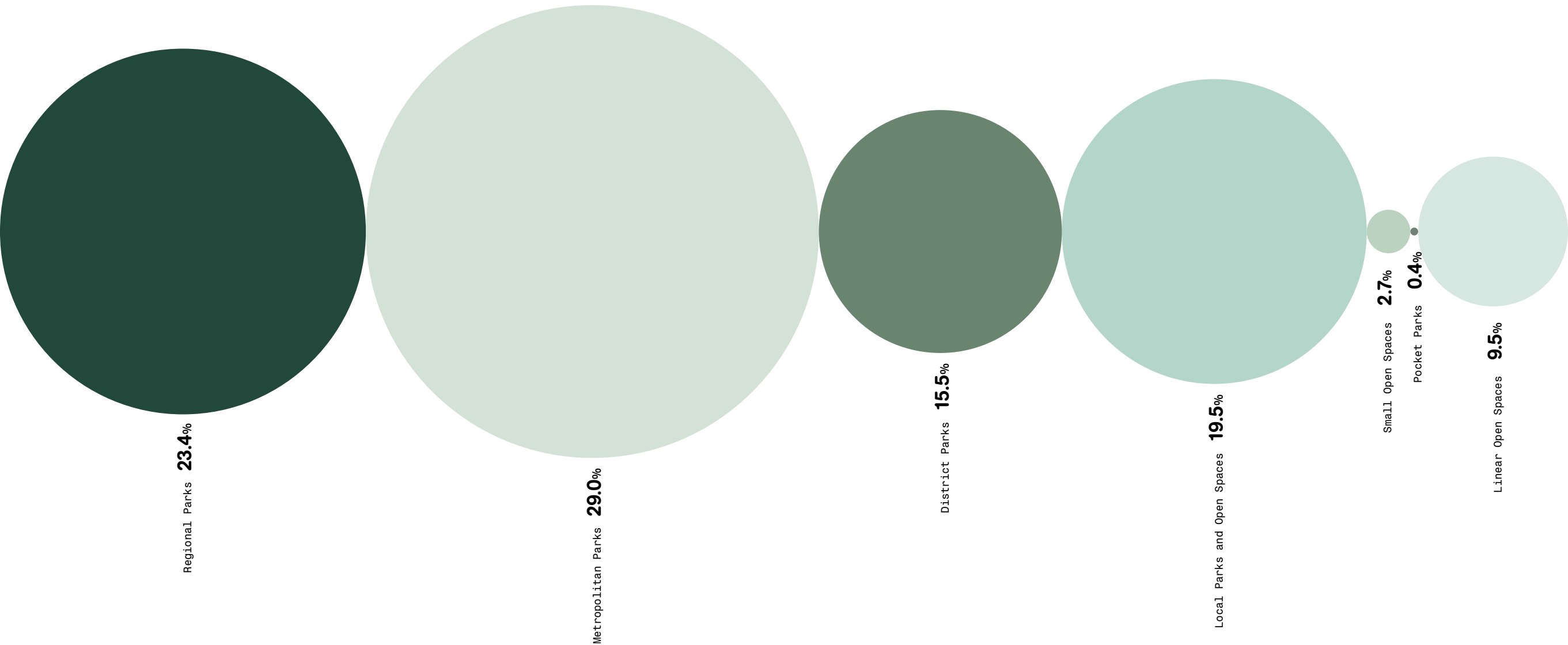
have no access to
a private or shared
garden in Great Britain



The majority of London’s public open space falls within the ‘regional’ and ‘metropolitan’ park categories - destination parks that are over 60 hectares in size and located as far as 40-minutes walk from people’s homes. Only 3.1% of London’s total public open spaces are ‘local’ - categorised as small spaces, pocket parks and community gardens under 2 hectares in size - and within 5 minutes’ walk of people’s homes.

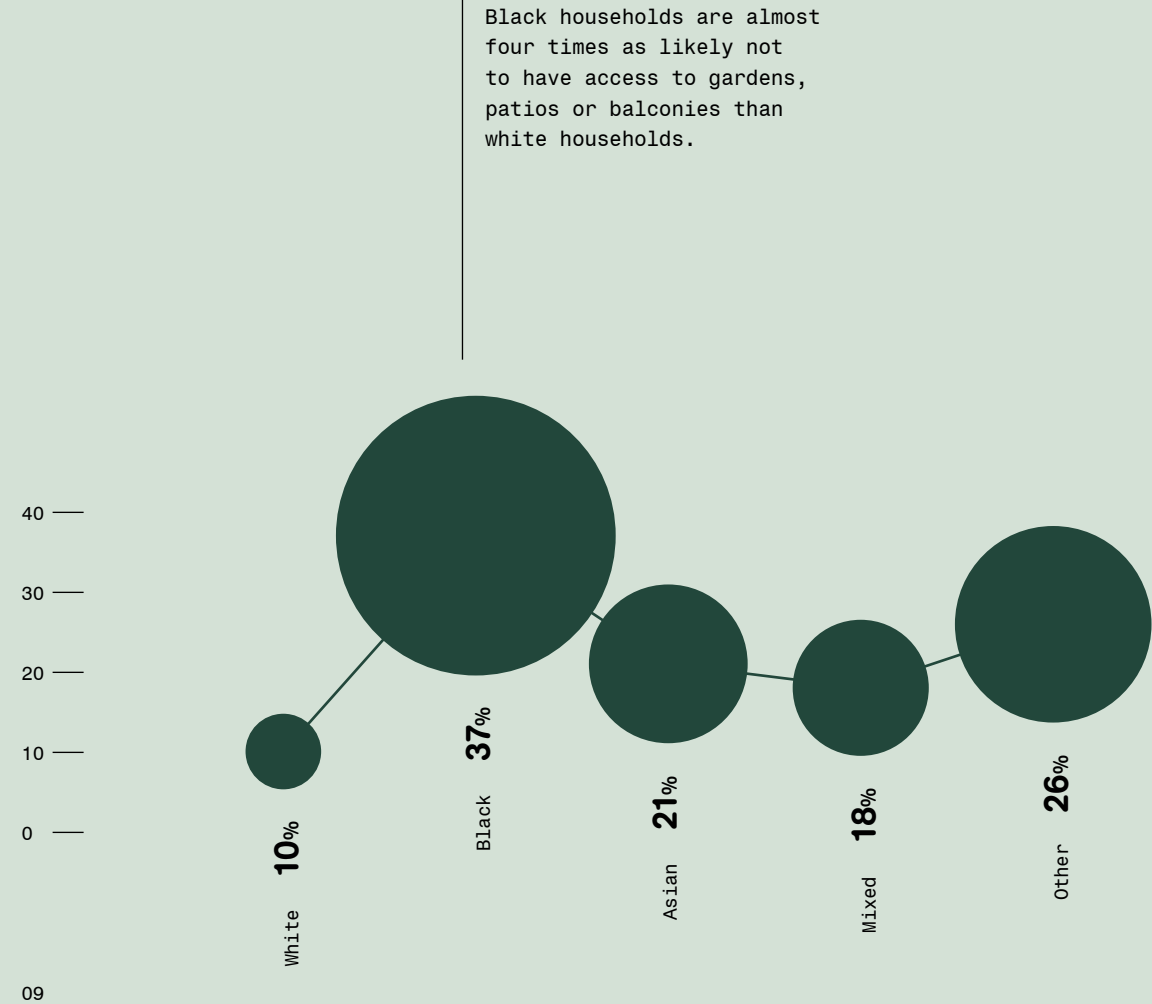
How can we create a sense of community if we are so lacking in community green spaces?

17.9% The London Plan Public Open Space, of which...



Data from the former Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) indicates that BAME communities have significantly less access not only to private gardens and terraces, but also to local public parks. In areas of >40% BAME residents, there is 11x less green space compared to areas where residents are predominantly white. this is compounded by the lack of private green space for these populations.

What if every street had a community garden and each postcode responsible for a portion of it?



03 Who are our local parks for?

On our relationship with the green spaces on our doorstep



10

London's green spaces are not equally accessible to all. There are distinct patterns; amount of green space correlates to levels of wealth, ethnicity and health across the city. As mapped, the borough of Barking and Dagenham sits at the lower end of the scale. How is London's green space distributed across our city, which communities does it embrace and which does it lock out?



11

212,906

Population estimate, 2017

56.3

Population density per hectare

1/33

London deprivation rank

65.8%

Employment rate

32.9

Average age

77.6 - 82.1

Life expectancy (years)

37.8%

Green space

22.7%

Private gardens

How close is white to green?

Comparing four boroughs in the North, South, East and West of London, the relationship between public green space provision and ethnicity is marked.

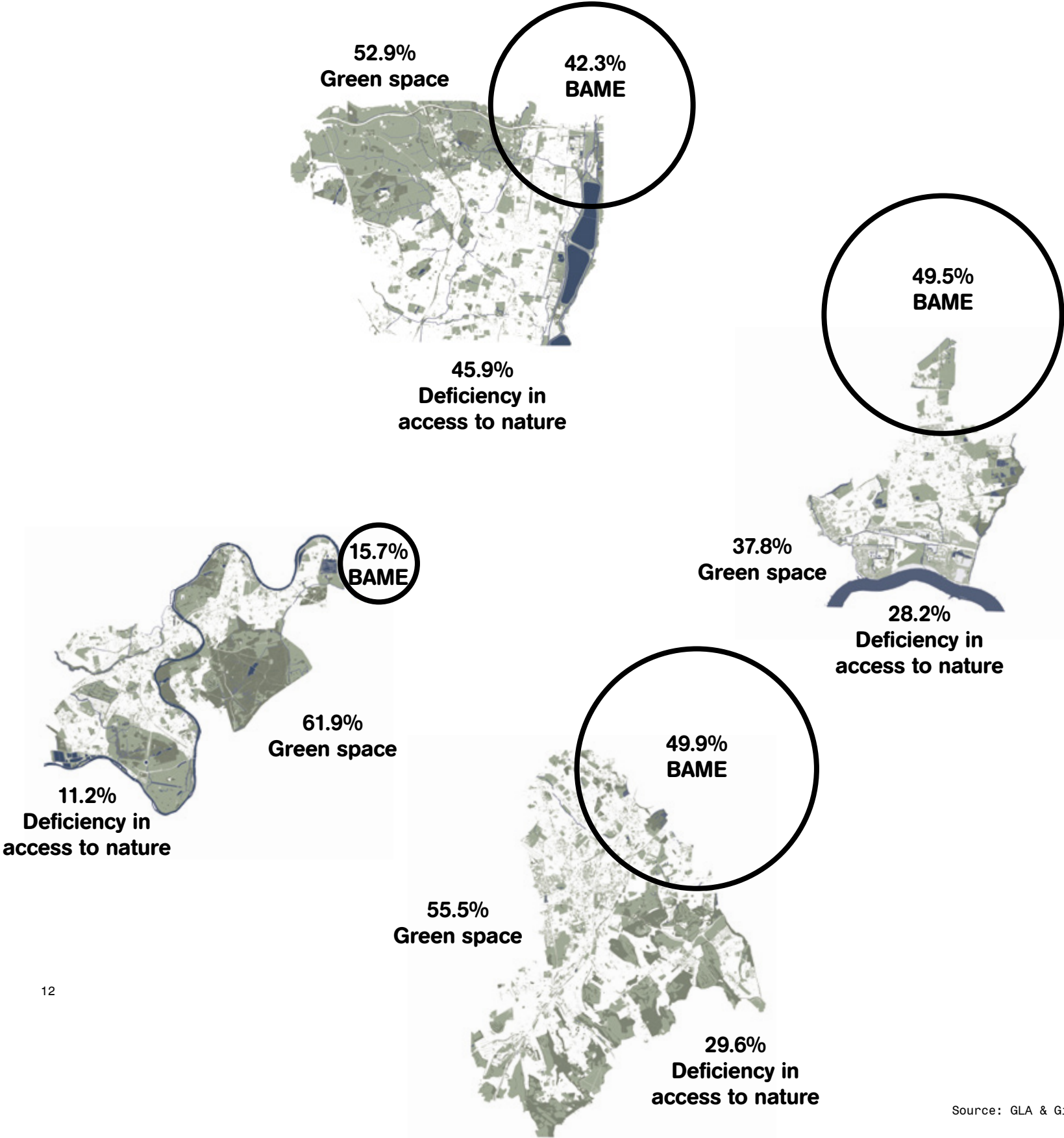
Barking and Dagenham’s population is amongst the most diverse in the city, the most deprived and its green space is severely lacking.

At the other end of the scale, Richmond-upon-Thames is primarily affluent, white British, and has almost double the area of public parks.

Measuring ‘Areas of Deficiency in Nature’ considers proximity of the nearest green space to one’s home. When read in conjunction with percentage green area, it reveals that even in boroughs that are proportionally greener, their parks can be located so far from people’s homes that large portions of the population still qualify as ‘deficient’. (More on this in Green for Victory: Parks and the wild).

To delve deeper, the borough of Enfield scores highly in percentage green space, but all its parks are concentrated in the north-west of the borough, where the population has a much higher proportion of white British. The south and eastern areas comprise much more ethnically diverse communities, this is where the deficiency in nature is much more pronounced.

All community groups need parks equally. Whether it be lack of physical area or distance, it is clear that the widespread inequality of London’s green spaces needs to be taken seriously. A measure of green space provision per community group needs to be established as part of our London data profiles to even begin to acknowledge and understand the depth of this problem.



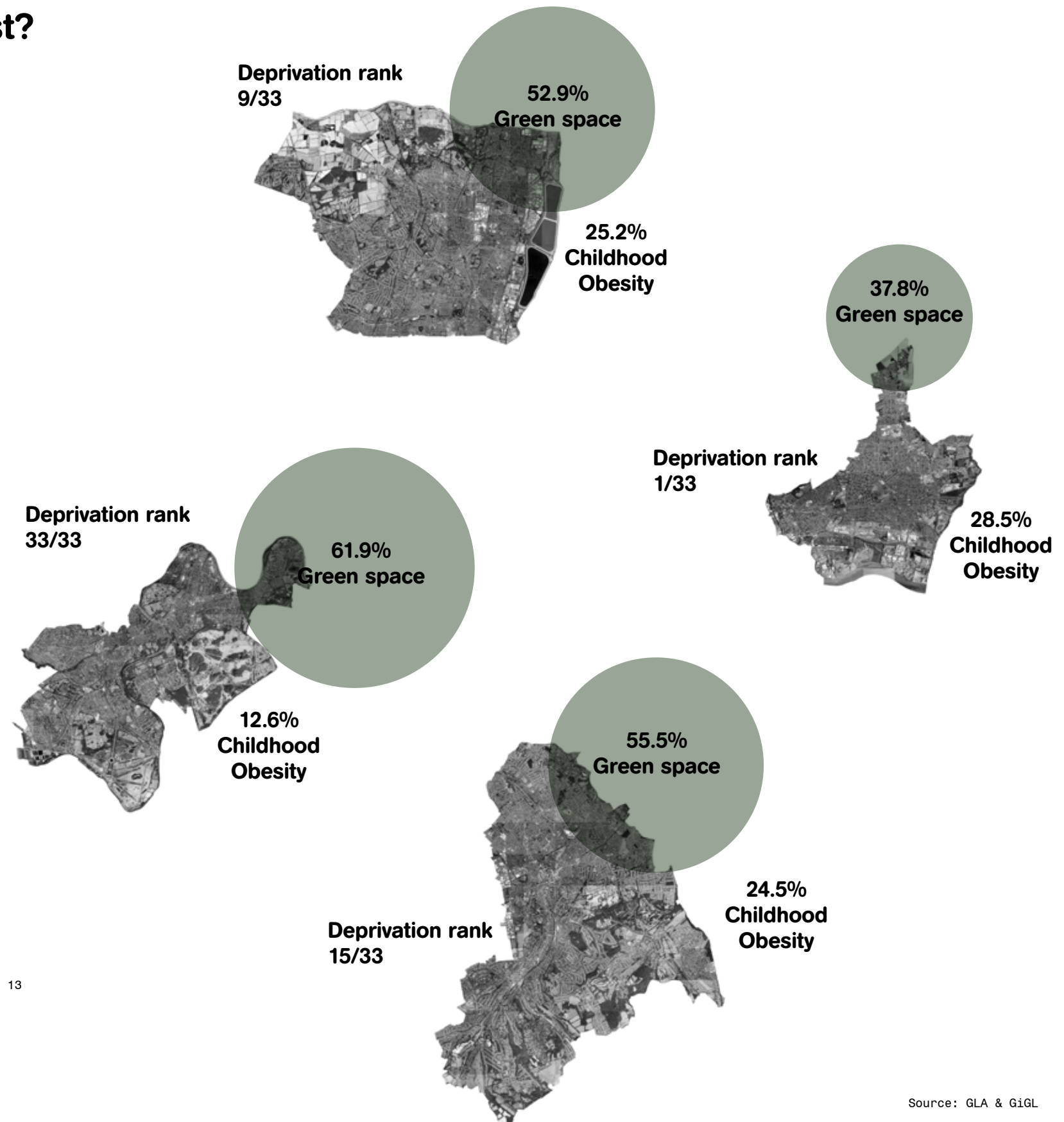
How much does a healthy lifestyle cost?

Being close to nature has a direct influence on a person's likelihood to exercise, breathe in fresh air and overcome stress. Every year, parks are estimated to save the NHS around £111 million based solely on a reduction in GP visits.

Unfortunately, some parts of our capital are significantly healthier to live in than others. Boroughs ranking as 'more deprived' have consistently less green space than wealthy areas, aligning with higher levels of obesity and lower life expectancies.

Parallels between wealth and nature are no coincidence. Richmond-upon-Thames is one of the most affluent boroughs, both due to its history of royal residents and the demand and desirability of living near a park. On average, living within 600 metres of a regional or metropolitan park adds between 1.9-2.9% to house prices.

This correlation is ingrained within our social fabric, and cause and effect perpetuate one another. Increasing parks in areas of deprivation may not be a complete solution to all our health issues, but what it will do is provide opportunity for some fundamental lifestyle changes. Nature and health cannot be just for the rich.



04 Tales from the community

On community values and openness



14

Google reviews are often overlooked within data collection, in favour of more formal and controlled questionnaires. But Google provides a safe space for the free and equal expression of opinion, and is a powerful platform representative of communal demographic that people trust. According to the online community, Barking Park is Barking and Dagenham's 'most loved' park. What qualities do people truly value about it?



15

15 Trees boulevard, Barking Park

16 Jetty, Barking Park




16

★★★★★ a month ago

A wonderful open expanse of space! Great for the family! Dad, a playing footie! Walking the dog (very clean Park) exercising or simply bringing ya boombox and enjoying nature accompanied by music! A great community facility.



17

★★★★★ 2 months ago - 

Lovely park with mature trees, lots of shade, waterway with ducks, storks etc. The Big Friendly Coffee shop within the park does gelato ice creams, coffees, pizzas etc. There is a kids play area with sand.

17 Paddle boats, Barking Park



18

★★★★★ 6 months ago - 

One of the only beautiful parks in London that **isn't overcrowded**

18 Chiaroscuro, Barking Park

19 Bark, Barking Park



19



20

★★★★★ 2 months ago

Love it, can't wait to visit again. This first visit was for birthday. Picnic with my family and thoroughly enjoyed the park. Full of fun stuff for kids too.

20 Miniature Railway, Barking Park



21

★★★★★ 4 weeks ago

It was peaceful and I had a great time with the kiddos who loved the sandy children's play area.

21 Tunnel, Barking Park

22 Swing, Barking Park



22

05 Marina's Tale

On a person at the heart of a park



23

Over the last three years, cafe owner Marina Sanduleac and her friend and former-owner Monika Drozd have created a communal living room at the heart of Barking Park. So much more than just a place to pick up a cup of coffee, ‘The Big Friendly Coffee’ has grown into a big friendly home, where the doors are always open. We manage to pull her away from her patrons for a cuppa and a natter.

A coffee break by the river

Coffee break transcript

Date	08.10.2020
Time	10:10 - 10:50
Location	Barking Park
Interviewers	Ilaria Catalano Antonia Alexandru
Interviewee	Marina Sanduleac



24

24 Fresh air, Barking Park

Marina: Almost everything I am doing here is for community, for kids, for mums with babies. Last year we did groups for babies and for little kids and we’ve had lots of arts and crafts activities. We do lots of stuff during the winter, it’s more like a community centre than a cafe.

Periscope: Do you organise all these events?

M: Yes, I organise them - I have the kids playing area, see, and it’s not ready for the winter yet because I usually put a rug there, it’s nice and clean, no one goes with the shoes there. Last year we used to do sand art and it was very nice, the kids loved it a lot. I don’t sell alcohol here, you know, it’s just cakes, coffee. Then this year I added pizza and pasta and we make everything fresh here, everything is healthy, we don’t buy any frozen stuff.

P: So the council owns the place and you and you manage it?

M: I have the lease for this cafe, but it belongs to the council. When you get something from the council you need to care for the community in the borough.

P: This community atmosphere, this feeling of being a big family, was it something you created from the start?

M: No, the previous owner who is a Polish friend of mine who moved to France, started it but I’ve kept doing what she used to, I used to work with her and we did this before. That’s why the name is ‘The Big Friendly Coffee’, because of the community atmosphere. I also have customers who are this age - *points to an older woman* - and when they come in, they have their own groups and they usually sit, enjoy and read the newspapers.

P: Is the cafe open all year round and 7 days a week?

M: Yes, it used to close in September but since I took over I’ve kept it open throughout winter. That’s when we do lots of activities for kids, in the summer for three months it’s very busy as the splash park is operating and you can’t organise any activities because there are already lots happening. During the winter people really enjoy it because on Saturdays and Sundays it means there’s something to do and not just keep children at home. I have two kids as well, so I know what parents need.

P: Do you feel like you’ve experienced the park outside your work - would you come here if it wasn’t for the Big Friendly Coffee?

M: Yes, we’ve come to this park every single day since we moved here six years ago, we used to come with the dog in the mornings and evenings. Sadly the dog isn’t with us anymore but we still come because our kids just wake up and they want to come in the park - they’re used to it.

P: Why do you think people love this park so much?

M: It’s because it’s huge, very clean and if you go on the other side you’ll see lots of flowers, trees and in the summertime it’s busy with people sitting on blankets for picnics. I think it’s the air - the fresh air - what more can I say? Once you get on the street that’s it, there’s gas everywhere from the cars. Here, you really enjoy it.

P: We saw that there’s a miniature railway, do you know much about it?

M: This year they were supposed to have it working during the summer but with the lockdown that we had, everything was postponed until next year. People keep asking about it, but I only saw it operating once three years ago and it’s usually volunteers who run it. Maybe I should get in touch with them.

There's also a lot of teenagers and I've approached them, I'd like to involve them in something. Maybe I'll try to get permission from the volunteers to operate the railway and involve the teenagers.

P: That's very bold of you, to connect such different groups that wouldn't usually meet.

M: There are things that teenagers can do in the park, but everywhere in the world you see teenagers just hanging around. If you can, you need to give them a hand. And they may change or they may not. I'm a little bit different, I like giving to people, helping people get on the right path.

P: That's a very rare approach.

M: This is what I like, and if you do what you like you are successful.

P: We understand the owner of the paddle boats is also the owner of the splash park, do you organise things with them too?

M: We didn't this year, but next year we definitely will. I spoke to the owner about some ideas and she seemed positive so we may organise something together, we don't know what yet. This summer we were shut for almost two months then they allowed us to open for take-away, then in September we opened with distanced seating. This summer was not easy at all, but then it wasn't easy for any business.

P: Does the council support you financially?

M: No, I do it all with my own money. This is a community and you need to treat them well because they're also my customers, you need to find an approach to bring people in. I also just finished my degree in September. I went to University of Sunderland, studying business and management, so now I have a much better idea of how it all works.

Elderly woman comes in

M: Morning, how are you?

Woman1: Just started to rain.

*M: Yeah, just not nice today.
I haven't seen you in a long time.*

*W1: Hmm... Tuesdays I don't come in here,
yesterday I went to the hairdresser...*

M: You were here a long time yesterday!

Woman2: Did you come here yesterday then?

*W1: Yes I came here for a little while,
sat on the bench.*

M:[chatter] Enjoy ladies, enjoy!

P: Do you ever bring in people from outside of the park, outside of the community?

M: There was one during the Easter holiday, we got a magician and he was doing tricks like the bunny in the hat, so all kids were very excited then. Other than that there's happy moments every day here.

I'm very caring about different things that happen here, I know all my customers. There are customers who come regularly and if they don't, I get worried. Where are they? There are a few people with disabilities who come here, sometimes when they come with no carer I'll call their carer to see why they're allowed out by themselves.

P: Do you have regulars who come to the cafe?

M: Yes, I do, they come in every day and if it's nice weather they'll sit outside. This year I'll cover the terrace so that customers can sit outside during the winter too. And then there's the gentleman there who is sitting on the bench outside.

*Looking outside from the cafe,
a man sitting on a bench.*

He comes every single day, if it's too cold, he'll come inside, if it's not too cold he'll always go outside. He feeds the pigeons, he has his tea and his breakfast there.

P: It feels like such a comfortable place, really a home. Do the people who come here live close or come from further away?

M: It's mostly people who live around the park but we have customers who come from further afield. It's usually in the summer for the splash park because there aren't that many in London. The splash park has lots of small swimming pools for kids and other kinds of entertainment. It gives kids somewhere to go especially during half term and the holidays. Some of them go on holidays abroad but this year that obviously wasn't the case.

P: Does the council care about the park, it seems like they do?

M: Yeah they do, and we've got the people who clean the park as well, they also know that people love this park. There used to be volunteers who came and cleaned the park, and people with disabilities were involved too, but since coronavirus that has stopped.

P: Would you like to expand this and do more activities? How do you see it looking here in five, ten, fifteen years?

M: Yes, like I mentioned I want to cover the terrace so more people can be outside, I can open the doors onto it as well. Then next year I'll have some more things for kids to play and maybe make the play area bigger. But generally I just want to keep improving the cafe. There are a lot of mums who are either teachers or on maternity leave, and they come and take part in activities with their babies. Usually I talk to them and ask what they would like. I don't just do it by myself, I get help from customers too. I do the research beforehand and then ask them, because what I like they might not and I like to find a balance.

People keep coming back and when you get positive feedback you just keep wanting to do more and more.

06 A call to arms

Towards the new wild

It is clear that London's parks are a necessity, not a luxury. It is clear that a basic human health right for every person should be to have a significant green space within easy reach of their homes. It is clear that London has a long way to go before this is achieved.

2020's COVID-19 pandemic sits atop an accelerating obesity pandemic, and the rapid emergence of a third pandemic in mental health. All three require the same antidote: space, air and activity.

London has a responsibility to ensure it is a healthy enough place to support its people, and it does not currently fulfil its obligation. Through unplanned growth, over-development and resulting population migrations across the city, the health of whole communities has been unwittingly abandoned. To rectify this, there needs to be a joined-up initiative throughout the city - to both increase park area in the most deprived boroughs, and to connect the parks we have, thus re-establishing London's green network for everyone.

Beyond this, London must also re-evaluate its nature bias, and the availability of its green spaces to all. It must do this by understanding the needs and nuances of specific communities.

As an urban park with an incredibly wide and diverse catchment Barking Park responds flexibly and positively to the changing needs of its local people, as such it is cherished. In the spirit of its original Victorian pleasure garden design, the park continues to reinvent itself as a place of amusement, entertainment and joy - a space for play.

At its core are a few key figures, of which Marina is one. Figures who listen, observe and respond to the needs of the individual, and in doing so, act for the whole community.

People such as Marina are vital in allowing parks to be truly inclusive spaces. Through slow relationships built over months and years, Marina shows that a park is created by the people that inhabit it, and that to be truly inclusive requires an instilment of care, trust and perseverance.

Beyond square metres, proximities and amenities, the power and commitment of the individual is vital in empowering public parks to be truly public, and for London's nature to be truly for all.



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Green flag vs yellow thumb
Image by Periscope

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Image by Periscope
Data Source: Greater London Authority, Green Flag Awards

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Photograph by Rodney Topor
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Photograph by Mike Peel [www.mikepeel.net]
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Image by Periscope
Source: OS Data © Crown copyright 2020

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Modified by Periscope
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Fresh air, Barking Park
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Image by Periscope

