



Re-imagining Fishponds Fields

From voices in the Tooting Community:

A win-win proposal to create a life-enhancing green habitat for all in the heart of urban Tooting, for current and future generations.

"In the morning we heard birdsong: robin, wren and chiffchaff: it was **a place of beauty and connection to the natural world**. Out early, solo joggers, ran along the hedgerows that surrounded the Fields; an elderly mother walked slowly arm in arm with her daughter enjoying **the clear air and sense of safe, open space**. Within the hour school children had appeared, sitting under the community orchard's shade to learn about the habitats of the birds, small mammals, bees, bats and the 15,000 other city species they lived alongside.

By mid-morning, girls and boys in several school classes were playing the first cricket of the season, heralding a shift from winter football and greater daylight hours. Teenage members of local sports clubs were coming along regularly to coach and teach, now that **Tooting was on the map as a centre of community sport excellence**. A local association supporting young people of refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds had joined the competitions. Cricket was followed by energetic athletics on the Fields.

Beneath the much-loved fig tree, in an opposite corner, two part-time 'gardenisers', horticultural workers, were drawing up that week's plans for community growing with volunteers from local groups, schools and households, so good for their physical and mental wellbeing. **A group of neighbours tended the community garden**, weeding raised beds of chilli peppers, runner beans and pumpkin squashes. They paused to relish the big sky, the quiet and the prospect of food they'd be growing for **the annual Tooting Foodival to be held in early Autumn**.

At lunch, the healthy living coordinator opened up the café, a social enterprise supporting food resilience and work apprenticeships. The café hosted **regular meet ups between local Councillors and neighbourhood groups** steering Wandsworth's Zero Carbon plans to cut carbon emissions. Parents, grandparents and carers with preschool children, enjoyed the inclusive, healthy space for physical exercise that reduced social isolation. **Children ran around safely**, playing on the climbing frames and in the sand pit.

At weekends the Fields held sporting events for a wealth of local clubs and teams. **Cricket, the 'No 1 sport in Tooting'** had found its true place in the community and the diligently stewarded green, was envied across the Borough.

Hoo-la-hooping, brisk walking, a trim trail, kite flying, picnics (socially distanced in the early days) were just a few of the post Covid possibilities relished by everyone sharing the Fields – **reflecting the many ethnic and cultural groups, inline with the demographics of the area**.

Households explored the green Wandsworth Slow Way linking the Wandle Trail, Fishponds Fields, through the natural 'lime tree' arch to Streatham Cemetery, Springfield Park, Wandsworth Common and beyond. Bats swooped as evening fell. Birds returned to their nests, households to their homes. A prize-winning model of both urban biodiversity and cultural diversity, Fishponds Fields was a celebration of Tooting's spirited social cohesion, justice and equality of access to green space. It had been the joyous collective hard-won achievement of Wandsworth Borough's Climate Action Plan launched 20 years earlier in 2020 for everyone and everything forever."

"Green public spaces are one of seven key provisioning systems in cities, along with shelter, water, food, energy, connectivity and sanitations. People need green space" Anu Ramaswami, New Scientist.

Fishponds Playing Fields is a kind of heaven: a green nine acre space in Tooting, London SW17 with a big big sky, just five minutes walk from the 'arterial traffic corridor' of the A24.

Forever Fishponds is a group of Tooting residents and local organisations, shortly to become a CIC, working to keep the Fields open year round in daytime for public use. Our vision of the Fields is as a flourishing place of connection in the heart of Tooting: open for all ages and cultures for sport, outdoor learning, recreation, play, celebration and enhanced biodiversity. A place on Earth where all can belong.

The Fields, historically once manor fish ponds and a famous plant nursery, is now designated a Playing Field on Metropolitan Land. They're underused and fall short of a brilliant potential to be a resource for a greener, healthier Tooting. They're regularly inaccessible to the surrounding community, their use being currently limited to organised sports users and some local schools. Gates are locked more often than need be.

There's a short, immediate window to consider a new future for the Fields when Wandsworth Council decide on a future contract to manage the Fields through a tender exercise in June 2021. In the last year, Forever Fishponds have held picnics, socially distanced gatherings, planted a 'Forest of Flowers', dropped postcards off at 3,000 households (three times) and asked local people 'What does Fishponds have that you love (and want to keep)?' and 'What does Fishponds not have that you would like or need (to improve your experience of the Fields)?' Many are discovering the Fields for the first time.

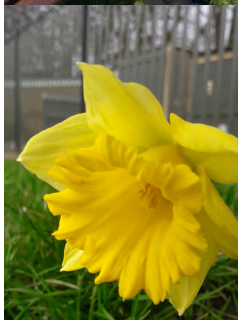
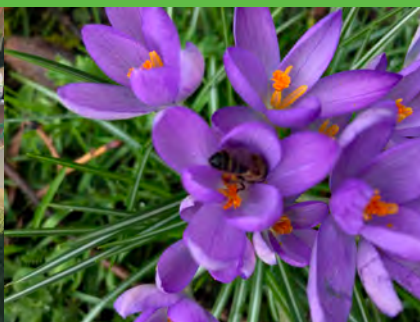
Our 'Community Offer', seeking to inspire and inform Wandsworth Council of local need, encapsulates people's answers and how the community can work in partnership to 'transform the future' for all forever. It's our hope that being a part of The Prize to Transform the Future can get the 'ducks in a row' to facilitate our vision, bringing stakeholders together, to create a groundbreaking model of governance to support cohabitation: organised and informal sport, community use and increased biodiversity.

Shared compatible use is possible. A broader pattern of use aligns with Sport England's new 10 year Strategy *Uniting The Movement* to 'rebuild the nation', acknowledging the need for everyone – young and old and from every community – to be able to enjoy a life out of doors. COVID has exacerbated existing inequalities in access to green space in Tooting as elsewhere.

There are many stakeholders in the Fishponds story. In addition to local residents of all ages and sports clubs we have been in touch with Sport England, London Sport, Fields in Trust, Shared Assets, London National Park City, Transition Town Tooting, Balham and Tooting Community Association, The heads, staff and parents of six nearby schools, GPs, pharmacists, health workers in psychiatric care, Friends of Streatham Cemetery, Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network, Open Space and ward councillors, the Leader of Wandsworth Council, Council staff, biodiversity officers, climate action plan officers, local historians and plant experts. Fishponds Fields are the missing keystone of Tooting life: in place, a flourishing life is possible for all – forever.



The Future of Fishponds Playing Fields: The Community Offer





Fishponds Fields: a win-win Community Offer creating a life-enhancing green asset for all in the heart of urban Tooting, for current and future generations

"My boys are 5 and 3 and we've used it to run around, explore and exercise."

Local resident

The future of Fishponds Playing Fields

The Community Offer

Forever Fishponds welcomes the Council's plan to include a Community Offer in the formal bidding process for the future management of Fishponds Playing Fields as set out in the Council's decision of 23 November 2020.

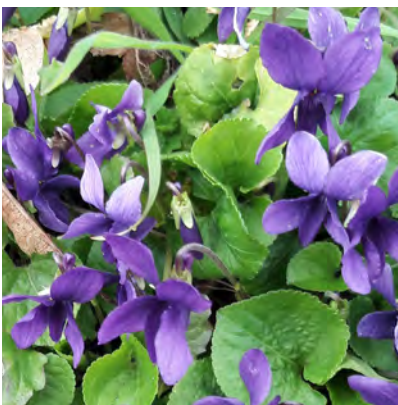
We understand that, as set out in the context of the Community Services and Open Spaces Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CSOSOSC) meeting on 2 February 2021, an exercise will be launched by the Council in late summer to seek a new management partner for the Fields.

This note contributes Forever Fishponds' views on the form the Community Offer should take, to assist the Council in preparing for this.

Purpose

We believe the Community Offer should enable a future for the Fields that realises their potential as an asset for the whole community, benefiting all residents, with emphasis on neighbours in the area surrounding the Fields, organised sport users and local schools.

Shared, compatible use for formal sport and informal sport/ outdoor activity should be fully possible together with increased biodiversity. The new management framework for the Fields needs to be drafted to promote this.



The evolving context

We ask the Council to bear in mind:

- the primacy of promoting physical and mental health as we recover from the Covid pandemic
- the contribution the Fields can make to the [Active Wandsworth Strategy](#) and the [Wandsworth Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- the contribution the Fields can make to Wandsworth's strategies for [Environment and Sustainability](#), [Biodiversity](#) and [Climate Action](#)
- the increasing recognition in Council policy development of the scope for expanding use of the Fields, for example in the consultants' report for the current [Wandsworth Open Space Study](#).
- the growing number of local stakeholders expressing interest in the Fields' future, stressing the need for safe, outdoor space for youth groups, activities and public space for the community to meet together, as identified in the [Tooting Bec and Broadway Neighbourhood Forum Consultation](#) (2019)
- the recently announced [Sport England 10 year strategy 'Uniting the Movement'](#) which places emphasis on encouraging outdoor activity of all kinds, especially for groups facing structural barriers to participation in this, side by side with formal sport
- the successful experience of opening the Fields to the public for lockdown both in July – September 2020 and more recently since 30 January 2021 (15 weeks to date) which has brought huge benefits to those living around ([see Note A](#)). There have been substantial numbers of diverse visitors ([see Note B](#))
- the location of the Fields in a densely urban, diverse part of Tooting far from green space.

Forever Fishponds recognises:

- the status of the Fields as playing fields and the contribution of sport to a healthy society
- the role of Sport England and NGBs as statutory consultees for individual sports
- the need for the Fields to operate on a resource efficient basis.

"As we adapt and rebuild from the huge disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, we need to collectively re-imagine how we keep movement, sport and activity central to the lives of everyone."

Sport England

"It brings so much joy to the neighbourhood and really brings the community together and we need more of this nowadays."

Local resident



The Community Offer

We have set out the essentials below. They respond to the wishes and needs of the local community around the Fields as evidenced in the gathering of data in recent months. **Note A** sets out in detail the evidence gathered and provides commentary on this. It makes clear the value local people attach to being able to access the Fields freely, as well as their needs and wishes for the future.

The priorities are twofold. They relate both to the pattern of use for the Fields and the management framework to support this.

Priorities

Access to the public

- Keep open year round in daytime for public use.
- Improve access by adding a further entrance eg from Streatham Cemetery.

Resources and facilities

Provide facilities for informal play, exercise and leisure:

- Additional play equipment for different age groups.
- Outdoor exercise equipment eg a 'trim trail', a perimeter path for walking and jogging, a netball hoop.
- Trees for shade, benches and tables to improve amenity.
- Toilets.



Increase biodiversity

- A range of measures eg perimeter planting, wild flower meadow strip, tree planting to improve drainage, community growing space and protection of wildlife.

Activities and use

Encourage, on a basis compatible with organised sport, use for:

- Targeted sport for women and girls, formal and informal.
- Targeted sport for minority ethnic and faith communities, formal and informal.
- Use by organised groups supporting health and well being eg youth activities, brisk walking groups and those based on 'social prescribing'.
- Occasional one-off community events such as performances and festivals.
- Outdoor learning, especially by both local primary and secondary schools.



Governance and management

To achieve the above, a governance framework with the characteristics below is likely to be needed. We ask the Council to ensure that requirements on these lines are included in the specification for future management arrangements.

Partnership: the management framework should incorporate partnership with local stakeholders working with the main delivery body with every partner committed to the goals under [Purpose \(page 2\)](#).

The Community voice: the views of a wide range of stakeholders, especially local residents but also schools, community groups and others with an interest in the Fields should play a significant role in policy and decision-making in the Fields' future management. This could be achieved in a number of ways but all should give substantial and regular stakeholder involvement.

Accountability: It is important that the new management body is publicly accountable and that its performance in delivering the Community Offer can be assessed. This is particularly important if a long lease is intended. Continuation of the lease should depend on periodic assessments of adherence to the Community Offer.

Not-for-profit status: a charity or other body constituted on a not-for-profit basis is likely to be most suitable.

"As a care-bubble granny I love the playground – it really provides physical activity and mental stimulation across quite an age range."

Local resident

"This green space has never been more important... as Tooting becomes crowded with so many new apartments without gardens or access to nature."

Local resident



Community Offer – summary

In summary, we ask for the specification for the new management arrangements for Fishponds Fields to include obligations on the managing body:

- To manage and develop the Fields in line with the provisions under [Priorities \(page 4\)](#).
- To keep the Fields open for public access year round in daytime is paramount. This covers both times when the Fields are being used for pre-booked sport (unless the user has a specific need for privacy eg for safeguarding reasons) and all other times ie they should be open all day, every day.
- To give a substantial role to community stakeholders in managing the Fields and planning for current and future generations.
- To adopt a partnership management model that will facilitate these requirements.

We ask too that significant weight is given to the Community Offer when responses to the tender exercise are assessed.

For its part, Forever Fishponds appreciates its dialogue with the Council to date, and especially the opening of the Fields since 30 January. It remains committed to working with all interests concerned, and bringing its many skills and resources to creating a flourishing future for Fishponds Fields.

Signed

Forever Fishponds

12 April 2021

“Green public spaces are one of 7 key provisioning systems in cities, along with shelter, water, food, energy, connectivity and sanitation. People need green spaces.”

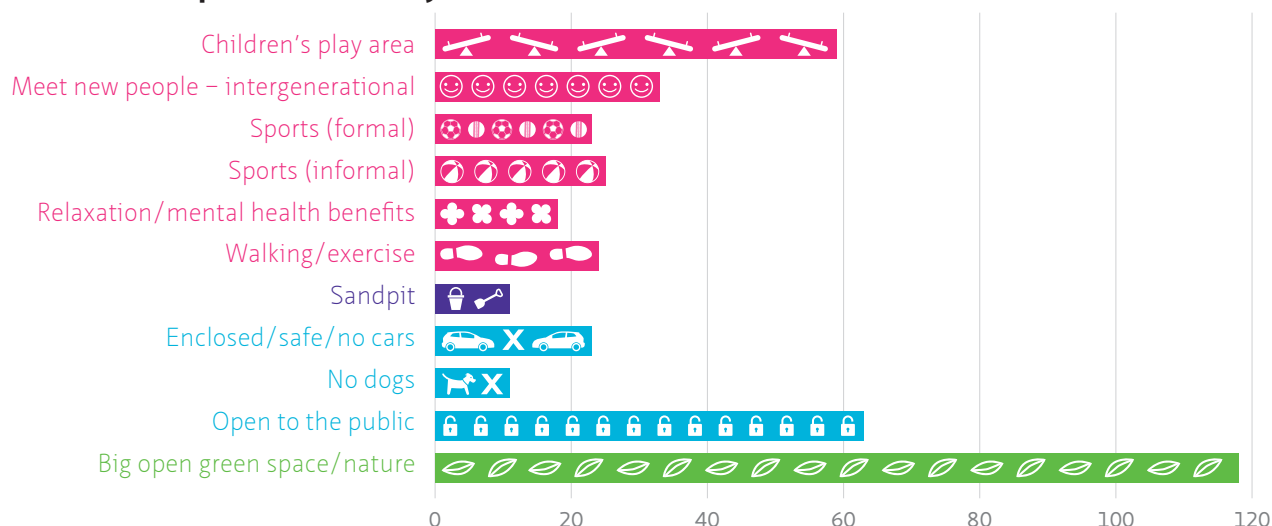
Anu Ramaswami,
New Scientist



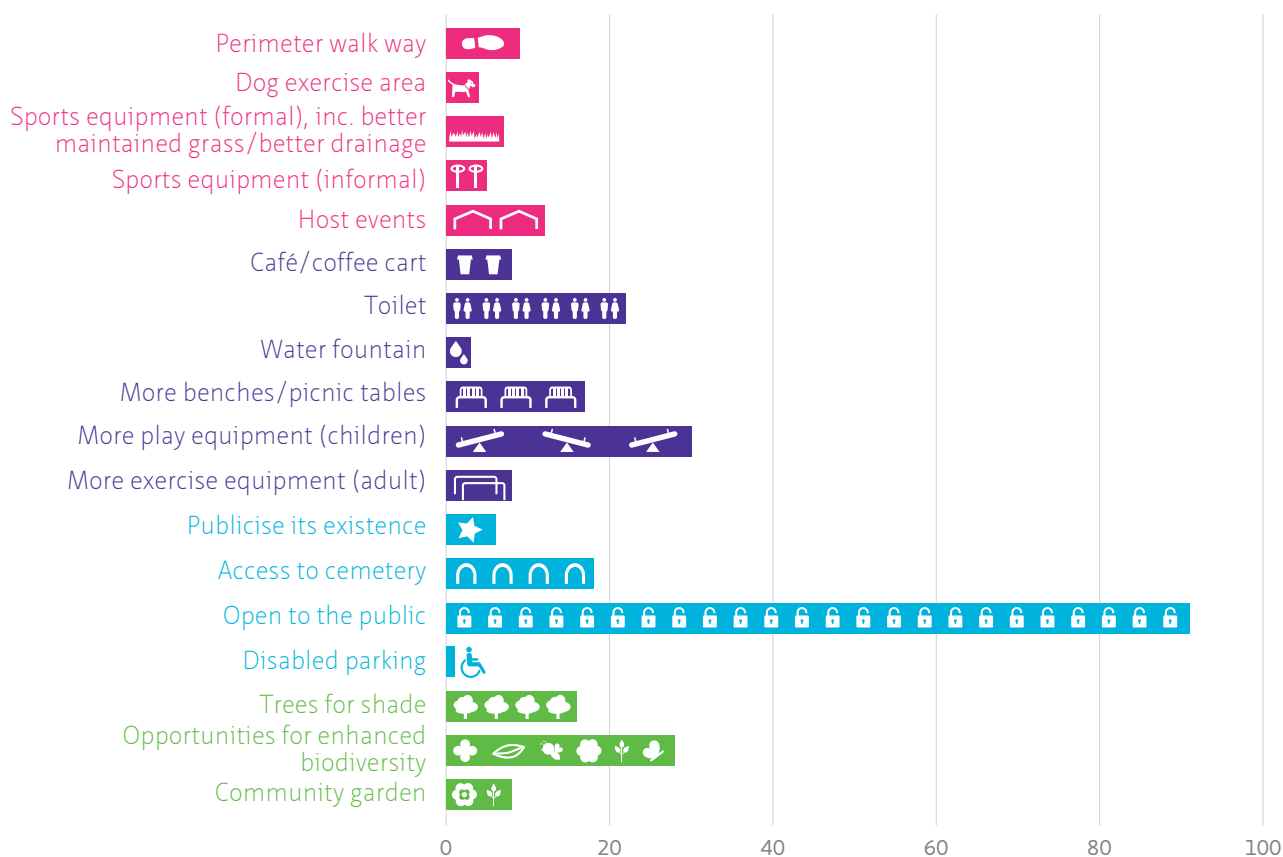
Note A: Evidence gathered

Evidence was gathered during the period of opening in Summer 2020 and February and March 2021 to seek responses to the questions below. A variety of means were used, including a 'postcard' leaflet distributed to 2,500 households in local streets in February 2021.

What does Fishponds have that you love?



What does Fishponds not have that you would like or need?

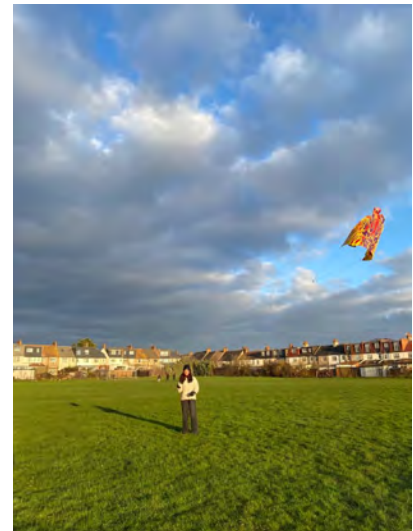


Note B: Use of Fishponds Playing Fields during summer 18 July to 6 September 2020 and from 30 January 2021

Regular observations made by Forever Fishponds during both periods of opening showed:

Key points

- Numbers using the Fields have risen steeply from the estimated summer average daily use of 50-100 people to the current level of 200-300 people or more. At the busiest periods there have been 100 people on the site at any one time.
- The Fields are busiest in the afternoon, at weekends, during school holidays and in finer weather.
- Children's and teens' outdoor play, exercise and learning are the main uses, with use by many families with children of all ages, including during home-schooling. They are also used by children from a local early years setting.
- All ages use the Fields for a range of activities including walking, running, fitness training, disk practice, ball games and wildlife study.
- Older people are relaxing with family and taking exercise.
- Women and girls are very frequent users including mothers, carers and girls, both in households playing together and as solitary users as walkers and runners.
- Users were diverse and reflected many ethnic and cultural groups, in line with the demographics of the area.
- People with disabilities and their carers are amongst those using the Fields regularly.
- Students, including those from St George's Hospital medical school and workers use the Fields to relax and unwind between their classes and shifts.



Narrative commentary on responses

Forever Fishponds opinion survey

Process for collecting views

About 180 local people expressed views during evidence gathering in both periods of opening. Women's and girls' voices were well heard in both phases.

The questions were:

- 1. What does Fishponds have that you love (and want to keep)?**
- 2. What does Fishponds not have that you would like or need (to improve your experience of the Fields)?**



"A green lung in the heart of Tooting, this is a unique opportunity for the community – from the earliest years to the older generations – to access a facility that is increasingly used and loved."

Local resident

The outcome

1. What does Fishponds have that you love (and want to keep)?

Those replying raised a wide variety of points. The specific responses, 419 in total, have been grouped into the categories shown in the [charts on page 7](#).

Two responses predominated:

There was great appreciation of the Fields as a huge green open space that feels calm and safe, with wide horizons, 'big skies' and closeness to nature (117 responses) and is dog free. They underline the absence of any other green space in the area around, apart from Streatham Cemetery. People feel relaxed and enjoy socialising.

Respondents felt that having public access to open space 'on the doorstep' (64) makes a huge difference. Many pointed out the relentless concrete local streetscape and the long distance to other open space. New opportunities had opened up for play, leisure and exercise, especially for small children and the elderly.

A third category, the benefits of play equipment for children (58) also featured strongly. As well as play opportunities, the equipment forms a natural focus for social connection, and leads to new friendships being developed.

Many respondents valued the opportunities for sport and exercise, mentioning jogging, sprint training, ball skills, fitness training, coaching and being able to practice football skills with real goals and nets.

"The Fields should remain open as they are a local resource that is very helpful for my football development and for others."

Local resident



2. What does Fishponds not have that you would like or need (to improve your experience of the Fields)?

The total number of responses provided was 291, with the key points those described below – see table.

There was an overwhelming call to keep the Fields open for public access (91), coming from the great majority of those who responded, preferably year round in daytime. Residents want to hold onto the benefits of opening for physical and mental health and wish to see a wider pattern of activities. Hours of opening need to be regular and predictable. Many are keen to protect and enhance biodiversity and see the Fields as a resource for nature. A number stressed the importance of not prejudicing organised sport.

Other significant priorities were:

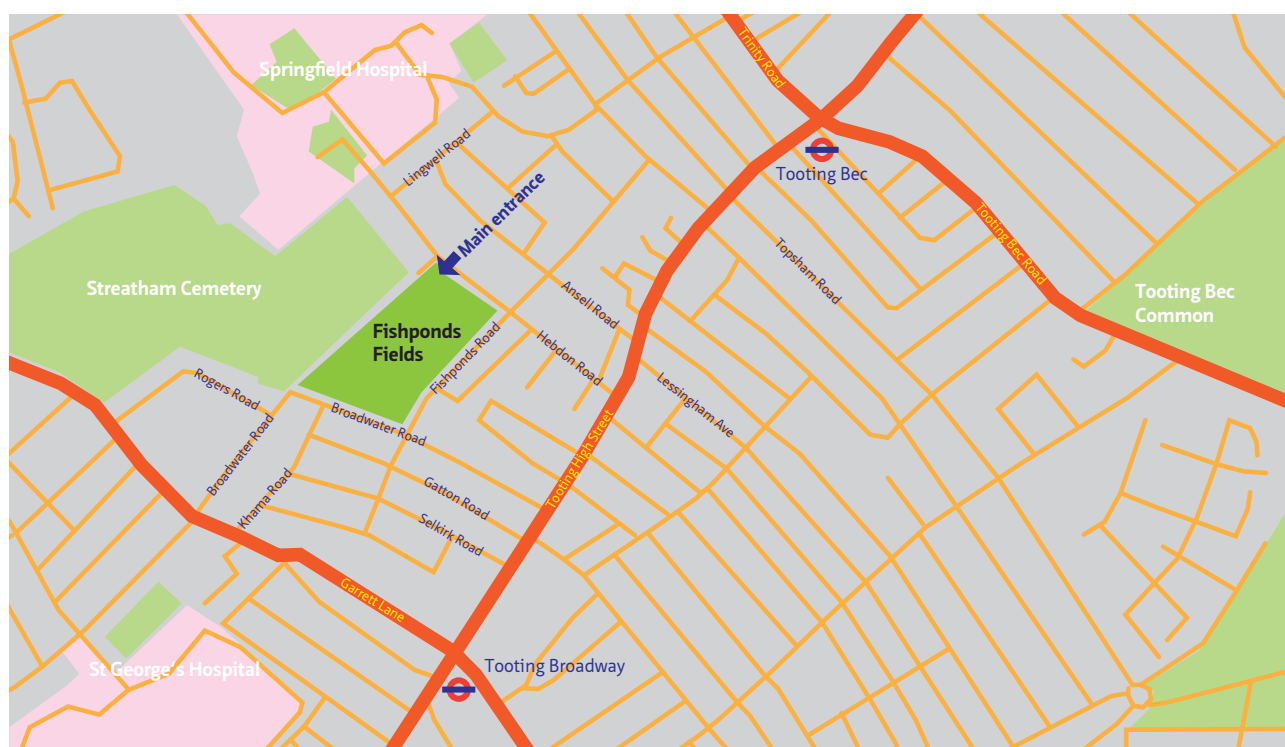
- More play equipment (31), including a sandpit, swings and items for very small children.
- A range of measures to improve biodiversity (29), including appropriate planting eg wild flower meadow, orchard, growing space, protecting wildlife and sustainability measures eg rain garden to improve drainage and carbon capture via trees and soil. Also a community garden (9).
- Toilets (18), which are a strongly felt need.
- A gate from Streatham Cemetery (16) to improve access for those living towards Garratt Lane and Broadwater Road, from where many of those visiting come, and to help create a 'green chain' through this part of Wandsworth.
- Outdoor exercise equipment (11), a perimeter path (9) for walking and jogging and other facilities for informal sport eg a netball hoop.
- Facilities to help sociability and relaxation especially more benches (16), trees for shade (13) and a café/coffee cart (8).
- Use the Fields to host community events (10).

Other items mentioned were a dog exercise area, a water fountain, a pond and disabled parking.

"Disability play equipment for the physically disabled and sensory and play equipment for autistic kids in a space as secure and safe as these Fields would be welcomed by so many families."

Local resident





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We are hosting an open meeting on 10 May to hear all voices in the Fishponds Story – invite below. We have had a strong response from local residents, sports clubs, local schools, health workers, community organisations and councillors. Prize to Transform the Future would be warmly welcomed.



Hear more about this amazing Tooting green space at an

**OPEN meeting on Zoom
on Monday 10 May 6–7.30pm**



You'll hear from Tooting residents young and old, local health experts, educators, historians, sports clubs, community groups, schools, councillors, sport enthusiasts, childminders, amateur botanists and wildlife experts.

Hear about the Community Offer proposals put by Forever Fishponds to Wandsworth Council to ensure Fishponds Fields is a green asset for all in the heart of urban Tooting, for current and future generations.

Join the exchange of views and explore a shared vision for the Fields' future.

To join: [click here](#)

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