



## A City for all Londoners

Comments from **the Ramblers**

December 2016

### Introduction

- 1.1 The Ramblers ensures that everything is in place so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors on foot and benefit from the experience. We seek to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals regardless of their age, background, fitness or mobility by providing the support, policies and resources everyone needs to enjoy and benefit from walking outdoors.
- 1.2 We are the largest charity promoting walking in the UK, with around 110,000 members nationally and nearly 13,000 in Greater London. Whilst the public perception of Ramblers is often of a countryside organisation, our membership is predominantly in towns and cities and we run a large number of urban group walks and have for many years promoted walking for health as well as leisure.
- 1.3 Amongst other initiatives we:
  - Protect the infrastructure that enables people to go walking.
  - Provide information and support to both new and experienced walkers to support their walking activities.
  - Lead ***Walking for Health*** in England in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support. We work in partnership with local authorities, the NHS and other voluntary organisations to support a network of local schemes offering free, short walks led by trained walk leaders.
- 1.4 We warmly welcome the ambition in *A City for all Londoners* to create a city which is green, healthy and more attractive, to encourage walking on 'healthy streets' and to promote good design in public spaces to improve quality of life. We are very pleased with the appointment of a Walking and Cycling Commissioner, who has the responsibility to oversee walking as a means of transport, as a means of health and well-being, as a means of encouraging tourism to all parts of Greater London and to redress the imbalance that has developed in recent years of cycling over walking.
- 1.5 Ramblers are keen to work with the Mayor and the Greater London Authority to improve the 'walkability' of London. Making walking the easy, safe and pleasant choice for Londoners would improve public health by getting people active<sup>1</sup>, help develop positive relationships within communities by increasing social interaction, cut air pollution by reducing car use,<sup>2</sup> and boost the economy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, Adrian 2014, *Claiming the health dividend*, Dept for Transport

<sup>2</sup> Defra, 2014 *Air quality statistics*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/air-quality-statistics>

<sup>3</sup> Living Streets, 2014, *The pedestrian pound: the business case for better streets and places*

## Part 1 – Accommodating growth

### *Growth Locations*

2.1 We welcome the commitment to protect London’s Green Belt from development. The Green Belt should be well maintained for people and wildlife and accessible on foot by green routes and by public transport. The Green Belt is a vital resource for human health and wellbeing because it provides opportunities to be physically active and interact with nature where it is most needed – close to where people live.

2.2 We agree with Professor Dieter Helm, Chair of the government’s Natural Capital Committee, that rather than allow Green Belt to be built on or to environmentally degrade, we should make more of the resource:

*“...imagine a green belt with lots of natural capital, a much more environmentally benign agriculture, much greater public access, woodlands located next to people so it could fulfil not only the original purpose of limiting the sprawl but also provide the lungs of the cities, the fresh air for children to play in, and the recreational benefits which are crucial to health and wellbeing. That is worth exploring before the irreversible destruction of this major asset located exactly where it is needed – next to people.”<sup>4</sup>*

2.3 We welcome the commitment to ‘join up plans for transport and housing and make the best possible use of space and get the right things built’, but urge the Mayor to prioritise walking as the main form of transport linked to housing and new developments. Plans for all new developments should have minimum levels of accessible open green space, linked to the wider community, explicitly factored into them.

### *Good growth/green growth*

2.4 We welcome the commitments to maintaining and enhancing green spaces and the recognition that access to green space has an impact on physical and mental health. Parks and green spaces are visited regularly by an estimated 37 million people each year<sup>5</sup> and are the means by which most people in England experience the natural environment.<sup>6</sup> Households with children, people living in urban areas, and those from black and minority ethnic communities use their parks the most.<sup>7</sup>

2.5 Research shows that the vast majority (68%) of visits on foot to parks and other green spaces are taken within 2 miles of home<sup>8</sup> and those who live within 500m of accessible green space are 24% more likely to meet recommended levels of physical activity.<sup>9</sup>

2.6 Although parks and green spaces are incredibly popular and provide enormous benefits for individuals and communities, funding for them is declining. Research from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) shows that over 90% of park managers in England reported that their maintenance budgets have fallen in the past three years and 95% expect this trend to continue.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dieter Helm, 2015, *In defence of the green belt*

<sup>5</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund 2016, *State of public parks*, <https://www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-parks-2016>

<sup>6</sup> Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, Natural England et al, January 2015  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/survey-reveals-importance-of-outdoor-visits-in-england>

<sup>7</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund 2016, *State of public parks*, <https://www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-parks-2016>

<sup>8</sup> Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, Natural England et al, January 2015  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/survey-reveals-importance-of-outdoor-visits-in-england>

<sup>9</sup> Natural solutions for tackling health inequalities Jessica Allen and Reuben Balfour UCL Institute of Health Equity, Oct 2014

<sup>10</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund 2016, *State of public parks*, <https://www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-parks-2016>

2.7 There is a growing trend of local authorities giving up their responsibility for parks. 50% of local authorities in England have disposed of or transferred the management or ownership of green spaces in the past three years and 59% are considering disposal or transfer in the next three years.<sup>11</sup>

2.8 London's local authorities must maintain their central, overarching role in the management of all their green spaces for long-term public benefit and ensure that they retain the ability to set the terms of use and accessibility. Local authorities must have a strategy for maintaining, improving and resolving imbalances in the supply, quantity and distribution of urban green spaces and should adopt Natural England's 'Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard' to ensure that everyone has access to green space within a specified distance of their front door.<sup>12</sup>

2.9 Funding for green spaces should be drawn from across local authority departments and budgets (including health, transport and education) that benefit from green spaces. Local authorities should work in partnership with communities, third sector organisations and corporate interests to develop new ways to fund and manage parks.

2.10 We accept that many authorities will permit the use of their green spaces for commercial purposes. But clear policies should be in place limiting the frequency of such events, and diversions and mitigation measures should be carefully planned and implemented. Revenue raised from such activities should be spent directly on maintenance and improvements.

2.11 Maintenance and improvement work that necessitates temporary closure of part of a green space must be properly planned and managed. Closures should be advertised in advance onsite and online and notified to local user groups and other community contacts. Diversions and other mitigation measures must take into account current usage, the impact on the broader walking network and the needs of all users including those with reduced mobility. They must also be well-signed onsite. In the case of large-scale closures (for example a major refurbishment), meaningful community consultation on plans to manage the closure should take place beforehand.

2.12 We call on the Mayor to support not only green spaces but also London's iconic green routes. London has seven 'Strategic Walks', namely: Capital Ring, Green Chain Walk, Jubilee Greenway, Jubilee Walkway and London Loop, plus sections of the Lea Valley Walk and Thames Path within Greater London. There are number of improvements which should be made to these routes, including the removal of obstructions, better signage, better links with public transport and safer crossings to extend the health, economic and social benefits from these popular green routes. Ramblers have compiled a list of specific improvements which could be made to these routes.

#### Part 4 – Environment, transport and public space

3.1 Ramblers strongly support the 'healthy streets approach' and the 'feet first' emphasis on walking.

3.2 We welcome the Mayor's decision to accelerate plans for a bridge from Rotherhithe to Canary Wharf and urge the GLA to ensure that walkers and cyclists are both provided for.

3.3 We also welcome the announcement of a formal inquiry into the Garden Bridge project, to assess the public sector contribution to the project, as well as to examine the way Transport for London, the Greater London Authority and other bodies dealt with the proposal. Ramblers

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<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/65021>

believe the Garden Bridge should not be built in its current form or location. The £60 million of public funds dedicated to the bridge should instead be used by TfL and DfT to meet budget shortfalls on infrastructure and projects to protect and enhance existing green spaces and routes for public use. Any public funding available for the building of bridges should be spent where there is a strategic need identified by communities and their elected representatives.

- 3.4 We support measures to reduce the impact of traffic, including traffic calming, pedestrian priority or pedestrianisation and the introduction of 20mph zones.
- 3.5 We agree strongly that London's public spaces are vitally important to the character of the city and as such should be an *'open and accessible network of wonderful, well designed and functional spaces'*.
- 3.6 We are concerned about the increasing role of private sector developers in new public spaces because in some cases, the sale or transfer of previously public spaces to private ownership and management has made areas less accessible and/or negatively alter their character. For example, in some new private/public developments, people walking in groups or taking photos have been questioned by private security guards. There is also criticism that some large-scale developments are designed not for public benefit but for private benefit, in particular to encourage shopping with little regard to local character or culture. Complaints have been raised that these spaces are too strictly policed, have few green or shaded areas or benches, and as such feel unwelcoming.
- 3.7 London's public spaces and streets should be accessible on foot to all for exercise, meeting and congregating, and for quiet enjoyment. When land is sold or given over to development, its accessibility and character must be protected. Local authorities in London should have in place clear frameworks for getting the most out of Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements to secure public benefit from the development of public space.