

WE ARE SHAPING.

WE ARE NEWHAM.



OUR GREENSPACES AND WATER SPACES.

Introduction

Newham has a network of natural and open spaces; not just our nature reserves, parks, and rivers but also playgrounds, playing fields, allotments, gardens, hedges, green walls, green/brown roofs, cycle and footpaths, street trees, docks, lakes and ponds. These are referred to as the borough's 'Green and Blue Spaces', 'Blue Ribbon Network' and 'Green Infrastructure' (GI).

Well-connected and well-designed local green and blue spaces deliver multifunctional benefits – from environmental benefits (reduced flood risk, increased wildlife, reduced urban temperatures) to social and cultural benefits (improvements in mental and physical health and social interaction and integration) to economic benefits (encouraging people to spend time and money in beautiful spaces).

This topic also addresses biodiverse places. Having a biodiverse borough means having a rich mix of plants and animals; and this variety and complexity helps nature to thrive.

The connectivity of natural spaces is important – not only because a network of open space means that wildlife can flourish but because providing easy access to such spaces also allows people to enjoy nature for recreation and education, as well its beauty.

The current Local Plan policies that relate to this topic are:

- SC4: Biodiversity
- INF6: Green Infrastructure and the Blue Ribbon Network
- INF7: Open Space and Outdoor Recreation

What does our current policy seek to achieve?

SC4: Biodiversity

- Protect and enhance biodiversity on land and in water environments.
- Deliver Biodiversity Net Gain. This means that a new development must ensure that its habitat for wildlife is enhanced and left in a measurably better state than it is was before
- Improve access to nature.
- Protect habitat connectivity and trees.

INF6: Green Infrastructure and the Blue Ribbon Network

- Protect, enhance and improve the connectivity of Green Infrastructure (and the Blue Ribbon Network).
- Support residential and visitor moorings.
- No net loss of functionality of green and blue spaces. This means planning decisions about a green or blue space need to be thought about not only in terms of the impact to the amount of this space (more or less) but also in terms of the impact to how it functions for wildlife and the people who use it. A space could have a key function for nature, it could be a place where people can exercise or, very often, it will perform a mixture of different functions.
- Deliver the Lea Valley Regional Park.

INF7: Open Space and Outdoor Recreation

- Protect existing green and blue space; seeking improvements to the quantity, quality, accessibility and connectivity.
- Deliver the Lea River Park and Thames Path.
- Reduce park, allotment and playing pitch deficiencies.
- Design open space to enhance urban cooling, biodiversity and to help against flooding. In addition spaces should be welcoming, inclusive and provide publically accessible toilets.
- Require sustainable ongoing management and maintenance plans.
- Play space should meet the latest London Plan requirements.
- Epping Forest Special Area Conservation (SAC) requirements. This requires schemes in proximity to the Forest to mitigate the impact of increased visitor number on the Forest through a Habitat Regulation Assessment and in some cases payment.



What you've told us

- The majority of people think that our parks are good (82%).
- The 2021 Citizens' Assembly is exploring how can we work together to make our parks and green spaces even better for residents and visitors. The community has identified seven priorities it would like to address:
 - Safety and crime in green spaces.
 - The Council to work collaboratively with the community to fund and improve green spaces.
 - Activities and events which are inclusive and accessible.
 - Protect, maintain and increase well-designed green spaces.
 - Rewilding – improving biodiversity by creating more wild-grown areas.
 - Green spaces we are proud of – investment in maintenance and tackling litter.
 - Welcoming and comfortable places which make the best use of space.
- Young people in the borough have highlighted similar issues and want to see an increase in wildlife, to improve biodiversity and access to nature.
- Young people also want their needs for open space listened to, which include safer, well-lit, freely accessible public spaces; to feel welcome – young people feel excluded due to gentrification; spaces they can identify with and allow them to spend time together free of charge with seating, lighting, shelter, activities, free Wi-Fi and a sense of security; and youth friendly signage.

- People living and working in the Royal Docks would like: places to feel safe (animation of the public realm and water fronts); community and social spaces and cafes for all ages in green spaces; open and water spaces to be better maintained and used; activities on the water and spaces which celebrate the industrial and natural heritage.

Sources:

- Newham Survey 2018 and 2019
- Youth Assembly Report (2021)
- Community Assemblies 2019 and 2021
- Royal Docks and OAPF: Engagement Report (2019)

What does the data tell us?

- In 2019 London became the world's first 'National Park City'.
- Green space covers 13.1% of Newham, compared with 39% for London as a whole.
- Newham has 25 parks and numerous green spaces totalling approximately 396 ha of publically accessible green space.
- The borough has 16% tree cover which is the second lowest in London.
- People enjoy and use parks and open spaces in Newham, with 43% of residents visiting at least once a week.
- Newham has seen no reduction in Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) since 2006/07, when 0.37 ha were lost.
- Newham has the largest three largest rivers in London, with the Thames to the south within the Royal Docks area, River Lea in the west and to the east the River Roding.
- The Environment Agency (EA) monitors the biological river quality as part of the Water Framework Directive. Of the three rivers in Newham, the Lea is noted to have the worst overall water quality, with the EA 2019 assessment rating it 'Bad'. The Thames and the Roding are both rated 'Moderate', however neither river has improved its overall rating in the last 6 years.
- Research provides compelling, measurable evidence of the immense social, environmental and economic benefits that well-designed and integrated green infrastructure can have on community vitality, climate change mitigation, resource efficiency and desirability, property prices, longevity and health of a city.
- Greening (planting of trees) has a cooling effect on the environment, with an urban park being approximately 1oC cooler than a non-green site.
- Access to, and engagement with, the natural environment is associated with numerous positive health outcomes, regardless of social class, including improved physical and mental health, and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, risk of mortality and other chronic conditions.
- Improving the appearance of a park can increase usage and improve physical activity among children and older adults, which in turn can reduce risk of obesity.
- There is extensive cemetery provision in Newham, with a range of providers. The borough has 120.7 ha of burial space. However we know that for some communities there are a shortage of suitable burial sites.

Sources:

- [London Development Database](#)
- [Well Newham 50 Steps to a Healthier Borough. Part 2: The Evidence for Action](#)
- [Public Health England: Spatial Planning for Health. An evidence resource for planning and designing healthier places](#)
- [RTPI Mental Health and Town Planning](#)
- [GLA: An Audit of London's Burial Provision](#)
- [Arup: Cities Alive: Rethinking green infrastructure](#)

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework 2021

- Environment is one of the three overarching objectives which need to be balanced in order to deliver sustainable development.
- Local Plans should:
 - Conserve and enhance the natural local environment.
 - Recognise the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services.
 - Minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity.
 - Plan positively for shared open space for recreation, sport and physical activity.
 - Plan for access to safe and accessible green infrastructure.
 - Identify, map and safeguard local wildlife-rich habitats.
 - Take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- Policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities and the opportunities for new provision.
- Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless informed by an assessment which shows it is no longer needed.
- New focus on delivering tree lined streets

- Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified.

London Plan 2021

- Boroughs should prepare a Green Infrastructure Strategy and evidence to inform area-based strategies which identify green infrastructure assets, their function and potential function.
- Develop a borough specific Urban Greening Factor (UGF) to identify the appropriate amount of urban greening required by major developments. The London plan includes a London-wide UGF to encourage more and better urban greening. It assists boroughs and developers in deciding the right type of urban greening for a development.
- Local Plans should protect and enhance waterway infrastructure. Proposals should support river restoration and biodiversity improvements.
- Provision should be made for the different burial requirements of London's communities, informed by a needs assessment.

Relevant London Plan Chapters and Policies:

- Chapter 8: Green Infrastructure and Natural Environment
- SI 14 Waterways – Strategic role
- SI 16 Waterways – use and enjoyment
- SI 17 Protecting and enhancing London's Waterways
- Policy S7: Burial Space

London Environment Strategy 2018

- Maximise green infrastructure in order to support the aim of more than half of London being green and for canopy cover to be increased by 10 percent.

What new trends and objectives do we want to address?

- **Green and blue space for health:** Pillar 1 of [Newham's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy](#) sets out that in Newham, our measure of success will be the health, happiness and wellbeing of our resident's, rather than growth, productivity and land value. A growing body of research, and our lived experience through the COVID-19 pandemic, has demonstrated that access to nature and open space for fresh air, exercise and a quiet escape improves our physical and mental health and wellbeing. Good quality open space enhances our quality of life and makes Newham more attractive and safer.
- **Parks and green space for all:** During the COVID-19 pandemic many people have become more aware of the nature on their doorstep and more dependent on it for recreation, exercise, and social contact. However, the benefits of spending time in nature are not distributed equitably, with many losing out because of a lack of suitable, good-quality local provision or more complex societal barriers. For those without gardens, the pandemic has highlighted the inequality of access to open space, amplifying the value of shared public spaces. Research tells us that access to green space is a social justice issue. With barriers experienced due to religion, race, ethnicity, age, disability, and gender and LGBTQI+ identity all impacting on access to and enjoyment of public space.
- **Invest in green space for climate change:** As an urban borough, Newham's network of natural spaces act as a green lung; protecting biodiversity by giving much needed homes for wildlife (animals and flowers), reducing pollution, helping water management, moderating urban temperatures and providing a buffer against the climate and ecological emergency.
- **Re-naturing (or Re-wilding):** The concept of re-naturing seeks to create healthier, more socially cohesive, biodiverse and connected city ecosystems for people and wildlife. It is about letting nature take care of itself and restoring an ecosystem's functionality rather than about creating wilderness. It is about working with nature, with minimal intervention. There is increasing evidence to suggest that this can occur in urban areas too, with benefits for wildlife and people, even through small projects.
- **Delivering Biodiversity Net Gain:** The Environment Bill is an emerging legal framework that considers air pollution, water quality and nature conservation. From 2023 it is likely that, by law, a minimum 10 per cent gain will be required on developments that are over 0.1 ha, with such gains needing to be secured for at least 30 years. The Local Plan can also set priorities for biodiversity within Newham. For example, targets on creating woodland or enhancing ecological networks. Such priorities help developers to make meaningful contributions through Biodiversity Net Gain.
- **Putting an economic value to green space:** The Mayor of London is promoting a 'Natural Capital Account' for London. It can help to inform and improve decision-making by framing public green spaces as economic assets, and highlighting the range and value of benefits that they provide.
- **Newham – an urban playground:** London is a youthful city, with Newham the youngest of all the boroughs. Child and young person-friendly places are recognised in London and globally as an essential component of inclusive place making. The GLA's Making London Child-Friendly report states that "cities that are safe for children tend to be safe for everyone", whilst ARUP's Cities Alive publication argues that "the benefits of a child-friendly city go beyond children to add value to all citizens' lives, child-friendly urban planning is a vital part of creating inclusive cities that work better for everyone". Bringing these concepts into planning for green and blue spaces can help bring benefits for everyone.



- **How open space is delivered and managed – raising expectations:** New public spaces in London are increasingly privately owned, which has led to some restrictions on how spaces are used and confusion around responsibilities and maintenance. The GLA's emerging Public London Charter consists of eight principles which are directed to the users, owner and manager of public spaces. The aim of the Charter is to ensure that London's public spaces are safe, accessible, inclusive, attractive, well-connected and easy to understand, well maintained and service. The funding and management of the borough's green and blue spaces is of fundamental importance. Whether publicly or privately owned, open spaces should be managed to be welcoming to all and provide amenities, in particular spaces for sport, play and to socialise, that reflect local needs.

Sources:

- [Towards a Better Newham: COVID-19 Recovery Strategy](#)
- [Newham Climate Emergency Action Plan](#)
- [Newham Social Integration Strategy](#)
- [Well Newham 50 Steps to a Healthier Borough. Part 2: The Evidence for Action](#)
- [Public Health England: Spatial Planning for Health](#)
- [Urban Greening for Biodiversity Net Gain: A Design Guide](#)
- [Using Green Infrastructure to protect people from air pollution](#)
- [Draft Public London Charter](#)
- [Natural capital accounts for public green space in London](#)
- [Making London Child-friendly. Designing Places and Streets for Children and Young People](#)
- [Arup, Cities Alive: Designing for Urban Childhoods](#)



What evidence will we use?

Green Infrastructure Strategy with supporting Parks and Green Spaces Plan, Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local Urban Forest Plan:

- This will be informed by a green and blue infrastructure needs assessment and will set out where Newham's green and blue spaces will be delivered and protected.
- It will inform biodiversity, open and blue space policies, guided by an up-to-date picture of our needs (from analysis of our existing green and blue assets and population requirements).
- It will help us to identify the size, type and location space needed, reflecting local access and identify areas of underuse and highlight opportunities for improving connectivity, access and quality.
- Consider borough-specific targets or standards (Biodiversity Net Gain / Urban Greening Factor / Natural Capital).

Play and informal recreation needs assessment:

- An audit of existing play and informal recreation opportunities to identify the quantity, quality and accessibility of play and informal recreation provision.
- This work will inform a strategy on play and informal recreation facilities and opportunities which will be supported by Local Plan policy.

Characterisation Study:

- The Characterisation Study will help to identify the 15 minute neighbourhoods which make up our borough. Working with residents, this piece of work will help to better understand how Newham's neighbourhoods are served by existing open spaces.

Burial space needs assessment:

- An audit of existing provision and opportunities for the re-use of burial space, taking account of the fact that different faith groups have different needs for burial provision.
- Work with neighbouring boroughs and sub-regionally to identify and address the requirements and to tackle burial space shortages within the sub-region.





Proposed policy changes:

- 1. Access to green and blue spaces:** Emerging evidence will inform our approach to a Newham Open Space Standard. This will set out the minimum open space standard per population we would like to see for Newham. We will then use our evidence base to identify areas of the borough which are deficient and propose policy and allocation proposals to reduce these deficits.
- 2. Explore the metric of ‘functionality’, how to apply and measure it.** Our evidence base will consider what ‘no net loss of functionality’ means when protecting green and blue space and whether our current approach is sufficient. Should we not have enough open space, we may seek to protect all open space and not just its broader function or protect it in certain locations. We will need to balance this against the requirements to deliver more homes and other uses. However, it could be that a development may reduce the amount of open space, but in doing so improve the quality of that space as a place for our communities to enjoy, be a more biodiverse habitat for wildlife and help address the climate emergency.
- 3. A Newham’s approach to 10 percent Biodiversity Net Gain.** Newham is an urban area with much of our development occurring on brownfield sites with limited existing biodiversity. As such, how a 10 percent net gain benefits a borough like ours is very different to those other parts of the country which have higher a biodiversity baseline. We will therefore consider the benefits of introducing a requirement for a higher Biodiversity Net Gain percentage.
- 4. A Newham Urban Greening Factor (UGF).** Urban greening provides a wide range of benefits for air quality, noise, urban heat island effect, rainwater run-off, biodiversity, recreation and health and wellbeing. The London Plan recommends pan-London interim UGF target scores. Using our emerging evidence base, we will explore introducing a Newham-specific UGF, one which is tailored to local circumstances and which helps address the climate emergency.
- 5. Strengthen the link to air pollution and improvements to biodiversity and green infrastructure interventions.** Consider providing guidance on the location and selection of species for landscaping to maximise impact in terms of removing air pollutants. Vegetation selection can play an important role at a regional scale but the main policy guidance will be on how vegetation at a street scale can be used to control the flow of pollutants.
- 6. Specific guidance on aviation and biodiversity.** Located in Newham, London City Airport can comment on and seek to restrict the type of urban greening on new developments. This is to discourage birds in areas close to the airport or under the flight path as this can lead to bird strike. Despite this, the current Local Plan is silent on the airport’s impact on the biodiversity measures a scheme can deliver. We will try to explore this in our emerging evidence and provide greater guidance on what is and isn’t possible in these locations. We will also develop better monitoring of the types of urban greening which is being permitted in the areas impacted by the airport.

- 7. A public realm management plan requirement:** Policy will set out how we will ensure that our green and blue spaces are designed to be welcoming, accessible and maintained over time. We could require new green and blue spaces to meet and deliver the draft Public London Charter, or we could develop a Newham-specific approach. This could be secured through a legal agreement linked to the planning permission (such as an s106 agreement).
- 8. Promote the co-design of green and blue spaces:** We will explore how to meaningfully involve residents in the design of green and blue space and how to involve communities in the ongoing decision making which takes place once a new green or blue space is delivered.
- 9. Clarifying the priorities for our blue spaces:** Newham has a significant number of water spaces, including the Royal Docks. These spaces provide significant habitats for wildlife, as well as unique visual amenity which give many parts of Newham a specific identity. There are also opportunities for leisure uses and activities both on and around the water. These different uses need to be balanced. Policy could set out guidance to deliver this balance, for example it could set out what we consider to be water dependant activities and where different uses should be located.
- 10. Burial space:** We will reflect on the findings of the needs assessment to consider potential suitable locations for new burial space, both within Newham and in other places accessible to our communities. In doing this, we will consider Newham's built environment and the needs for other land uses.

- 11. Create a new policy structure:** Some of the policies in this chapter overlap and repeat. It is proposed to have instead two policies, one focused on green spaces the other on blue spaces. Each policy will consider protection, enhancement, accessibility, connectivity and recreational value, our approach to management and maintenance and importantly and delivery. In addition, we are considering the introduction of new policies to set out further detail on particular aspects of blue and green infrastructure:
 - a. **An urban greening policy:** set out Newham's approach to Biodiversity Net Gain and will explore an Urban Greening Factor for Newham.
 - b. **Policy for trees:** to increase the number of trees and overall canopy cover. A new policy to set out in greater clarity our approach to the borough's trees. We will seek to reduce the loss of mature and semi mature trees. Appropriate trees should be designed into developments from the outset. Newham's emerging 'Local Urban Forest Plan' will inform decisions on planning applications.
 - c. **Policy for play:** guidance on child friendly design. A new policy provide clear direction and guidance on play and informal recreation. Based on an up-to-date assessment of need, we will encourage developments to provide new or enhanced outdoor sports facilities, playing pitches and child and young person play and recreation provision. This will include a requirement for accessible and inclusive playground equipment. We will work with the young people in our borough to co-design our approach to this policy.



You tell us

- Do you agree with the proposed changes?
- Are there other changes we should consider?
- Is there anything missing?
- What do you think the priorities for our green spaces should be?
- What do you think the priorities for blue spaces should be?

