



Copers Cope Area Residents' Association



7 January 2021

To: Cllr William Huntington-Thresher, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services
Cllr Will Harmer, Chair of the Environment and Community Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Michael Tickner, Environment and Community Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee & Copers Cope Ward Councillor
Peter McCready, Project Officer Bromley Council

cc:

Stephen Wells, Copers Cope Ward Councillor
Russell Mellor, Copers Cope Ward Councillor
Christine Harris, Kelsey and Eden Park Councillor
Diane Smith, Kelsey and Eden Park Councillor
Peter Dean, Kelsey and Eden Park Councillor
Ian Dunn, Clock House Ward Councillor
Vanessa Allen, Clock House Ward Councillor
Josh King, Clock House Ward Councillor
Kevin Brookes, Penge and Cator Ward Councillor
Kathy Bance, Penge and Cator Ward Councillor
Simon Jeal, Penge and Cator Ward Councillor

Re Feedback on the Open Space Strategy

Dear Cllr Huntington-Thresher, Cllr Harmer, Cllr Tickner, ward Cllrs and Mr McCready

We are writing on behalf of the Copers Cope Area Residents' Association (CCARA) and the West Beckenham Residents' Association (WBRA), which between us have over 1750 paid up members across Beckenham wards. The Beckenham Green Friends Group is part of CCARA.

Our Associations welcome the strategy for Open Spaces. A review of all our open space sites and their potential could not be more timely. We are most supportive of increasing biodiversity and investing in open spaces to increase their amenity and use. We are very happy to work with the Council and Id Verde in support of these aims.

www.coperscope.org.uk & www.westbeckenhamra.org

To protect and promote the interests of residents in matters of local concern.

CCARA, founded in 1935, covering central and northern Beckenham.

WBRA, founded in 1945, covering parts of Kelsey and Eden Park, Clock House and Penge and Cator.

Consultation may not be sufficient

The consultation was launched by the Council on its website press release of 12 November. In our opinion the Council website does not have an effective enough reach and so many local people may not be aware of this. (Unfortunately the press release missed our Express Review newsletter that goes out in hard copy to 1750 households.) It was disappointing that information on the consultation was not included in the Environment Matters Winter 2020 edition that the Council delivered to many households across the borough - this was a wasted opportunity which would have increased public engagement on the Open Space Strategy. Further opportunities to raise awareness in the Leader of the Council's e-newsletter on 4 Dec and 14 Dec were also missed.

We mention this as open spaces have never been more important than in this time of pandemic. COVID-19 will change the way we live forever and increased accessibility and usage of open spaces are issues of importance to local people now, more than ever before. It would be helpful if the Council could time consultations of high importance to coincide with its own publications (especially where these are delivered in hardcopy) to maximise awareness and feedback responses.

Public health and open spaces

The importance of open spaces and outdoor activity have been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has shown that even in parts of the borough considered well-endowed with green spaces there is not enough outdoor space. With more and more high density housing being built in towns like Beckenham, with every inch of a plot being used right up to the boundary line narrowing the ambient space in the public realm, and with the loss of gardens and small pockets of green space to parking and development, the Open Space Strategy should have a clear objective to **increase the Open Space** in the borough. This is missing from the strategy document.

Investment in open spaces must be viewed in the long term, with short term costs being offset in reduction in public health costs. The Open Space Strategy should seek to maintain, promote and increase usage of open spaces and increase outdoor activity to support physical and mental health.

Repurposing of open spaces

The disposal or repurposing of any public open space is of great concern. **Our Associations oppose any disposal of open public space.** Open spaces (of all shapes and sizes) that are currently not well used should be enhanced to increase usage and amenity in the public realm. Green and open spaces are the lungs of our locale and they must be protected.

Any disposal or repurposing should not be done before full and proper consultations, on a case-by-case basis with local people, are conducted. With the best of intentions such consultation cannot be achieved through Press Releases and Ward Councillor engagement. There needs to be comprehensive consultations with community groups, stakeholders and residents which pro-actively encourage engagement in order for people to be allowed a

voice before schemes are approved and enacted. Ensuring local people are kept informed in a meaningful way will ensure the reputation of the overall Open Space Strategy and its aims.

The recognition of the value of the smallest pieces of open space does not appear to be included in the Strategy. There are hundreds of these postage-stamp-sized spaces across the Borough that are at first glance often hardly noticed, but which play a vital part in retaining intervals of open space in the built environment. It's essential they are retained and maintained as a whole to enhance our neighbourhoods.

1% reduction in maintenance budget

Our Associations cannot support any reduction in parks maintenance budgets..

There are not enough funds currently. A 1% reduction equates to a minimum of 2% in real terms, taking account of the projected inflation rate, rising to 3% by 2025. A walk through what was previously considered the boroughs flagship park, Kelsey Park, will show how desperately maintenance is needed in the playground, for the rotting fences and for a lake that needs dredging. CCARA also runs the Beckenham Green Friends Group and has first hand experience of the budget pressures already on IdVerde in regards to park maintenance. For example, the hardstanding that fronts the high street is not regularly swept and the litter that accumulates here diminishes the appearance of the town.

10% for increasing biodiversity

A 10% target is not enough. This needs to be doubled at minimum. **Bromley borough can do better than this!**

Local residents would like to see more trees planted across Beckenham. Our Associations can assist in finding locations. Further, when street trees die, or are damaged, we would like the Council to commit to replacing them as soon as practical and for there to be a commitment to maintaining them (we've noticed across Beckenham the strangulation of young trees by ties that haven't been adjusted).

Planted-up tree pits have become popular in some roads in Beckenham. We would like the Council and ID Verde to work with residents, residents groups and friends groups to identify more land and tree-pits that can be used to plant pollinator gardens. We request the Council implement an easily accessible outreach scheme for tree planting and other biodiversity initiatives. Our Associations would be keen to work with the Council on this.

Commercialisation of parks and open spaces

Parks and open spaces belong to the people. They should be held in perpetuity for local communities and not be viewed as a commercial opportunity. Whilst we support assessing commercial opportunities in open spaces as they arise and providing those opportunities where they bring amenity and enhancement to open spaces, our Associations do not believe that increasing revenue through commercial activity should be an explicit objective of the strategy. Rather, increasing the amenity and services offered in open spaces should be the objective.

Active travel and cycling

We would like to see the strategy focus on how open spaces can support active travel and cycling. Open spaces offer safe and healthy links for journeys that are little utilised. More could be done here to offer sign posting, additional lighting, improved security, segregated cycling, walking routes etc. Families with younger children have few off-street places to cycle across the borough - dedicated spaces for this are welcome.

Accessibility

The strategy does not mention accessibility for those with a disability or impairment. Nor do the Partners include representation from an accessibility or disability stakeholder. This omission must be rectified. We need all our open spaces to be as accessible as possible

For some people the lack of toilets can often dissuade them from going out to open spaces, because of the fear of 'getting caught short' or not having conveniences for children. The Council must consider the **provision of toilets** in or nearby open spaces, under the community scheme or otherwise.

Amenities in open spaces

There is so much scope here to improve the offer in our open spaces. Such facilities include **water fountains**, cafes, toilets, **litter & recycling bins**, children's playgrounds, sports equipment, allotments & gardening plots, outdoor gyms, pocket parks, exercise circuits as well as space for safe walking and running. The local community are best placed to make recommendations and we hope the Council and Id Verde will actively engage community groups like ours to seek views from local people.

Basic amenities such as water fountains, proper lighting, litter bins and recycling bins should be given priority and a mechanism set up to allow local people to report where there are gaps in these.

Lighting and security also needs to be addressed. Local people should feel safe to use parks in the early evening during the winter months. Consideration should also be given to sports pitches/courts that are not currently lit.

We look forward to being asked for our active engagement in support of Open Spaces throughout the strategy implementation period.

Yours Sincerely

Chloe-Jane Ross, Chair, Copers Cope Area Residents' Association

Marie Pender, Chair, West Beckenham Residents' Association

Alan Old, Committee Member for Planning, Copers Cope Area Residents' Association