



The countryside charity
London

Cashing-in on London's Parks & Countryside



Protecting London's Green Spaces, January 2026

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

"Staggeringly, ten percent of public land in Britain has been lost since 1979.* Whitewebbs Park in Enfield is one of the public parks currently under threat. There a 450 year-old oak tree was brutally butchered and Spurs' plans to develop the park involve cutting down 207 trees, including veteran and mature trees, and taking over most of the park for their elite private use.

It is absolutely essential for us to protect these trees and people's access to nature. Campaign to Protect Rural England London is assisting the fight to save Whitewebbs and other sites currently under threat and it is clear to me that it is more important than ever to protect our parks and green spaces, before it's too late."

Dame Judi Dench



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Summary and foreword

Since we published our 2024 report, *Green Defenders*, detailing threats to London's parks and green spaces, we have continued to monitor risks and support local residents in their campaigns to protect local green spaces across the capital.

Two years on, there have been 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, and the local campaigners we work with, are dealing with over fifty threats to Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land, many parks and recreation grounds, sports fields, nature reserves, and other green spaces.

In the past two years, we have seen two particular challenges:

1. **Parks for Sale.** The law courts confirmed in a judgement that councils have unfettered powers to sell parks. Currently, the public's rights to enjoy three major London parks, Wimbledon Park, Whitewebbs Park and Greendale Park, are set to be lost. Elsewhere, parks are being turned into commercial event spaces.

2. **Damaging government policies.** The government has caved to lobbying to remove protections designed to hold back environmentally-damaging urban sprawl, introducing a 'grey belt' policy which is now enabling developers and speculators to cash-in on the countryside, while vast amounts of brownfield land lie idle. In recent months, developers have put forward two large sites in Bromley's Green Belt for building; and Government announced a 'new town' to be built in Enfield's Green Belt. These sites are productive farmland and heritage landscape. We expect many more to come forward. And yet there is no shortage of brownfield land in London, much of which is ready to build on. Planning permission is in place for 300,000 homes in London. That's a ten-year supply of brownfield land. And there is plenty more.

There are other problems. The law is complex, the planning system is weak, and it is hard for individuals to make a case against powerful, wealthy landowners and developers. Green spaces often lack a clear identity which also makes them vulnerable.

Added to this, housebuilding is being held up as the answer to the housing crisis. But this is smoke and mirrors. We are building homes in London, faster than population is rising. And, in any event, this is a crisis of affordability, and building homes does not make them cheaper. Even the Office for Budget Responsibility has said that building the 1.5 million homes government has promised under its 'build baby build' campaign will only bring prices down by 0.8%.

The results of new policies and commercialisation of our parks are clear to see.

We are losing our countryside and our urban green spaces. This is all happening despite everything we know about the importance of parks and despite the widespread availability of brownfield land in London.

Whether the site under threat is a popular public park, Green Belt agricultural land, or neglected fields, CPRE London helps local residents fight to save them or take action to stop them coming under threat in the first place. The charity has also worked hard to show that building on green space is unnecessary and cannot solve the housing crisis.

There can be no excuse for councils to sell parks or rent them for commercial use. Nor any excuse for local councils to release protected land for building when so many previously developed (brownfield) sites would benefit from new development.

These are the green spaces which should be enjoyed by millions of Londoners, which support a huge diversity of wildlife, and which are crucial to adapting to reducing flood risk, cooling the city in the face of climate change and producing food locally.

This report details current threats, discusses the causes in more detail and sets out what you can do to help.

CPRE London would also like to take this opportunity to thank and pay tribute to the volunteers, the Green Defenders, who stand up and speak out for the future of our countryside, and London's parks and green spaces. We are all in their debt.



(R) Threatened Green Belt land in Barnet: Rob Gowar
Cover photos: (L) Kitty Clarke (R) Patricia Desso

Saved

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, are extremely popular and are vital for local residents' health and well-being. Islington council was planning to build over them as part of a large development. But the council withdrew its plans following a determined community campaign, during which residents, sports groups, local organisations and charities including CPRE London, raised serious concerns about the loss of open space in one of London's most densely populated boroughs. Campaign Group: [EC1 Voices](#)

Grove Park Health Club development (Lewisham and Bromley)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

A proposal to build on a nature-rich area of Metropolitan Open Land on the border of Lewisham and Bromley was withdrawn by the developer in July following strong opposition from local residents and CPRE London.

Barnet Playing Fields (Barnet)

GREEN BELT

PLAYING FIELDS

PUBLICLY OPEN SPACE

Barnet Playing Fields is a popular nine-acre green space, which has been used by the whole community for many years. But Barnet Football Club wants to build a new stadium on the fields, which would leave local families, joggers, dog walkers, cricketers, friends and grassroots football clubs with nowhere to go. In July 2025, following a successful local campaign, supported by CPRE London, Barnet Council voted against the proposal and said it has no plans to sell or lease the playing fields. In October 2025 Barnet FC launched an appeal against the Council's decision to protect the fields, which demonstrates that no green space in London is ever completely safe. Campaign Group: [Save Barnet Playing Fields](#)

Lammas Park (Ealing)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Plans to demolish the old Lammas Park Lodge and build a 6-storey block of flats in its place would have had an adverse impact on the openness of this green space which is also designated as MOL. The plans have now been withdrawn following objections from CPRE London and local residents.

Low Hall Playing Fields (Waltham Forest)

PLAYING FIELDS

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Waltham Forest Council was proposing to build a new lido on Low Hall playing fields, which are well-used and much needed for sports. But following budget constraints and strong opposition from local residents and CPRE London, the project was cancelled.

Royston Gardens (Redbridge)

GREEN BELT

Plans to concrete over one of the last remaining riverside meadows on the lower river to make a crazy golf course have now been withdrawn following objections from local people and organisations including CPRE London and the River Roding Trust. The meadow, near to Redbridge Roundabout, was historically a sports field, but following abandonment became incredibly nature-rich with one of the highest butterfly counts local ecologists had ever seen. Campaign Group: [River Roding Trust](#)



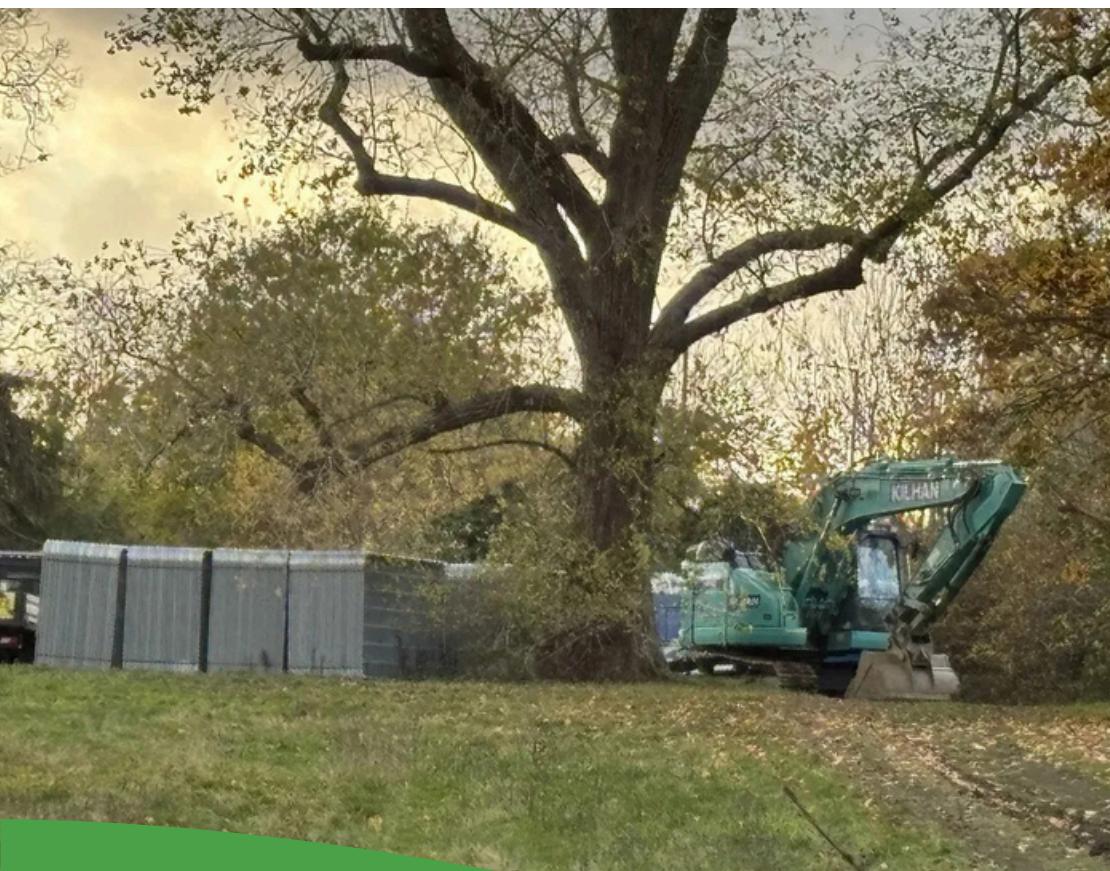
Image: Kriss Jordan

..... and Lost

Gurnell (Ealing) METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Ealing Council's planning committee has approved a development on protected Metropolitan Open Land at Gurnell despite concerns about the loss of green space and an increased risk of flooding along the Brent due to a reduction in floodplain storage.

Whalebones Park
Image: Nick Jones, the Barnet Society



Finchley Memorial Hospital (Barnet) PLAYING FIELDS

PUBLIC PARK

A large private property development has been approved on the green space in front of Finchley Memorial Hospital. This land was promised to the community when the new hospital was built on designated playing fields. The development will mean the devastating loss of accessible public green parkland and increased traffic and pollution on already congested roads.

Clitterhouse Playing Fields (Barnet) PLAYING FIELDS

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Clitterhouse Playing Fields is a unique, historic, valued and tranquil urban grassland. However, Barnet Council has leased a large proportion of the land to a developer who is turning part of this public green space into a professional level, pay-to-play sports facility with artificial caged pitches and floodlighting which also excludes the general public from using much of the site when not in use for sports. The planning application has been approved by the Council. Campaign Group: [Clitterhouse Green Not Greed](#)

Whalebones (Barnet) PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE

NATURE RESERVE

SINC

VALUABLE HABITAT

This 10-acre green space in Barnet was rich in biodiversity and acted as a 'green lung' for the local area. It was thought it was protected by a trust to preserve the land for agriculture and food production, though this was not confirmed. Now, a large housing development on a significant section of the green space has now been approved.

Former NatWest Sports Ground (Merton) DESIGNATED OPEN SPACE

Merton Council recently approved the construction of 353 new homes and a sports centre on the site of a former sports ground despite its status as a designated Open Space.

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](#)

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

Hounslow Local Plan

GREEN BELT

Despite many existing industrial/commercial properties being advertised To Let or For Sale, Hounslow Council continue to propose building warehouses on 23.22 hectares of Hatton Fields. These fields are critical in mitigating the heat island effect of Heathrow airport, they act as a natural sponge to absorb our ever-increasing rainfall and they are a local green lung for local residents. Alongside Friends of Hatton Fields we continue to highlight opportunities for Heathrow to repurpose unnecessary car parks within Heathrow boundaries. Campaign Groups: [Friends of the River Crane Environment](#) and [Friends of Hatton Fields](#)



Ealing Local Plan

GREEN BELT

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Early drafts of Ealing's local plan proposed the de-designation of large tracts of Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). But following public outcry and strong opposition from local groups and CPRE London the Council backtracked on some of the most damaging de-designations. The local plan is currently being examined in public and questions and concerns about the borough's protected green spaces remain. Campaign Group: [Ealing Matters](#) and [Friends of Grove Farm](#)

Green Belt land under threat from a new data centre in Havering.
Image: North Ockendon Residents Association

Enfield Local Plan

GREEN BELT

Enfield Council's draft Local Plan proposes releasing approximately 436 hectares of Green Belt land for housing and employment development, including major sites such as Crews Hill and Vicarage Farm.

These proposals fundamentally undermine Green Belt protection and overlook the Borough's significant capacity for brownfield regeneration, including the Meridian Water site where 10,000 homes are waiting to be built. Robust evidence demonstrates Enfield's housing needs, including affordable and family homes, can be fully met on existing brownfield and underutilised sites, delivered through medium-rise, well-designed developments that enhance neighbourhood character and provide high-quality shared open spaces. Releasing Green Belt land is therefore contrary to national 'brownfield first' planning policy and sustainability principles more generally.

In a further blow, in September 2025, the Government's New Towns Taskforce announced Crews Hill and Chase Park in Enfield as one of twelve potential locations for a new town across England, stating it is a sustainable location and 'grey belt' which locals have called 'smoke and mirrors', pointing to one poorly served train station and beautiful historic landscape and productive agricultural land. Residents are very concerned that. The Enfield Society, Enfield RoadWatch and CPRE London will challenge these proposals and advocate for a brownfield-first approach that protects the Green Belt while supporting sustainable growth and regeneration across Enfield. Campaign Groups: [Enfield Society](#) and [Enfield RoadWatch](#)

Other Green Belt threats

Biggin Hill (Bromley)

GREEN BELT / SINC / WOODLAND

A scoping application has been submitted for a large development on a beautiful section of Green Belt land at Pimlico Wood and Strawberry Fields in Biggin Hill. The woods contain protected tree species and the development would have a devastating impact on local wildlife and nature.

Norman Park Surrounds Development (Bromley)

GREEN BELT

A significant amount of Green Belt land surrounding Norman Park in Bromley has been sold to developers, Berkeley Homes, who are now looking for planning permission for a development they refer to as Ravensbourne Place. They are claiming the site is 'grey belt' despite it being productive agricultural land and high value habitat. The land lies adjacent to Norman Park, River Ravensbourne, Scrogginhall and Barnet Wood, which are key wildlife corridors supporting bats, badgers, birds and protected species. The development would have a devastating impact on this habitat. Campaign Group: [Keep Bromley Green](#)

Hook Park (Chessington)

GREEN BELT / VALUABLE HABITAT

A planning application for a major development on Green Belt land at Hook Park, if approved, would have a severe, adverse impact on land which is rich in nature, including deer, foxes, bats, hedgehogs, red kites and sparrowhawks. The site currently forms part of a green corridor running continuously for several miles from Hook to beyond Leatherhead. It provides an essential physical and visual break, protecting the unrestricted sprawl of adjacent built-up areas and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The proposed development would seriously damage existing Green Belt, lead to a significant increase traffic and air pollution on already congested roads and other local infrastructure. Campaign Group: [Hook Park Developments \(Clayton Road\)](#)

St. Mary Cray (Bromley)

GREEN BELT

Residents of St Mary Cray, near Orpington, are uniting in a bid to protect their cherished greenbelt farmland from a proposed development. The plan, which initially seeks to construct 350 homes in the Derry Downs area, and could eventually expand to 900 if approved, threatens to alter the local landscape permanently.

The potential development poses significant risks to the local ecosystem and community. The loss of the greenfield not only puts the natural environment and well-established hedgerows at risk, but could lead to increased flooding, endangering nearby properties. Additionally, the area's roads, already narrow and unsuitable for heavy traffic, would face further strain, as well as an increase in potential pollution and congestion from the increase in road traffic. Petition: [Change.org](#) Campaign Group: [Derry Downs Green Belt Future](#)

Lodge Farm (Havering)

GREEN BELT

This large Green Belt site was farmland but has now been bought by a developer who is undertaking engineering work on the site without planning permission and allegedly bringing waste on to the site. Havering Council has issued the landowner with a temporary enforcement notice to halt this activity.

Broadwater Lake (Hillingdon)

GREEN BELT / SSSI

Hillingdon Council has submitted a planning application to build a new Watersports Facility and Activity Centre on Broadwater Lake, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The development would have a catastrophic impact on local wildlife and set a dangerous precedent for protected sites in London and across the UK. Campaign Group: [Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust](#)

Baldwins Farm (Havering)

GREEN BELT / VALUABLE HABITAT

A planning application to construct football pitches and a car park on Green Belt land at Baldwins Farm in Upminster has raised 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. But if approved, will have a significant adverse ecological impact on endangered wildlife such as the water vole; destroy priority habitat for Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank; and disturb nearby bat species, a breeding sand martin colony, a Barn owl nest site, and feeding/overwintering habitat for Lapwing, Snipe, Green Sandpiper and a wide range of wildfowl species; as well as red-listed species nightingales which bred for the first time last year at Belhus Woods CP and this year on the actual Baldwins Farm proposed development site.

Data Centre (Havering)

GREEN BELT / [AGRICULTURAL LAND]

Plans to build Europe's largest data centre on Green Belt opposite Top Meadow Golf Course in Fen Lane, Upminster are currently being considered by Havering Council. Up to 390,000 square metres could be lost to the data centre and associated equipment. The development would be permanent, irreversible and lead to loss of productive agricultural land. It is also in an isolated location which can only be reached by car so will generate unwelcome car trips and congestion, contrary to the London Mayor's transport strategy. Campaign Group: [Havering Friends of the Earth and No to Havering Data Centre](#)

Other Green Belt threats

Medi Parc (Hillingdon)

GREEN BELT / SINC

This section of Green Belt adjoins the eastern edge of Old Park Wood in North Hillingdon and was previously hospital grounds. It was left for decades and became a haven for nature. In the early 2000s the GLA and Hillingdon Council designated the chalk grassland site as a Grade 1 Site of Interest for Nature Conservation because of the important mosaic of habitats hosting a sizeable population of bee orchids, and pyramidal orchid as well as other regionally restricted plants and fauna that included bats, vertebra, butterflies, bees and the nationally scarce Roesel's bush-cricket. The site adjoins a SSSI* wood and was a valuable wildlife corridor until developers, who purchased the site in around 2008, began degrading it, removing wildlife habitat in the hope of gaining planning approval for the site. The site should be restored to support the London Nature Recovery Strategy.

*Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Hasmonean High School (Barnet)

GREEN BELT / SSSI

Hillingdon Council has submitted a planning application to build a new Watersports Facility and Activity Centre on Broadwater Lake, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The development would have a catastrophic impact on local wildlife and set a dangerous precedent for protected sites in London and across the UK. Campaign Group: [Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust](#)

Agricultural land near Benets Road and Wingletye Lane (Havering)

GREEN BELT

The strip of Green Belt separating Hornchurch from Upminster has been a rural landscape where farmers have grown crops and residents have walked for years. It is also rich in wildlife with many bird species, including the red kite. This is now under threat from development by the property-developer owner, at the expense of the tenant farmer who still works the fields. There are concerns the development could lead to applications across the whole of the wider Ingrebourne Valley. Campaign Groups: [Residents Association of Emerson Park](#) and [Save Our Fields Campaign Group](#)

Threatened Green Belt land near Benets Road

Image: Patricia Dessoy



Threats to parks

Whitewebbs Park (Enfield)

GREEN BELT / PUBLIC PARK / VALUABLE HABITAT

With support from hundreds of donors, campaign group Guardians of Whitewebbs has mounted a new judicial review to challenge Enfield Council's flawed decision to grant planning permission to Tottenham Hotspur Football Club (Spurs) to build an extensive training facility on Whitewebbs Park. Spurs' plans would prevent public access to a large section of this public park and result in the loss and permanent destruction of sixteen hectares of grassland and over two hundred trees. A wealthy private company should not be able to take over a public park for its own exclusive use, as this will lead directly to loss of public amenity and damage to irreplaceable habitats. Spurs have all the training pitches they need, totalling seventeen, at their current academy in Enfield. Campaign Group: Guardians 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 2 listed house, public gardens and parkland have been neglected. The Grade II listed Registered Park and Gardens were added to the Heritage at Risk Register in November 2024. Residents are concerned that Croydon Council may sell off parts of the grounds for development.

Wimbledon Park
Image: Save Wimbledon Park

Wimbledon Park (Merton/Wandsworth)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND PUBLIC PARK

The All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) wants to expand the Wimbledon Tennis Tournament site onto the section of Wimbledon Park which is heritage parkland. It was previously a golf course with provision for public playing access. Plans include a new 8,000 seat stadium, 10 other private buildings, 9.4 kms of roads and paths and 38 tennis courts, in essence, turning the land into a service area for the tennis tournament. While the golf course was accessible throughout the year, playing time for the public on the new tennis courts will be very limited to a matter of weeks. Local campaigners point out this is protected Metropolitan Open Land, a Grade II* listed park, subject to restrictive covenants 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 can be withdrawn at any time and no access will be allowed when the tournament is taking place. A petition by Save Wimbledon Park opposing the plans has secured over 22,000 signatures and there have been more than 2,000 objections to the planning application. All England Lawn Tennis Club's (AELTC) Application in the High Court, to try to establish their ownership of the former WPGC golf course, is set for January 2026. In addition, Save Wimbledon Park (SWP) has been granted permission to take its judicial review case to the Court of Appeal which decided that the High Court's decision in July 2025, to uphold the GLA's decision to grant the AELTC planning permission, requires legal scrutiny. No date is currently set nor is there a date in regard to the issue of the covenants, specifically drawn up at the time of the sale of the land in 1993, to stop such a development happening.

Campaign Groups: Save Wimbledon Park, the Wimbledon Society, Wimbledon Park Residents Association.



Threats to parks (continued)

Greendale Park (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 Greendale Park, which is also a 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. Local residents have been informed by Southwark Council they can travel to parks outside of their ward for play and recreation despite insufficient play provision in the ward. Southwark Council approved the proposed land arrangements for the development in December 2025.

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. Campaigners and CPRE London say the site should be returned to park 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 in Westminster.
Image: Andreas Praefcke, CC BY 3.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0> via Wikimedia Commons

Victoria Tower Gardens (Westminster)

PUBLIC PARK

This much-loved Grade 2 listed Royal Park has been targeted as a site for the construction of a Holocaust Memorial and associated Learning Centre which would result in the loss of a large portion of this valued green space. CPRE London has supported campaigners including London Parks & Gardens who led the campaign to save the park for nearly a decade. Campaigners have suggested other more appropriate sites to locate the memorial which would not involve loss of such an important park, for example the Imperial War Museum. They point out the area is already saturated with monuments, over-crowded with visitors and deficient in green space and that the park is the backdrop to not only the Grade 2* Buxton Memorial (marking the contribution of Parliamentarians who sought to end slavery) but also the setting for the World Heritage Site of the Palace of Westminster. After planning permission was granted by the Secretary of State, campaigners went to the High Court who overturned the decision in April 2022 on the grounds that the London County Council (Improvements) Act 1900 imposes statutory protection of the park which had been ignored. However, the Government has sought to undermine this decision by introducing a Holocaust Memorial Bill to override the 1900 Act protections. In January 2024 the BBC reported that the then 98-year old Holocaust survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch told a Commons committee that the chosen location was "dangerous" and "impossible". The Holocaust Memorial Bill is due to come back to the House of Commons. There is one Lords amendment that the Commons has to deal with and it is unclear whether a fresh inquiry will take place. In the meantime, Victoria Tower Gardens has been named one of Europe's Seven Most Endangered heritage sites by Europa Nostra. The fight to keep the entirety of this small but important public park open to everyone for quiet enjoyment continues. Campaign Group: [Save Victoria Tower Gardens](#)



Threats to parks (continued)

Danson Park (Bexley)

PARK

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Danson Park is one of Bexley's most cherished green spaces—a place of calm, beauty, and refuge for both people and wildlife. Yet Bexley Council is considering a planning application for a contractor to install Go Ape, a commercial assault course of permanent structures spread across more than two hectares of precious woodland within a Grade II listed landscape. This tranquil, award-winning park, celebrated for its rich flora and fauna and cared for by countless volunteers, is at risk of being transformed into a high-priced attraction that excludes many local residents. The development would undermine the park's peaceful character as well as existing free or affordable leisure opportunities. Volunteer groups and residents alike are horrified at the prospect of commercialising a green space that is vital for biodiversity and community wellbeing.

Manor Park Road green space (Barnet)

PARK

In 2025 Barnet Council published plans to sell-off a small local pocket park in Manor Park Road to be replaced with a development of flats. The current open space and play area are extremely popular and vital for local residents' mental health and physical wellbeing. After considerable community opposition the plans have been temporarily paused, but the threat to this green space remains.

Chiswick Back Common (Hounslow)

PARK

Chiswick Back Common is a loved and valued stretch of historic Common Land which is an essential part of the life of local residents and visitors. For decades there have been local tennis courts for community use, and 5 a side football which enjoyed enormous popularity at affordable prices. Since 2020, the local operator, Rocks Lane has been converting the area into padel courts charges for over £50 an hour. There has been extensive unsightly building, massive canopies and lighting for which consent is required under Common Land regulations but this has not been applied for (since 2003). Hounslow Council are being pressed by local residents to take action but have allowed the situation to continue. Campaign Group – Mid Chiswick Society and Friends of Chiswick Common. Email: midchiswickcc@gmail.com

Rhodesia Road Open Space (Lambeth)

PARK / SPORTS COURT

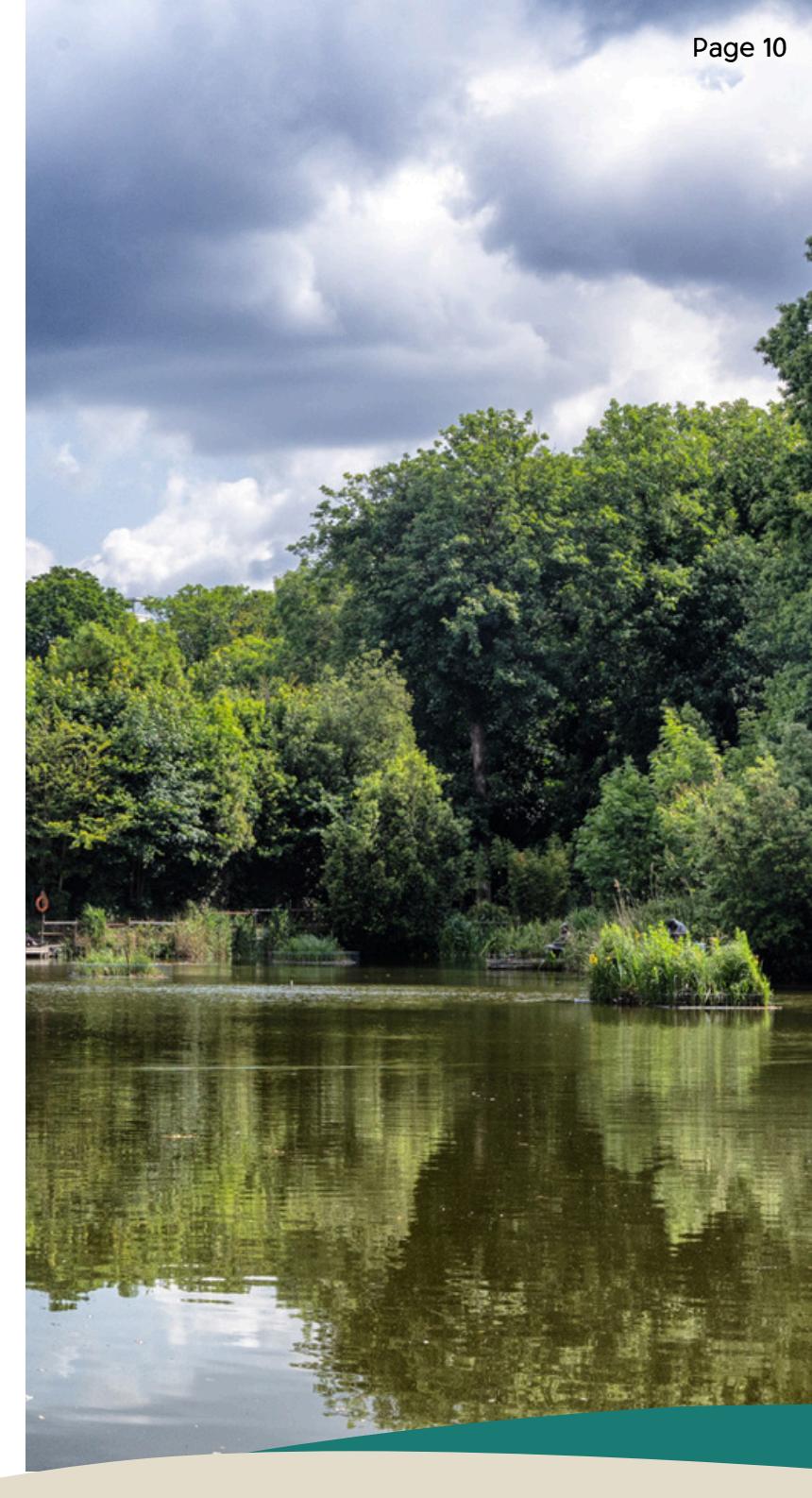
A proposed development would result in the loss of the adjacent park and sports court which is the only unrestricted green space the local community has access to.

Morton Road Park (Islington)

PARK

Islington Council is planning to develop part of this park for housing. An open play area and section of green space could be lost in an already densely populated corner of the borough. A consultation on the proposals is currently underway.

Repository Wood
Image: Candy Blackham



Threats to playing fields

Oakfields Sport Ground (Redbridge)

PLAYING FIELDS GREEN BELT

The popular grassroots club, Bealonians FC, continues its struggle with Redbridge Council to secure its future as the Council seeks to monetise its assets by only offering a short lease, demand a large ground rent payment per annum and take away a significant part of the car park for alternate sporting use and more income. Is the tactic now to make grassroots clubs uneconomical and therefore render the playing fields obsolete and ripe for development? Also on Oakfield, the lease ran out at the end of August last year on the adjacent playing field of similar size used for over thirty years by the Old Parkonians Football Club Oakfield Parkonians Cricket Club and several other clubs. Following lengthy negotiations stretching back to 2017 the lease is ready to sign. But Redbridge has still not done so in spite of many promises to finalise it quickly. The Borough is undertaking a “strategic review” of its assets. Such is the needless frustration and cost this has caused, the Club’s Charitable Trust, which holds the expired lease, has now complained formally to the Local Government Ombudsman about the Council’s “egregious maladministration”.

Campaign Group: [Bealonians FC](#) and [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

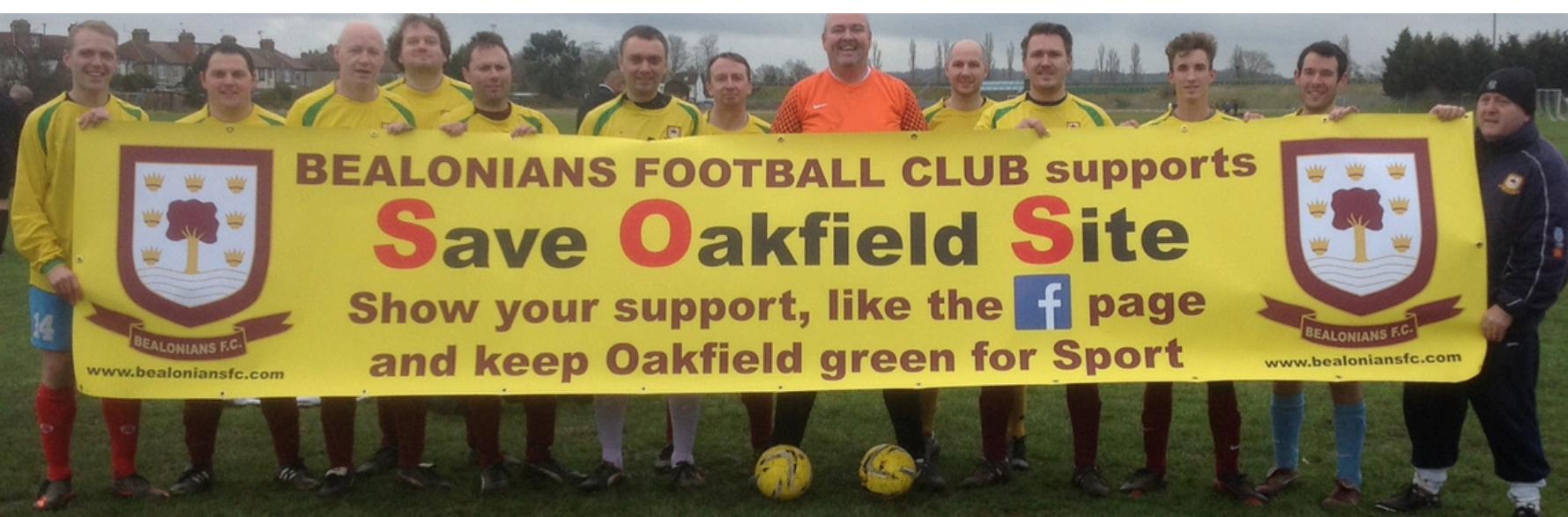
A number of sites in this patchwork of protected playing fields between Lee and Kidbrooke are still actively used as sports pitches. Some have legal covenants protecting them for public use. But some have been bought by developers and fenced off, some many years ago, some recently. One has already been 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. Clive Efford MP has offered to support the opening and retention of local playing fields for sports clubs’ use. 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.

Oakfield Playing Fields
Image: Andy MacRae



Threats to playing fields (continued...)

Barkingside Sports Ground (Redbridge)

PLAYING FIELDS

A planning application was approved in May 2025 to build 114 residential units on Barkingside's oldest recreational sports ground, which was established in 1923 and is also designated Open Space in the Council's own Development Plan. The Council's Playing Pitch Strategy also identifies that there is a desperate need for playing pitches in Barkingside and borough wide. The approved scheme will result in over 85% of site's green space within an area identified as deficient in open space. Local campaigners have now officially lodged a judicial review claim against Redbridge Council. Campaign Group Ville and Leafe Residents Association: [Save Barkingside Sports Ground](#)

STC Sports Club (Greenwich)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND PLAYING FIELDS

Plans to build on a sports field near Ivor Road in New Eltham have recently been [submitted](#) to Greenwich Council despite the playing fields being designated as Metropolitan Open Land.

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

PLAYING FIELDS NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Large areas of green space have been bought by developers and fenced off with a view to their being developed for private profit. Local campaigners feel these sites are extremely vulnerable and likely to be developed 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. In July 2025, Redbridge Council was awarded £3 million from the GLA to transform the walking route between Wanstead Park, Roding Valley and Ilford town centre. Campaign Group: [River Roding Trust](#)



Hare and Hounds football ground (Waltham Forest)

PLAYING FIELDS OPEN SPACE

A number of local grassroots football clubs are interested in using the abandoned Leyton FC football ground behind the Hare and Hounds pub in Waltham Forest. The field has a covenant that states the land has to be kept as a sports ground. The owners of the ground have previously tried to build on the site. A local campaign petition to bring football back to the ground for the local community has so far received over 3,000 signatures. Campaign Group: [Save the Hare and Hounds Football Ground](#)

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

PLAYING FIELDS METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND GREEN BELT

Near to the vast Meridian Water housing development in Enfield, there is a patchwork of green spaces to the west, north and east of the Banbury Reservoir. These have been degraded as a result of fly-tipping, gravel extraction and road building and widening. In Enfield Borough's masterplan for the development, various proposals have been put forward for a new park to sit next to the high-density housing. However, local residents are very concerned that, with a much higher population, there will not be enough provision of green space and playing fields for this area, which already lacks adequate green space facilities for the existing population. Local residents want to propose a vision for a new park which incorporates various pieces of land directly adjacent to the new development but also land to the north of the North Circular and fields surrounding the Banbury Reservoir, making better use of fields which have been left to become derelict and using Compulsory Purchase Orders for private land where necessary. Campaign Group: [Banbury Reservoir Park](#)

Oakfield Playing Fields
Image: Andy MacRae

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. New owners have submitted plans for changes to the promised nature reserve which have been challenged by local campaigners. They offer only limited public access and questions remain over their wildlife benefit. Campaign Group: [Wandle Valley Forum](#)

Warren Farm (Ealing)

NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

This beautiful rewilded 61-acre urban meadow is part of Brent River Park in the borough of Ealing. It is home to an abundance of common, rare and endangered species – such as a quarter of London's breeding skylark population, barn, little and tawny owls, rare clovers, beewolves, yarrow pugs, bats, slow worms, *thanatus striatus* spider (a first record for Middlesex), copse bindweed which is facing UK extinction and many more. Local campaigners have been calling for the council to give the site a clear identity as an official Local Nature Reserve. They have gained support from notable wildlife organisations and conservationists including Kabir Kaul, Chris Packham, Iolo Williams and more than 26,000 people who signed their petition which is still live. In a groundbreaking development in March 2024, The London Borough of Ealing's Cabinet confirmed that it would designate all of the council owned land at Warren Farm as a Local Nature Reserve while relocating the proposed sports facilities, that would have destroyed the rewilded meadow, to the neighbouring land owned by Imperial College. This will safeguard Warren Farm Nature Reserve and its rare species while allowing for the creation of a Brownfield Nature Reserve to act as a vital Buffer Zone between the now potential neighbouring sports fields and the main rewilded meadow. The Warren Farm Nature Reserve campaign is ongoing, with the official Local Nature Reserve designation in slow progress, it is heading in the right direction but it's not over the line just yet. Campaign Group: [Warren Farm Nature Reserve](#) The campaign petition can still be signed [here](#)



Threats to nature reserves (continued...)

Gorne Wood (Lewisham)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

NATURE RESERVE / SINC / VALUABLE HABITAT

Tucked between houses and a commuter railway line is an extremely rare living remnant of the Great North Wood where 400-year-old trees, endangered and protected species and ancient hedgerows can still be found. The woods are now in private ownership, local people have been shut out, and the site is now being damaged and degraded. There is a risk it will be lost forever. The [Fourth Reserve Foundation](#) has been successfully running a nature reserve adjacent to Gorne Wood since January 2018. They have created a [vision](#) for the Gorne Wood site with objectives to re-wild the community section of the woodland facilitating outdoor education opportunities. They have raised £130,000 towards the purchase of the land and completed a business plan. The Local Plan was adopted in July 2025 and the site is now formally designated as Metropolitan Open Land. The Council is now exploring next steps while the Fourth Reserve work on Phase 2 of their Business Plan which will look at high level feasibility plans to protect Gorne Wood while providing a community woodland garden. Since the Local Plan was adopted this summer, there has been a flurry of activity on site. The landowner applied to build 28 houses on the woodland, which was rejected, and they've now put the land up for sale for £3million - far more than the community can afford to pay and far more than it has been valued at. Under the ACV rules, AA Homes must inform the Local Authority and community first so they have a protected period of time to consider and make an offer. In fact, they are refusing to engage with campaigners about the land at all. CPRE London is working with the Fourth Reserve to protect the site. Campaign Group: [The Fourth Reserve Foundation](#)

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

Wildlife Haven adjacent to Emirates Stadium (Islington)

SINC

Islington Council has launched a development project with Network Rail in conjunction with Innova to build on a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation near to the Emirates stadium. If the development goes ahead, it could damage an important wildlife corridor.

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 skylark at Crayford Marshes
Image: Donna Zimmer

Other threats to green spaces

Repository Woods (Greenwich) **METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND / SINC**

The Ministry of Defence is vacating the Woolwich Barracks and surrounding land and selling the property to the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The building is Grade II listed. The land includes Repository Woods which is also Grade II listed, designated MOL and a SINC. Repository Woods is also on the Heritage at Risk Register. The Woods currently enjoy a degree of protection because they are closed to the general public, though the Dell Angling Society fishes in the lake. The integrity of this site may be threatened by the Council's current development plans. Any decisions on development need to be carefully monitored to prevent uninformed and inappropriate commercial development on this precious green space.

Christchurch Spinney (Barnet) **WOODLAND**

This peaceful section of woodland in Christchurch Lane is a haven for wildlife near to Barnet High Street. The site provides an important link in the nature corridor between the Old Fold Manor golf course and Hadley Green. However, Barnet Council has authorised the sale of part of the spinney it owns, subject to planning consent being obtained by the buyer. A planning application is unfortunately expected in due course. Campaign Group: [Barnet Society](#)

Thamesmead Waterfront 'New Town' (Greenwich) **METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND / SINC**

This site was included in the Government's recently announced shortlist of 12 locations across England for potential designation as new towns, following recommendations from the New Towns Taskforce. The site includes extensive areas of MOL, woodland, public open space and is also designated a SINC.

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 planning to build a secure children's home on it, saying there is nowhere else in London to locate it. Waltham Forest Council Cabinet has agreed that it should take on the project management of the secure children's home project, preceding the planning permission part of the process. Local Campaigners argue that the site is not suitable for a secure school and plan to object to any planning application that comes forward. Campaign group: [East London Waterworks Park](#)

Crowlands Heath Golf Course (Barking and Dagenham / Havering) **SINC / METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND**

Barking and Dagenham Council has agreed to sell the Crowlands Heath Golf Course, to H4Life who want to build a housing development there. The site is designated as MOL and two-thirds of it is neighbouring Havering.

Motspur Gas Holders (Kingston) **METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND**

Berkeley Homes has submitted a planning application for the redevelopment of the former gasworks site at Motspur Park. The site lies on protected Metropolitan Open Land and there is concern that the high-rise 16-18 storey development will damage the openness of the MOL, disturb wildlife and have an adverse impact on the character of the local area. The site is located within an important area of connected MOL sites and this development will compromise the adjacent MOL significantly. Instead of building on the MOL, the land could be transformed into a public park or nature reserve.

Greenwich Equestrian Centre (Greenwich) **METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND**

Greenwich Council has agreed to enter talks to facilitate the sale of Greenwich Equestrian Centre and has acknowledged its intended use might not continue if placed on the open market. The site is protected MOL but an application from local campaigners to have the site recognised as an asset of community value (ACV) has recently been turned down by Greenwich Council.

Other threats to green spaces

Mudchute Park and Farm (Tower Hamlets)

METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND

Mudchute Park and Farm has been a much-loved community green space for almost 50 years. But its future is at risk having entered formal legal proceedings to secure a long-term lease for the site. Campaigners presented a petition with 6,583 signatures to the Council in July 2025. Negotiations are ongoing. Campaign Group: [Mudchute Farm Lease Campaign](#)

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 is a remnant of 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, the results of which are unknown. The work contributed to a resurgence of Japanese knotweed which is currently undergoing eradication. Meanwhile FOCRG, with support from idVerde, have been undertaking winter working parties to clear other invasive species and open up the natural watercourses. No planning application has been submitted but the group continues to monitor the site closely. Campaign Group: [Friends of Chislehurst Recreation Ground](#)

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.

Infilling on estate green spaces

Peregrine House Open Space (Islington)

ESTATE GREEN SPACE

In late 2025 Islington Council conducted a consultation on plans for an infilling development on green space at the Peregrine House Estate. The site is very popular with local residents who would like it to be protected as a Designated Open Space.



Peregrine House Green Space
Image: James Dunnett

The creeping commercialisation of London's parks (By Ed Allnutt, Local Campaigner)

Festival-style events have become a regular sight for visitors to London parks and commons. To some, including cash-strapped councils, they are welcome – to many locals, not.

Total event days increased to 140 in 2025, from 87 in 2022. These aren't evenly distributed: big, well-connected spaces host the majority [2]. Hyde Park, Brockwell Park and Victoria Park are, for example, lucrative destinations in the eyes of major events companies like Festival Republic for ticketed events. £50 day tickets are usual, but VIP packages with merchandise and exclusive areas can be £200 upwards [3].

Musical events in green spaces are not new but the bigger scale and frequency are. Local opposition is mounting. Complaints centre on community, health, and environment. Events are now seen as overly commercial. They install forbidding three metre-high solid steel perimeters. They are loud, and they outstay their welcome, requiring fencing before, during, and after the event. Wildlife is disturbed. Compaction damage has killed trees and led to long-term enclosure for expensive remedial groundworks [4].

Local opposition has begun to turn into legal action. In 2017, Friends of Finsbury Park sought to enforce part of the Greater London Parks and Open Spaces Act 1967 [5]. This farsighted legislation empowered local authorities to hold entertainments in parks and to make "reasonable charges" for them but limited the space they could take to one tenth of the park, or one acre, whichever was greater. Unfortunately, the later Local Government Act 1972 then allowed councils to hold entertainments with no restriction and Lord Justice Hickinbottom, in the case taken to court by Friends of Finsbury Park, said at appeal that those later powers applied.

Councils often now feel there is no restriction on enclosure. A local architect calculated events now take up 41% of Brockwell Park. Plans show most of Gunnersbury Park fenced off. At Clapham Common, though, a planning inspector in 2023 obliged organisers to follow the "1/10 rule" because it still applies to common land.

When a structure is put up and taken down within 28 days, no planning permission is needed. Councils often rely on this and issue "permitted development" certificates to put on festivals. But at Brockwell Park, the setup and takedown exceeded 28 days. Campaign group Protect Brockwell Park successfully held Lambeth Council to account this year in the law courts: Mr Justice Mould judged the council was "irrational" in granting the permission certificate [6].

Brockwell Park
Image: Brixton Buzz

Residents and campaigners almost never oppose events in parks entirely, seeking a balance between entertainment and local needs. Unfortunately, this balance is rarely struck, due to councils' insistence on revenue generation. While sometimes ringfenced for park upkeep, officers have made frank admissions that takings also cover other budgetary holes.

Although we have focused on events, amenity groups are seeing many forms of revenue generation: concessions, stalls, pop ups, brand activations, excess cafes, pay-per-use sports, and expensive recreational facilities like saunas.

It remains to be seen if a balance can be negotiated between locals, councils, and organisers. If it can't, there will be more litigation. And pressures will mount for regional or national powers to step in, for example by reinstating the 'one tenth' rule.

The 10 parks which host two thirds of festival events are (source FT):

Alexandra Park
Brockwell Park
Burgess Park
Crystal Palace Park
Finsbury Park
Gunnersbury Park
Hyde Park
Old Royal Naval College
Victoria Park
Walpole Park



Commercial pressures: why are threats arising?

GOVERNMENT HOUSING AND GREEN BELT POLICY

Government has caved in to relentless pressure from developers to undermine Green Belt protections. Planning permission significantly increases land value. Developers acquire farmland cheaply and 'landbank' it, hoping to gain planning permission at a later date. They then apply pressure to remove protections and this is what has finally happened with the Government's new 'grey belt' policy which undermines Green Belt protection. Immediately two large farmland sites in Bromley have been put forward for development, with developers claiming these are 'grey belt'. More are expected.

Unrealistic housebuilding targets.

Successive governments have required councils to allocate double or triple the amount of land than can actually be built out. London is required to allocate land for 88,000 new homes per year for 10 years even though the average build rate for the last ten years was only 38,000. High targets mean local authorities say they have to allocate Green Belt, because they don't have enough brownfield land.

Failure to build-out sites which already have planning permission. In London, planning permission is in place for 300,000 homes but these are not being built. But the government requires councils to allocate more and more land for development anyway.

UNFETTERED POWERS TO SELL PARKS

Almost unbelievably, the law courts confirmed in a recent judgement that **councils have unfettered powers to sell parks**. As long as councils conduct a short consultation, they can sell, and remove the public's rights over, that park. With councils under financial pressure, there is an increasing risk councils will look to treat parks as financial assets which can be sold (or leased long-term, which falls under the same legal ruling).

Professional sport or public park? The close relationship between many sports clubs and borough councils sometimes means they collaborate to take over protected Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land or 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.

RENTING OUT PARKS TO PAY FOR THEIR MAINTENANCE

Some London boroughs say they can't afford to maintain parks and must lease parks for large-scale commercial events to raise funds to cover maintenance costs. One council has even sought to sell a part of the park claiming this is the only way to pay for maintenance. But all parks in London are suffering from tight budgets: renting or selling parks to pay for maintenance is not the answer. If rented out, it significantly impairs the public's rights to use that space. And if it's sold, it's gone forever.

LARGE HIKES IN ANNUAL RENTS FOR COMMUNITY-SECTOR LEASEHOLDERS

Cash-strapped councils are increasingly asking much higher or even commercial rents for green spaces. Community groups simply can't afford it. In the past it has been very common for councils to lease public land at low-cost for example to sports clubs or community groups running wildlife reserves or educational activities. Often the land has a covenant or public trust for non-commercial uses. Hiking the rent risks community groups being forced off the land, and the social value being lost.

SALE OF PUBLIC-AMENITY LAND

Many owners have simply chosen to sell. 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 owners sell the land to speculators or developers, who 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. Related to the problem above, many green spaces in London have 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 make it easier to argue it is not needed. Neglect creates a cycle of decline, a well-understood path to loss of green space.

USING ESTATE GREEN SPACE FOR HOUSEBUILDING IS CHEAPER THAN BUYING LAND

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. The effect is to add density and reduce the amount of green space per person. This can be extremely short sighted and set whole community up for having poor access to parks and nature in future. Councils should instead look to 'grey space' - nearby roads and car parks, to build much-needed social housing.

Other reasons threats are arising

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

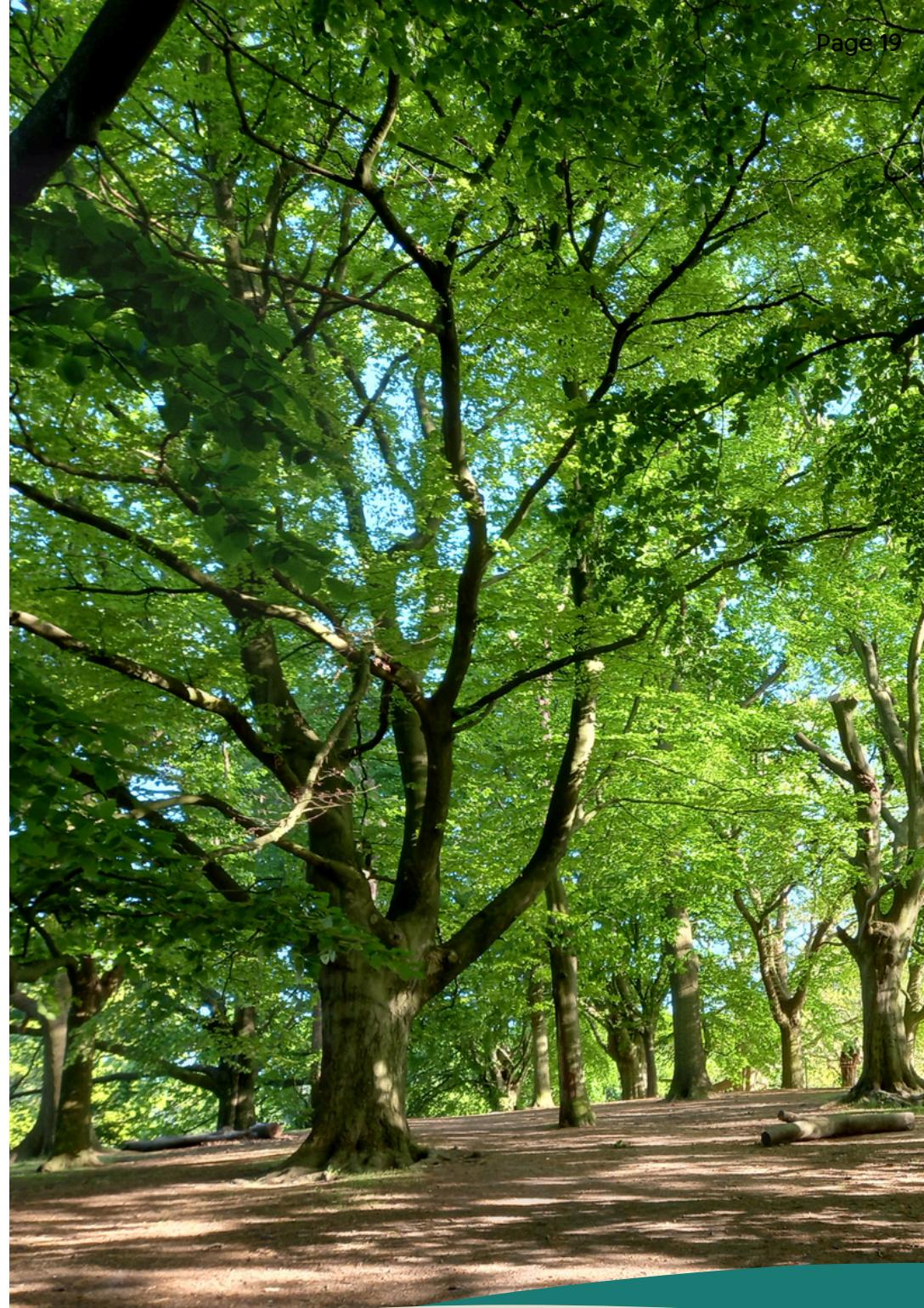


Image: John Sadler

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 local resident groups, campaign groups and park friends groups. These groups champion their local green spaces, ensure they are well-used and loved and, if necessary, spring into action if a threat arises.

- Look through our [guidance on protecting green spaces](#) and check out our [Green Defenders webpage](#).
- Join your local park friends group: find details at [GoParks.London](#). Or start a new one: advice available from [Parks Community](#).
- Ask landowners, including councils, to register and protect sites as a [Town or Village Green](#) or with Fields in Trust protection.
- Identify neglected green sites in your area and tell us about them. Advocate for it to be a park, nature reserve or sports pitch.
- Submit [nature records](#) with a view to the site gaining SINC or SSSI designation.
- 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.

Support CPRE London action

- ✓ 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.

- [Sign up for our newsletter](#) to find out how you can support our campaign work on protecting green spaces.
- [Join CPRE London](#) or make a [donation today](#).

What should London boroughs do?

Boroughs should not sell, permit development on, or commercialise parks and green spaces either to raise money or benefit private or exclusive interests. They should respect public amenity covenants on private land.

They should invest in parks, support park friends groups and promote and champion local parks, ensuring they are well maintained, improved and valued.

Boroughs should 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.

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

They should introduce new protections for parks and green spaces including via the Local Green Space designation and Fields in Trust, and use Local Plans to introduce designations for nature recovery and flood protection, particularly for areas of Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land.

What should the London Mayor do?

London Plan and the Green Belt Review. The Mayor must push back against government pressure and refuse to release Green Belt for development. This is unnecessary with planning permission already in place for 300,000 new homes and plenty of brownfield available. The Mayor must instead bring brownfield sites forward for development.

The London Plan should have very strong protection for Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land, be ambitious in increasing land and nature protections, ensure more equal access to green space and nature, steer development towards brownfield sites and guide boroughs to reclaim grey space and bring disused green space back into recreation or nature use.

Mayoral decisions The Mayor has a statutory role in relation to protected land and can halt development where it

does not meet London Plan policy, but in recent years has allowed development on a number of key sites including parks. The Mayor should instead show leadership and not allow weak justifications for loss of protected green spaces to prevail.

Additionally, Mayoral decisions lack transparency and the opportunities for public involvement are much limited. This needs to change.

Data and mapping. The Mayor should also support a community-led effort to map vulnerable green sites, update official records and bring out-of-use sites back into use, to stop green spaces coming under threat in future. If identified now, sites can be purposed for new habitat or recreation.

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[6]“killed trees” - as per report at Brockwell. 16 May 2025 - PBP ruling handed down by Mr Justice Mould <https://protectbrockwellpark.org/down/Press%20Release%20-%20PBP%20WINS%20JUDICAL%20REVIEW%20-%20FINAL%202016052025.pdf>

Questions and Further Information

If you have any questions about this report or CPRE London’s work to protect green spaces please email: office@cprelondon.org.uk

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Become a CPRE London Member

CPRE London provides support and advice to local campaigners for free, helping protect and enhance threatened local green spaces. Please consider becoming a CPRE member from just £5 a month to enable us to do this important work by signing up at:

<https://www.cprelondon.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-member/>

Donate to CPRE London

Please consider donating to CPRE London to help enhance, protect and promote London’s green spaces so we can make the city and the countryside better places for everyone to live, work and enjoy: <https://www.kindlink.com/fundraising/cpre-london/donate>



Image: Rob Gowar

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.

We are part of the national network of CPRE, the countryside charity, which campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone’s benefit, wherever they live.

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