



The countryside charity  
London

# Green defenders

Saving London's parks and green spaces



Protecting London's Green Spaces, March 2024

The Campaign to Protect Rural England, London Branch, is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered in England number 1200094 and registered charity number 802622

London only has half the green space it needs for a population its size. We must protect what we have.

The London Mayor and boroughs should ensure the public's love for London's parks and green spaces is reflected in the way they are managed and protected. They should:

- prevent developments which would result in loss of vital parks and green spaces
  - help map all vulnerable green sites
- support local groups to get fenced-off or derelict sites back into use
  - strengthen planning protections in the London Plan
- support Boroughs to bring brownfield sites forward for development so green fields are not targeted.

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## Summary and foreword

Since CPRE London published our 2022 report [Forever Green](#), detailing over fifty threats to London's parks and green spaces, we have continued to monitor risks and supported local residents in their campaigns to protect local green spaces across the capital. We are also supporting the hundreds of volunteer-led groups who befriend green spaces and look after them.

Two years on, we've seen successes. But too many sites have been lost, many are still in danger and new sites have come under threat. Nowhere is completely safe and we are dealing with threats to Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land, formally protected green spaces and registered Greens, historic parks, recreation grounds, sports fields, nature reserves and housing estate green spaces. These are the green spaces which should be enjoyed by millions of Londoners and which support a huge diversity of wildlife. They also play a vital role in adapting to the impact of climate change, reducing flooding and cooling the city.



There are several reasons for this: the law is complex, the planning system is weak, local communities are left on the outside of too many decisions, and it's hard for individuals to make a case against powerful, wealthy landowners and developers. Green spaces often lack a clear identity which makes them vulnerable. Added to this, we face the myth that building on the Green Belt will somehow solve the crisis in affordable homes.

The results are clear to see. Too many valuable green spaces are being lost or damaged by building projects or neglect. We are also seeing pressure mounting to remove the protections designed to hold back environmentally-damaging urban sprawl. There can be no excuse for local councils altering Local Plans to release protected land for building when so many previously developed sites would benefit from new development.

This is all happening, despite everything we learned about the importance of local green space during the pandemic and the widespread availability of brownfield land in London.

Whether the site under threat is a popular public park or neglected open space, we help local residents fight to save them or take action to stop them coming under threat in the first place.

Londoners often unknowingly rely on these individuals or 'green defenders' to protect important public rights. But it shouldn't be this way.

This report calls on the London mayor to take a lead in protecting London's green spaces and, with the boroughs, supporting local communities to protect and care for the green spaces that define so much of what makes life in London worth living. It also pays tribute to the volunteers, the Green Defenders, who stand up and speak out for the future of London's parks and green spaces. We are all in their debt.

Tony Burton CBE  
Chair, CPRE London  
February 2024

Like all of the green sites under threat in London, the campaign to save them is often left to a small group of individuals. Donna Zimmer is leading the campaign to save Crayford Marshes in Bexley which has been bought by developers. Home to rare birds and visited by seals, the site is a Metropolitan Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, and a flood plain.

# Lost .....

Twyford Abbey (Ealing)

**METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND**

New buildings and car parking space have been approved in the grounds of Twyford Abbey which are protected Metropolitan Open Land, a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and have a blanket Tree Preservation Order in place. The proposed heritage benefits of the scheme do not outweigh the enormous environmental damage that would be caused to this beautiful and unique area of woodland, which is one of the few green spaces in the area.

Kilburn Square Green Space (Brent)

**ESTATE GREEN SPACE**

In November 2023 Brent’s Planning Committee approved an infilling development on the Kilburn Square Estate which will involve the loss of mature trees and green space.

Part of Crystal Palace Park (Bromley)

**PUBLIC PARK**

**METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND**

Bromley Council approved new housing on a section of Crystal Palace Park, protected Metropolitan Open Land, to finance the regeneration of the rest of the park.

Peckham Green (Southwark)

**PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE**

Peckham Green was one of few local green spaces and for 20 years was a well-used and maintained as a park. However, Southwark Council applied to build on it and despite strong opposition by local residents the green has now been lost.

Orient Way Park (Waltham Forest)

**PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE**

Waltham Forest Council has approved a planning application to build on this popular green space. More than a hundred trees will be cut down to facilitate the development.

**BEFORE & AFTER:**  
Peckham Green in Southwark has now been lost to development.

Photos:  
[www.facebook.com/SavePeckhamGreen](https://www.facebook.com/SavePeckhamGreen)



# ..... and saved

Tooting Common (Wandsworth)

**PUBLIC PARK**

Wandsworth Council was planning to fence off and charge for access to a section of Tooting Common as part of a new commercial football facility. The proposal would have involved enclosing a 38,500 square foot area of the common in order to build a pay-to-play floodlit football facility behind an 80 yard long, 15-foot high mesh fence. However, after a flood of objections by concerned residents supported by CPRE London, a public inquiry refused the application in November 2022. Campaign Group: Tooting Common People

St Dunstan's Gardens (Ealing)

**PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE**

After almost 800 objections by local campaigners, Ealing Council rejected plans to build on this popular green space in 2022 because the site was designated as public open space and building on it would set “a harmful precedent for future development”.

A large section of Tooting Common, which is a ‘turn up and play’ pitch, was saved from being fenced off for ‘pay to play’ pitches.

Brownsell Green (Barnet)

**ESTATE GREEN SPACE**

Plans to build two blocks of flats on a community green space and children’s playground, in an area identified in the Barnet Local Plan as an area of open space deficiency, were abandoned by Barnet Council in August 2022 after strong local opposition.

Dovers Farm Green (Havering)

**PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE**

This much-loved green space had been the subject of numerous development applications since 2015. But after a successful campaign by local residents, Havering Council designated the site as a Village Green in May 2023, protecting it from future development.

Park Road Allotments (Hounslow)

**FOOD GROWING SITE**

Northumberland Estates submitted several applications to build on this tranquil wildlife haven and food growing space in Park Road, Isleworth. The latest proposal to build on the allotments was rejected by Hounslow after opposition by local campaigners and CPRE London. The landowner appealed the decision, but this too was rejected by the Planning Inspectorate in December 2023.



## Threats to Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) arising from Local Plan Reviews

### Hounslow Local Plan

#### GREEN BELT

Despite many brownfield sites being available, Hounslow council was proposing to release 184 hectares of Green Belt for development and to remove the designation from a further 375 hectares. Proposals to re-designate Green Belt as MOL have been dropped but vast areas of protected green fields which are critical to mitigating the 'heat island' effect of Heathrow Airport and managing rainwater, as well as providing vital green space for residents, remain under threat. We continue to highlight alternative sites such as the very large areas of surface car park surrounding the airport. Campaign Groups: [Friends of the River Crane Environment](#) and [Friends of Hatton Fields](#)

### Ealing Local Plan

#### GREEN BELT METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

The latest draft of the Local Plan proposes to change the designation of all Ealing's Green Belt sites from Green Belt to MOL, remove the protection entirely from one large Green Belt site and most worryingly to remove protection entirely from seven large MOL sites. CPRE London and local groups such as [Friends of Grove Farm](#), have strongly opposed the proposals.

### Enfield Local Plan

#### GREEN BELT

The next phase of public consultation on the Enfield local plan is expected to start in early 2024. The Council is proposing to release a huge area of Green Belt for new development, equivalent to over 500 football pitches. However, their proposals fail to recognise the substantial opportunities to regenerate and intensify brownfield sites in the borough. Evidence shows there is enough brownfield land to accommodate all the family and affordable homes needed in Enfield within medium-rise blocks at gentle density and with attractive shared open space. Campaign Groups: [Enfield Society](#) and [Enfield RoadWatch](#)

Aside from holding back urban sprawl, Green Belt provides space for much needed woodland, new habitat, recreation and much more.



## Threats to parks

Whitewebbs Park (Enfield)

GREEN BELT

PUBLIC PARK

NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT

Local resident and park user Sean Wilkinson (pictured) has mounted a legal challenge, with support from other park users, to Enfield Council's decision to lease a large section of Whitewebbs Park to Tottenham Hotspur, who wish to build a training facility there. Tottenham's plans would prevent public access to a large section of the park and result in the loss and destruction of natural surface and important habitat. Residents point out that the park was purchased by the local authorities with the intention it should be available for public amenity. They say it should not be leased to a wealthy private company, for exclusive use, as this will lead directly to loss of public amenity. Campaign Group: [Friends of Whitewebbs](#)

Norwood Grove (Croydon)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

PUBLIC PARK

Norwood Grove was once described as the most beautiful park in South London. But the 200-year-old Grade II-listed house and public gardens have been neglected. Residents are concerned that Croydon Council may sell of parts of the grounds for development.

New Road Park (Haringey)

PUBLIC PARK

New Road Park is managed by London Borough of Haringey estates management. But it has recently come under threat with a proposal to build flats on this much loved and well used local green space.

Campaign Group:

[friendsofnewroadpark@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofnewroadpark@gmail.com)

F1.Wimbledon Park (Merton/Wandsworth)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

PUBLIC PARK

The All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) wishes to expand the Wimbledon Tennis Tournament site into a section of Wimbledon Park which to date has been a private golf course with provision for public access. Plans include a new 8,000 seat stadium, 10 other private buildings, 9.4 kms of roads and paths and 38 tennis courts, none of which will be available to the public. Local campaigners point out this is protected Metropolitan Open Land, a Grade II\* listed park, also subject to restrictive covenants that it should never be built on, and that the development will have a devastating impact on the historic Capability Brown landscape. Although a small part of the land is being offered as a 'permissive' park, permission could be withdrawn at any time and no access will be allowed when tennis is played. A petition by Save Wimbledon Park opposing the plans has secured more than 13,000 signatures and there were more than 800 objections to the planning application. Merton Council's planning committee granted permission for the scheme in October 2023, but the following month Wandsworth Council rejected it. At the time of writing in February 2024 the London Mayor's office has called in the planning application for review.

Campaign Groups: [Save Wimbledon Park](#), the Wimbledon Society, Wimbledon Park Residents Association.

'Green defender' Sean Wilkinson in Whitewebbs Park in Enfield. Sean is taking Enfield Council to court, with the support of CPRE London, the Public Interest Law Centre and many local park users, to try to stop the sale of the park to wealthy football club Tottenham Hotspur, and defend the public's right to use the space.



## Threats to parks (continued)

Green Dale (Southwark)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND PUBLIC PARK  
NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT

A damaging scheme to build a new stadium for Dulwich Hamlet Football Club on Metropolitan Open Land at Green Dale, which is also SINC, was given permission by Southwark Council and will mean the loss of a large area of this park. A large free-to-use astroturf pitch will also be lost and a high, visually impermeable fence will obstruct views across the open space and beyond. This will significantly reduce its sense of openness.

West Ham Park (Newham)

PUBLIC PARK NATURE RESERVE / SINC /  
VALUABLE HABITAT

This 77-acre, Grade II listed park is owned and managed by City of London Corporation which has said it wants to develop blocks of flats on an area of the park which until recently was greenhouses and a plant nursery used to supply bedding plants. The Corporation says it needs the money but CPRE London and local campaigners are pointing out that all London parks are suffering from funding deficits. The space is also protected as part of the Park. And the area is already lacking in good quality green space. We say the site should be regenerated and returned to park as open land or as greenhouses reflecting the heritage of the site (from 1762-80 it was owned by Dr John Fothergill, a Quaker physician and noted botanist, who planted a famous botanic garden here). Campaign Group: [Friends of West Ham Park](#)

Victoria Tower Gardens (Westminster)

PUBLIC PARK

Despite being a Grade I listed Royal Park, this much-loved green space has been targeted as a site for the construction of a Holocaust Memorial which will mean the loss of a large portion of the park. CPRE London and other campaigners have fought to save the park, saying there are other more appropriate sites which would not involve loss of a park, for example at the Imperial War Museum. They point out the area is already saturated with monuments, over-crowded with visitors and deficient in green space. After planning permission was granted, campaigners managed to secure a public inquiry. But although the Government gave it the go-ahead, the High Court overturned the decision in April 2022 on the grounds that the London County Council (Improvements) Act 1900 imposes statutory protection of the park. However, the Government has indicated it may seek to change the 1900 Act, which would allow the scheme to go ahead and also have serious consequences for other parks across London. In January 2024 the BBC reported that 98-year-old Holocaust survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch told a Commons committee that the chosen location was "dangerous" and "impossible". The fight to save the park continues.

Campaign Group: [Save Victoria Tower Gardens](#)

Victoria Tower Gardens in Westminster.

Image: Andreas Praefcke, CC BY 3.0

<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>>, via  
Wikimedia Commons



## Threats to playing fields

Oakfields Sport Ground (Redbridge)

PLAYING FIELDS GREEN BELT

The popular grassroots club, Bealonians FC is at risk of losing its current home to make space for a West Ham United FC academy facility. The club's lease negotiations with the Redbridge Council were ceased, and according to campaign group Save Oakfield Society (SoS), Redbridge Council is in negotiations that could see part of the Oakfield site used as a West Ham Academy, effectively privatising a public amenity. Campaigners are calling for the land to be protected from development and to retain the public's rights to use it for future generations. Campaign Group: [Save Oakfield Society](#)

Imperial Fields (Merton)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND PLAYING FIELDS PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE

This site is threatened with development of a 6-storey block of 77 flats on Metropolitan Open Land which is also designated locally as Protected Open Land, is part of a Green Corridor and is sited within the Wandle Valley Regional Park. The plans include a large area of surface car parking on what is currently green space. Planning permission was granted in 2020 by Merton Council after the London Mayor chose not to intervene. Development has not yet begun. Campaign Group: [Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage](#)

Quaggy Playing Fields (Lewisham/Greenwich border)

PLAYING FIELDS METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

A number of sites in this patchwork of protected playing fields between Lee and Kidbrooke are still actively used as sports pitches. Some have legal covenants protecting them for public use. But some have been bought by developers and fenced off, some many years ago, some recently. One has already been lost to development. Most of these spaces are privately owned and designated as Metropolitan Open Land. The owners use these pitches as 'landbanks' with the idea of making profit through future development of land. Local campaigners are fighting for the sites to be brought back into public use, with one success, the Bowring Sports Ground, which now hosts AFC Lewisham, but the threat to other fields remains acute.

Campaign Group: [Friends of Quaggy Playing Fields](#)

Belvedere Road Playing Field (Bexley)

PLAYING FIELDS

In its finalised Local Plan, Bexley Council proposed development of a fenced-off playing field behind Belvedere Road. CPRE London continues to challenge this saying it should be brought back into use for public recreation.

Some members of Bealonians FC, a 600-member strong grass roots football club, facing eviction from their homes ground at Oakfield Playing Fields because Redbridge Council has announced it wishes to issue a lease to wealthy West Ham United Football Club to build its youth academy there.



# London playing fields

## Strategic hubs under threat and outdated records

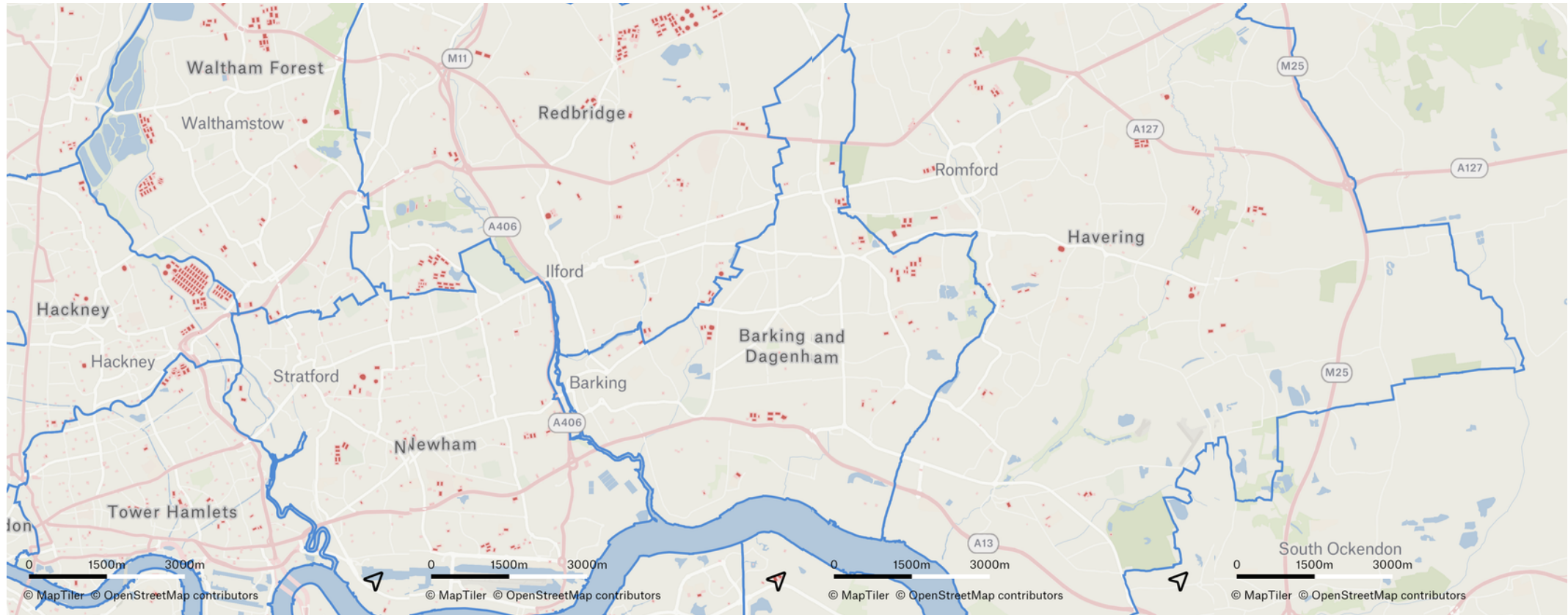
This [map](#) (a section is recreated below) of London's playing fields was created using Open Street Map data, a source of open data on London's green spaces. It reveals a lot, but it also hides a great deal.

It shows how incredibly important some big playing pitch hubs are, sometimes serving very large areas including outside of London. For example, cricket and football pitches at Oakfield Playing Fields (seen at the very top of the map just left of centre) serve the whole of East London and Essex.

Shown in this light, it is unimaginable that Oakfield is coming under threat for the second time in a decade, as we have detailed above.

Access to good quality, open data can be extremely important to ensuring playing fields, and indeed other green spaces serving other equally important functions, remain protected and available to the public. Data needs updating and improving.

When data is incomplete and out of date, it makes an overall assessment of provision versus need difficult. For instance, some privately owned sports facilities might be disregarded, even though they provide public amenity (i.e. are not for professional sports). Playing fields which are out of use are not marked as such. Open Street Map is crowd sourced so it's unsurprising it isn't complete or wholly current. But other sources are also incomplete or need updating. This needs to change.



London's playing fields. CPRE London used Open Street Map data to try to see where important sports hubs are located and to understand whether this open data set reflects the reality of what is available on the ground. Data is incomplete and does not match other sources.



## Threats to playing fields (continued...)

Leigh Road Sports Ground, Royston Gardens (and sites adjacent to River Roding) (Barking & Dagenham / Newham / Redbridge)

PLAYING FIELDS NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT  
METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

These two large areas of green space have been bought by developers and are disused and neglected with no public access. Local campaigners feel these sites are extremely vulnerable and could be subject to inappropriate planning applications in the near future unless action is taken. River Roding Trust has created a vision for the whole area called 'Edgelands' with a view to bringing the sites back into use to reduce the threat of future development.

Interestingly, Royston Gardens is now an important grassland habitat with a huge diversity and number of butterflies present, though is not recognised as a site of importance for nature conservation. Campaign Group: [River Roding Trust](#)

Disused playing fields and open land around Banbury Reservoir (Enfield / Waltham Forest border)

PLAYING FIELDS METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND GREEN BELT

Various playing fields around Banbury Reservoir have become derelict and disused, and one has been acquired by a developer, despite the fields being on protected land. A Green Belt site to the north is threatened with having its designation removed as part of the Enfield Local Plan review, which will leave it highly vulnerable to development. CPRE London is working to help local residents establish a campaign because of concern that the land and related public amenity will be lost. Campaign Group: [Banbury Reservoir Park](#)

Clitterhouse Playing Fields (Barnet)

PLAYING FIELDS METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Clitterhouse Playing Fields is a unique, historic, valued and tranquil urban grassland. However, Barnet Council are leasing the land to a developer (Argent) who are turning this public green space into a professional level, pay-to-play sports facility with artificial caged pitches and floodlighting. The planning application was approved by the Council in October 2023. Campaign Group: [Clitterhouse Green Not Greed](#)

Yiewsley Recreation Ground (Hillingdon)

PLAYING FIELDS METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Hillingdon Council has denied rumours it is planning to build on protected MOL at Yiewsley Recreation Ground but may build on a smaller section of green space that used to be a swimming pool and is protected by covenant for purposes of recreation. Campaign Group: [Yiewsley Matters](#)

Low Hall Playing Fields (Waltham Forest)

PLAYING FIELDS METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Waltham Forest Council was proposing to locate a new lido on Low Hall Sports Grounds though recently stated this is no longer planned. Low Hall fields are well-used and much-needed for sports. While the council has said it would work with sports clubs to find alternative facilities, some may not survive this disruption and relocation. If funding is available for a new lido we believe this should be put towards the creation of wild swimming ponds at the proposed East London Waterwork Park (a local campaign) or the creation of a lido at the site of the old Larkswood Lido in Chingford, closed in 1987. Most of that site is now a car park.



Royston Gardens - one of the many playing fields in London which have been fenced off and taken out of use, usually by developers or speculators who wait until they think local people have forgotten about them and then apply for planning permission. Sometimes these fields are in areas with acute need for playing pitches. Image: Google Maps

## Threats to nature reserves

Beddington Farmlands (Sutton)

[NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND](#)

This very large and important site was meant to be restored and opened to the public as a nature reserve: this was a condition attached to planning permission for an incinerator. But the land has since been neglected, the habitat is in decline and it remains closed to the public. Residents fear it will be lost forever if the planning conditions are not enforced so they are campaigning to ensure it is restored and opened up for public use.

Campaign Group: [Wandle Valley Forum](#)

Gorne Wood (Lewisham)

[NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT](#)

The Fourth Reserve Foundation is raising funds to save the closest site of designated Ancient Woodland to the City of London. Exactly 100 years ago, a section of the land was leased to local people and named the 'Dandy Fifth Park'. But in recent years the woods were sold into private ownership, local people were shut out, and the site is now being damaged and degraded. There is a risk it will be lost forever. The Foundation has been successfully running an adjacent nature reserve since 2018, serving the local community. They have now created [a vision for the Gorne Wood site](#) with objectives to re-wild; facilitate outdoor education; follow Ancient Woodland management; and connect Gorne Wood to the adjacent nature reserve via a heritage 'Brockley Green Walk' experience.

Campaign Group: [The Fourth Reserve Foundation](#)

Warren Farm (Ealing)

[NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND](#)

These disused playing fields, owned by Ealing Council, have been derelict for many years. For a time, the site was threatened with development of QPR's training ground. Local campaigners fought to save it as it had returned to nature and become home to diverse and rare species. In May 2022 a Public Consultation revealed an overwhelming majority of respondents wanted Warren Farm protected for its biodiversity and safeguarded as a Local Nature Reserve. At the time, the council appeared still to be considering whether the site should be returned to sports use. Happily, in February 2024, Ealing Council announced all of Warren Farm will receive Local Nature Reserve status, with sports being placed on neighbouring land owned by Imperial College. There are many steps yet to be taken but this is a hugely positive outcome for this area of importance for nature conservation.

Campaign Group: [Warren Farm Nature Reserve](#) The campaign petition can be signed [here](#).

[Beddington Farmlands](#). The owners were required to restore the wetlands and introduce public access, when they were given permission to build an incinerator on the site but they simply never did it.



## Threats to nature reserves (continued...)

Crayford Marshes (Bexley)

GREEN BELT

NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT

The Friends of Crayford Marshes are campaigning to save this much-loved green space located next to the Thames at the outer edge of South-East London is protected Green Belt and a nature reserve with considerable historic interest. But is now under threat from being built over having been bought by developers. The Friends of Crayford Marshes are determined to protect this wildlife haven with its many public footpaths through and around the marshes. They've been working with the RSPB, London Wildlife Trust, CPRE London, CPRE Kent and WWT to create '[A Vision for Crayford Marshes](#)' which was published in December 2023. Campaign Group: [Friends of Crayford Marshes](#)

Crossness Nature Reserve (Bexley)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT

The waste management company Cory, who own and run an incinerator on the adjacent site, want to expand and build a 'carbon capture' plant on the neighbouring nature reserve. The new plant will concrete over six acres of valuable grazing marshland habitat and stables visited by migrant birds such as wheatear and whinchat, as well as locally breeding barn owl & kestrel. Equally concerning, 'carbon capture' plant is strongly opposed by green campaigners who say it brings no environmental benefits, and the real way to reduce the carbon impact of London's waste is to improve London's very low recycling rate. Campaign Group: [Save Crossness Nature Reserve](#)

Grove Park railway cutting (Lewisham)

NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT

A series of protected green spaces with importance for nature conservation, this site has been subject to sale and planning applications bringing the whole area under threat. The landowner has, on several occasions, cleared the land in what can only be described as nature vandalism. Recognising its heritage and nature value, and its importance as a local park, local campaigners now want to give the area an identity as the 'Railway Children Park' referencing Edith Nesbit who lived nearby. Campaign Group: [Grove Park Neighbourhood Forum](#)

A wheatear photographed at Crayford Marshes.  
Image: Donna Zimmer



## Other threats to green spaces

Canal Club Community Garden (Tower Hamlets)

### COMMUNITY GARDEN

The council has submitted its own planning application to demolish a local Canal Club and encroach on the north bank of the canal. Over the past decade the occupants of Belmont Wharf have transformed the site from an industrial wasteland into a community garden and haven for wildlife. The garden's future remains uncertain despite promises from the Mayor of Tower Hamlets that he would protect it from development.

Campaign Group:

[twitter.com/canalcommunity](https://twitter.com/canalcommunity) [Canal Club Community Garden](#)

Baldwins Farm (Havering)

### GREEN BELT

A planning application to construct football pitches and a car park on Green Belt land at Baldwins Farm in Upminster, if approved, will have a significant adverse ecological impact on endangered wildlife such as the water vole and destroy priority habitat for Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank. Noise and light pollution from the football pitches is likely to disturb nearby wildlife such as bat species, while the potential use of fertilisers and pesticides on the pitches could lead to chemical runoff into nearby habitats and further endanger nature. More worrying, there is concern that no clear need has been established for these pitches and the scheme might be nothing more than a smokescreen for a landfill operation.

Whalebones (Barnet)

### PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT

This 10-acre green space in Barnet is rich in biodiversity and acts as a 'green lung' for the local area. It is supposed to be protected by a trust to preserve the land for agriculture and food production. However, we understand that the trustees want permission for a large housing development on the land, and having failed with one planning application, are now working on a second. The local community wants to protect the land from development and create a community focused horticulture operation, providing fresh healthy food for people locally. A planning application to develop part of the green space was submitted to Barnet Council in autumn 2023.

Love Lane Green (Croydon)

### METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

A community group has put years of work into transforming an area of wasteground in Croydon into a park, wildflower meadow, children's playground and food growing site. However, despite being designated as protected Metropolitan Open Land, Love Lane Green is now under threat. The landowner wants to build on the green space and the council has been unable to prevent the community from being evicted. The fight to save the garden continues. Campaign Group: [Friends of Love Lane Green on Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)

Cator Woodland (Bromley)

### METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Adjacent to Cator Park is a piece of Metropolitan Open Land which is rich in nature including slow worms, stag beetles, bats and a range of birds and butterflies. In June 2023, despite a Tree Preservation Order covering the whole site, 131 protected trees were cut down in what became widely known as the 'Bromley Tree Massacre'. Bromley Council subsequently ordered the landowner to replant the trees although this deadline has passed with no action taken meaning the council will likely lead on the planting and claim costs from the landowner or leaseholder. CPRE London is calling for heavy fines to act as a deterrent to other landowners who believe they can get away with large scale felling of protected trees.

Campaign Group: [The Friends of Cator Park and Alexandra Recreation Ground.](#)

Thames Water Depot (Waltham Forest)

### METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

This site was subject to a planning application some years ago which was eventually rejected. A local group came together to propose the site should be transformed into the East London Waterworks Park and even raised £1.5million to buy the site. However, the Department for Education, which owns the site, is now consulting on building a secure children's home on it, saying there is nowhere else in London to locate it. Campaign group: [East London Waterworks Park.](#)

Data Centre (Havering)

### GREEN BELT

Plans to build Europe's largest data centre on Green Belt land opposite Top Meadow Golf Course in Fen Lane, Upminster are currently being considered by Havering Council. An area of up to 390,000 square metres could be taken up by the data centre and associated equipment. The development would be permanent, irreversible and divert the land from its existing agricultural use. Local campaigners opposed to the scheme are concerned that the Council is considering the application through a Local Development Order, rather than a full planning application.

Campaign Group: [Friends of the Earth Havering.](#)

Goddington Park (Bromley)

### GREEN BELT

Bromley's planning committee recently approved an application for a new sports pavilion and access road on Green Belt land in Goddington. This was despite the council's planning officers recommending it should be refused due to the detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

## Other threats to green spaces

Hornsey Cricket Club (Haringey)

**METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND**

Plans to construct a large multi-purpose sports centre on protected Metropolitan Open Land in Haringey have been met with strong opposition from local campaigners who point out this is inappropriate development on protected land. They also fear it will have a significant impact on the openness of the open space and ultimately lead to further encroachment development.

Campaign Group: [Save Our Space N8](#)

Land behind Talbot Road and Francis Road (Southwark)

**NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT**

This tranquil nature reserve next to East Dulwich train station is a haven for wildlife and has remained undisturbed for many years. But despite being designated as a SINC, the reserve is currently under threat from a planning application.

Blackheath and Greenwich Bowling Club (Greenwich)

**COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE**

An enabling development to build four houses on this bowls club green in Blackheath, to fund the building of a new green and club house elsewhere, has been criticised by many residents who are concerned about the loss of community open space.

Walden Woods (Bromley)

**PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE / NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT**

Walden Woods is renowned for its biodiversity and aesthetic beauty. Badger setts have been found in the area. It is part of a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and remnant ancient woodland. Although the 2016 Local Plan secured Walden Woods as public open space, Bromley Council designated an adjacent area for educational purposes and is now proposing to build a 150 pupil SEN school. The Council has annexed part of the woods and granted a 150 year lease to Rivermead Inclusive Trust to provide the school. If building goes ahead, around a quarter of open space will be lost. The Department of Education cleared some ground in 2023 for a feasibility study but no planning application has yet been submitted. There are also fears that this might be the start of a wider encroachment on this precious woodland. Campaign Group: [Friends of Chislehurst Recreation Ground](#)

London's parks are London's countryside.  
Image CPRE London



## Infilling and threats to local estate green spaces

Often councils pursue 'infill' - where new housing blocks are built within existing estates, between existing blocks - as a means to delivering new council homes. If a council owns the land, it tends to make it easier and more financially viable than other options.

However, often this involves building over estate green spaces.

There is a very clear need for more social housing in London and there is a role for infilling. But inappropriate loss of community green space has been occurring with increasing regularity.

In recent years we have been asked to support a number of campaigns to save green spaces in housing estates where infill development is planned.

We highlighted more than thirty examples in our 2022 report on threats to green spaces in London entitled 'Forever Green'.

We have supported these campaigns because green and play spaces are vitally important and because we feel there are other, better ways, to enable the building of homes for social rent.

We understand most of those estate green spaces have now been built on. It is likely there are many more such cases across London currently being planned.

Infill should not leave estate residents without adequate green space and, while we understand the bind councils are in, we believe there are other options. We advocate that:

- Infill blocks should be built on 'grey space' i.e. car parks, superfluous roads, hardstanding, garages or derelict or disused buildings OR, if part of a bigger regeneration scheme, the estate reconfigured to retain adequate green space per person if that makes more sense
- Overall the intention should be that the quantum of green space is retained and the quality improved / amenity value increased
- Reference must be made to the borough green space standards when estates infilling is proposed i.e. the intention should be to ensure the standards are met within the locality
- Infilling designs should focus on retaining green space especially where it is well used e.g. ball courts BUT Where green space is not apparently well used, it should be reconfigured, redesigned or repurposed to make it more useful / better used (rather than making an assumption that it is of no use).

EC1 Voices protest against the loss of one of the few remaining open spaces in a densely populated part of Islington. A high density development proposed for the site, if it goes ahead, will lead to the loss of well-used, much needed and highly valued open space facilities. Sign their [petition](#).

There may be some estates where residents feel it is appropriate to use some of the surrounding green space for development. This could be shown by organising a ballot. In other cases, alternative sites or grey space can and should be used instead.

We also believe that the context - for example the continued loss of council homes under Right to Buy - needs to be brought into the wider debate on this issue, to avoid the over-simplification which has led some to believe we simply have to build over green spaces.

Green spaces, estate gardens included, are essential for everyone and all Londoners should feel the benefit.

### Finsbury Leisure Site (Islington) COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE / SPORTS PITCHES

The football pitches on the Finsbury Leisure Site are one of the few public open spaces in this part of Islington. But the council is planning to build over them as part of a development that will include the construction of an overbearing 18-20 storey high-rise block of flats. The current open space and pitches are extremely popular and vital for local residents' health and well-being. Although the council has said they will make new rooftop sports pitches, these will be smaller and, most importantly, the openness of the site - a fundamental and important characteristic of open space - will be entirely lost to all people using the pitches and living in or visiting the area.

Campaign Group: [EC1 Voices](#)



## Why are threats arising?

**Ownership structures and related legal powers and duties are diverse and often not well understood.** In many cases they have evolved over time as a result of ownership transfers and piecemeal legislative changes without proper consideration of the effects these have for the future protection of London's open spaces.

**In our experience, some councils fail to consider properly the powers and duties they have** in relation to open spaces.

**Local communities lack the resources to challenge threats to open spaces** and if they have no funding or support to enable them to navigate planning and other processes or pursue legal action, it can result in a lack of effective public scrutiny of councils' decisions.

**The planning system doesn't provide adequate protection.** Despite welcome policies in the London Plan, there are weaknesses in national planning policy that leave the system open to greater challenge. It is too easy to argue that building on a green space is 'sustainable development' or needed for major infrastructure development then that can trump protections.

**There is relentless pressure from developers.** Planning permission significantly increases land value and any land in London is already worth a great deal. So developers acquire green sites and 'landbank' them with a view to applying for planning permission at a later date. They then apply pressure to remove protections usually paying specialist PR firms to work with local stakeholders and the council.

**'Sell the park to pay for the park'.** At least one threat has arisen recently because the organisation which manages the park says it cannot afford to maintain it, so needs to sell part of it to pay for maintenance. But all parks in London are suffering from tight budgets: selling off parks to pay for maintenance is not the answer. Once it's gone, it's gone forever.

**Failure to use brownfield land.** National and London planning policies state 'brownfield' (previously developed) sites should be used before greenfield sites for new development. London has plenty of brownfield land but boroughs still fail to prioritise these sites for development or to work with owners and developers to bring them forward. More powers to support this are also needed.

**Private land: public amenity - sold to speculators.** Many of London's protected green spaces are privately owned but used for public recreation, usually by grass roots sports clubs. Sometimes covenants protect the land for this purpose. But - and this is now a huge problem - owners sell the land to speculators or developers, take it out of use and fence it off, and hope eventually to gain planning permission. A cycle of decline ultimately leads to it being developed.

**Dereliction and neglect.** Too many green space sites in London have fallen into disuse and become derelict. Often this is deliberate: the owners, whether a private company, individual or local authority, might allow the site to be neglected with a view to gaining planning permission later. If it can be demonstrated, as a result, that the site is not providing public amenity, it might then be easier for them to argue it is not needed. Neglect creates a cycle of decline and is a well-understood path to loss of green space.

**Outdated classifications and lack of clear identity.** This is adding to problems, enabling exploitation by public authorities and commercial interests who take advantage when sites seem abandoned.

**School development.** Historically, many green spaces in London have been lost to school development and these pressures continue. The option of expanding school capacity on existing brownfield sites is unfortunately not often considered. This is short-sighted given school rolls can increase and decrease quite dramatically over time, so boroughs find they have too much school capacity, having just built over a green space to build a new school. Too often the London Mayor gives a free pass to schools being development on Metropolitan Open Land when other development wouldn't be allowed.

**Incremental development.** One small building or change to surfacing can often lead to expansion of buildings in a park. Sometimes land is converted to hardstanding for car parking, for example, and, over time, it starts to appear as if it is no longer actually part of the park. This can then be exploited and used to justify the case for new building.

**Right-to-buy and estate regeneration.** Over many years, the Right-to-buy council homes, with no replacement, has meant council housing stock has been substantially depleted. Estate regeneration or 'infill' development on London's council estates is a means by which boroughs, who own the land, can make the building of new, much-needed social housing financially viable. This is increasingly common around London and can mean the loss of valued green or communal open space on estates. Many more truly affordable homes also need to be coming forward on other sites as part of commercial development.

**Professional sport or public park?** The close relationship between many sports clubs and borough councils sometimes means they collaborate to take over protected land (Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land) and even public parks. We believe selling off green spaces used for public amenity, or restricting their use for professional sports or commercial use, is highly questionable, short sighted and potentially illegal.

## What can you do?

Whatever the reason a site is coming under threat, the solution invariably lies with communities being engaged with a site. Even iconic locations like Hampstead Heath only exist today as a result of historic, hard-fought campaigns.

We recognise this and support the London Friends of Green Spaces Network, helping create and grow volunteer-run park friends groups. These groups champion their local park, ensure it is a well-used and loved and, if necessary, spring into action if a threat arises.

- Join your local park friends group: find details at [GoParksLondon](#). Or start a new one: advice available from [Parks Community](#).
- Ask landowners, including councils, to register and protect sites as a [Town or Village Greens \(TVG\)](#).
- Identify neglected green sites in your area and tell us about them. Consider advocating for the site to become a park, nature reserve or sports pitch.
- Submit [nature records](#) with a view to gaining nature protection designations such as SINC or SSSI for the site.
- Get involved with neighbourhood planning to write planning policies for your local area; or campaign for land to be designated as Local Green Space or Metropolitan Open Land.

## What should the London Mayor do?

**Safeguard public rights in relation to green spaces.** The law protecting parks is complex which can enable authorities and commercial interests, sometimes working hand in hand, to take advantage of loopholes and avoid public scrutiny.

**Prevent developments which would result in loss of vital parks and green spaces.** The Mayor has a statutory role in relation to protected land but decisions lack transparency and the opportunities for public involvement are much limited. This needs to change. The Mayor should show leadership and not allow weak justifications for loss of protected green spaces to prevail.

**Help map vulnerable green sites and support local groups update official records and bring out-of-use sites back into use.** This is critical so more spaces don't come under threat. If identified now, sites can be purposed for new habitat or recreation. The Mayor should also support a volunteer effort to update official records because outdated and incomplete data is creating vulnerability.

**Strengthen planning protections via the London Plan.** The London Plan should have more ambitious policies to increase the area of protected green space, ensure more equal access to green space wherever you live, steer development towards brownfield sites and guide boroughs to reclaim grey space and bring disused green space back into use.

## What should London boroughs do?

Invest in parks, support park friends groups and promote and champion borough parks; ensuring parks are well maintained, improved and valued.

Identify derelict and neglected green spaces in the borough and work with the community to update official records and bring them back into use especially if they are at risk.

Ensure housing estate 'infill' schemes don't leave residents with inadequate green space; create more green and communal open space by turning nearby minor roads and wasted public realm into 'streetparks'.

Protect parks and green spaces including via the Local Green Space designation; not sell, permit development on, or commercialise parks and green spaces either to raise money or benefit private or exclusive interests; respect public amenity covenants on private land.

Create new parks in areas with not enough green space by converting roads into 'streetparks'.

Boroughs should use Local Plans to introduce designations for nature recovery and flood protection, particularly for areas of Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land. They should introduce policies to make better use of all public realm including 'grey space' i.e. poorly used roads, car parks and other hardstanding, which can take up hundreds of hectares of space in a single borough.

## CPRE London's commitment to London's parks and green spaces

- ✓ We support local groups, helping them save vital parks; and supporting them to create new parks from neglected and derelict green spaces.
- ✓ We identify the reasons spaces are coming under threat and work to tackle the causes.
- ✓ We champion parks, green spaces, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Belt, showing why they are so important.
- ✓ We publicise threats and advocate for political commitment, new policies and legislation to tackle them.

CPRE London works to save and promote green spaces in Greater London, and to make our capital city a better, greener and healthier place for everyone to live in, work in, and enjoy.

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