



An evolving vision for Fishponds Fields

Creating a life-enhancing green asset for all in the heart of urban Tooting for current and future generations

18 July 2020



Imagine 2030

"We heard birdsong in the morning, robin, wren and chaff chaff: 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 butterfly meadow; **the clear air and sense of safe, open space**. Within the hour school children had appeared, sitting under the shade of nut trees to learn about the habitats of the birds, small mammals, bees, bats and the 100s of other species they lived alongside.

By mid-morning, girls and boys in several school classes were playing the first cricket of the season, a shift from winter football to longer 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, led by the community activity space workers.

Beneath the much-loved fig tree, in an opposite corner, two part-time horticultural workers, were drawing up that week's plans for community gardening with volunteers from local groups, schools and households – so good for their physical and mental wellbeing. **A group of neighbours tended raised beds of medicinal herbs**, runner beans, caraway and cumin. They paused to relish the Fields, the big sky, the quiet and the blackberry harvest soon to come.

At lunch the healthy living coordinator opened up the grass roofed café, a social enterprise supporting food resilience and work apprenticeships. The pavilion next door hosted **regular meet up between local councillors and neighbourhood groups** steering Wandsworth Council'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 from the Olive Tree Nursery ran around safely**, playing on the climbing frames and in the sand pit.

At weekends the Fields held sporting and community events for local clubs and teams. **The fine cricket green**, was envied across the Borough. Many delighted in their greater strength and flexibility from regular yoga and exercise classes. Brisk walking, kite flying, women's walking football and picnics were just a few of the post Covid activities enjoyed by everyone sharing the Fields – **reflecting the many ethnic and cultural groups, in line with the demographics of the area**.

Households explored the Tooting Green Way, opened with ceremony in 2023, linking the Fields, through the lime trees, to Streatham Cemetery, Springfield Park, Wandsworth Common and beyond. Bats swooped as evening fell. Birds returned to their nests, households to their homes. An exemplar of both urban bio diversity and cultural diversity, Fishponds Fields was a celebration of Tooting's spirited social cohesion and stewardship of green space. It had been the joyous collective hard-won achievement of Wandsworth Borough's Climate Action Plan launched 10 years earlier in 2020 for everyone for everything forever."

The vision in a nutshell

Forever Fishponds hails the landmark decision to open Fishponds Fields in daylight every day from 18 July 2022 as a space for community activity and sport. We affirm the local need for such a space and summarise here the key elements needed to bring the evolving vision to fruition.

‘Joining up’ is vital to secure the best outcome – whether of concepts making up the vision or co-working among the many parties and stakeholders involved.

The vision proposes the flourishing of people, place and planet

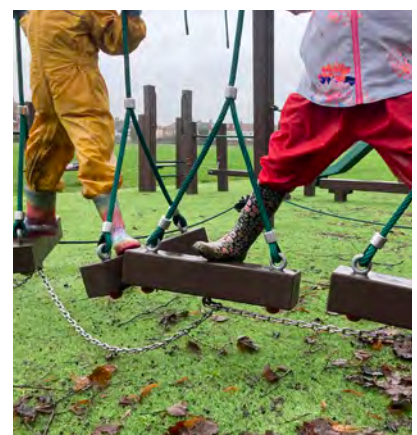
1. **Well-being for all:** a life-enhancing green space open for all the community that embraces physical, mental and emotional health every day
2. **Stewardship of nature:** enhancing and protecting the Fields’ rich habitats, biodiversity and place to connect to the natural world
3. **Social value:** optimising the Fields as a keystone of Tooting life – an inclusive community hub for all ages and cultures in an area of socio-economic deprivation – a gathering place for relaxation and play, six minutes’ walk from Tooting’s High Street
4. **Voice:** ensuring local people have a clear and meaningful voice in decisions on the Fields, now and into the future
5. **Forever:** Protecting the Fields in perpetuity for all of the above

“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

“When I was a kid I wanted to play football, but they told me I couldn’t because I was a girl. Now I can and it’s wonderful.”

Walking Women’s Footballer





"Exercise at Fishponds Playing Fields became a bit of a habit for us all this winter. The sheer size of the place and its astonishing trees takes your breath away..."

Local resident



Despite much progress in the past 12 months, following the interim appointment of Enable LC to manage the Fields, *much more* is needed to secure:

- **Connected community:** increasing social value through increased use of the Fields, located in an area of the Borough recognised for its green space deficiency
- **Green infrastructure:** a keystone in addressing Wandsworth Council's Climate Action Plan and WESS (Wandsworth Environment and Sustainability Strategy) and a broad range of other strategies: Wandsworth Health and Wellbeing; Active Travel; Walking and Cycling Strategy; Air Pollution; Physical Activity; Mental Health; Social Prescribing. The proposed **Tooting Green Way**, an urban corridor from the Fields linking the Wandle Trail to Wandsworth Common exemplifies the 'joined up' delivery of many of these strategies
- **Designated playing fields:** promoting sport excellence through outreach and innovation, and embracing organised sport and informal physical activity side by side with other compatible use

A joined up approach

The Fields should be enjoyed by all, with a shared sense of stewardship and belonging amongst those of all cultures, faiths and ethnicities, all generations and those of differing experiences of physical and mental health.

The Fields can flourish if the Council, those managing the Fields and community join up their energies, resources and skills with a management and development ethos that promotes wellbeing in the round: environmental stewardship, physical and mental health (evidenced by growing research into a 'dose of nature'¹) and building social solidarity.

Within a programme of physical activities, social prescribing can support vulnerable and excluded groups; outdoor learning will promote nature classrooms, connection to nature with community horticulture and gardening; the protection and enhancement of the Fields' current biodiversity, a place to address all aspects of climate action planning and appropriate community gatherings.

¹ www.doseofnature.org.uk/the-science

A good beginning has been made recently with the introduction of a range of exercise classes, some activities to support those with special needs, and initial planning of biodiversity improvements but there is room for a more integrated approach.

To work in a 'joined up' way, there is a need for:

- Ensuring those appointed to manage the Fields, currently and in future, are committed to deliver this evolving vision and have the skills, resources and processes to do so.
- Two-way channels for inviting and respecting continuing creative input from local people, to the management and development of the Fields. Forever Fishponds welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership with the managing body to this end.
- Investment and resources from the Council and partnership organisations, including future-facing funders keen to invest in social entrepreneurship to safeguard and protect green spaces.



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

Anu Ramaswami,
New Scientist



Council decisions on the long term management of the Fields

The Council's decision on the long term management arrangements for the Fields after the current interim appointment of Enable LC expires around the end of 2022, will be critical.

Forever Fishponds proposes that the tender documentation should be based on specified obligations covering:

- Goals for the management of the Fields to maximise social and environmental value together with physical activity: a joined up approach
- Evidence of the skills required for the above, especially communications and relationship building
- Commitment to a meaningful partnership approach affording space for the community voice at the centre of planning and decisions on the Fields
- An established status in governance for Forever Fishponds CIC with a collaborative working protocol and agreed transparent mechanisms for holding those managing the Fields to account
- Agreed guiding principles such as active listening and mutual respect

Forever Fishponds is ready to contribute further thinking to all of the above.



Realising the vision

Key elements of the vision, which are based on the views and needs expressed by local people in consultations over the past two years, are set out below. These needs will evolve as local people's experience of using the Fields accumulates.

The opening of the Fields on 18 July 2022 during daylight hours every day in summer is a magnificent milestone. Forever Fishponds thanks the Council and Enable for committing to this. To establish the Fields as a destination for community activity and a sports facility daily opening should be maintained year round.

Wellbeing for all

The Fields should support a wide of range of activities for those of all ages and backgrounds to promote well being in the round.

Designing these activities should draw on the learning of the past 12 months, especially the demonstrated benefits of community involvement in specific decisions for example on the seasonal activities programme, new equipment and Enable-led community events and camps.

An aim throughout should be to create a sense of shared belonging among all users.

The activities should include:

- Organised sport, maintaining the Fields' role as designated playing fields, especially for schools, both to promote excellence and draw in all local communities
- An evolving programme of informal sport and exercise, responding to users' expressed needs and wishes, and drawing in those who have never exercised before
- Activities supporting outdoor learning, climate resilient gardening, biodiversity and heritage walks

Social value

- Activities serving those experiencing social isolation, physical or mental health difficulties and other obstacles to social inclusion, and those with no habit of using outdoor green space – working with Social Prescribing teams



"As a Muslim woman who wears the hijab, it is difficult to find an outdoor space to exercise comfortably... The Women's classes have become a lifeline... it's wonderful to come together as a community and form connections with women from all walks of life, cultures and ages at this class"

Women's fitness session participant



- Community events and gatherings to build up friendship, social bonds and pride in our area: picnics, community celebrations, and occasional festivals and performances. These to be on an appropriate scale and respectful of neighbours

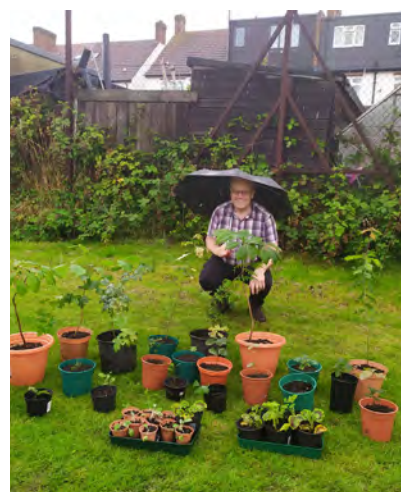
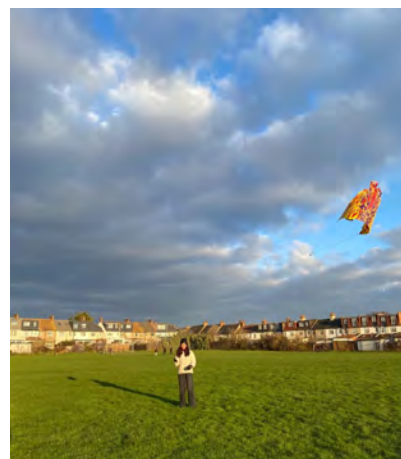
Stewardship of nature

The Fields present the opportunity to connect to and learn about the natural world in a rich habitat for wild life which can be enhanced and needs protecting.

The Council's 17 July 2019 declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency and aims to be carbon zero by 2050 and the greenest inner-London council by 2030. The Fields can play a key part in delivering Wandsworth Environment and Sustainability Strategy (WESS) and a Climate Action Plan that emphasises the role green infrastructure plays in increasing the Borough's capacity to adapt to climate change in droughts, heatwaves and heavy rainfall events.

The Fields offer practical ways of delivering the Biodiversity Strategy and the Walking and Cycling Strategy, increasing delight in the local area, promoting stewardship of the natural world and active lifestyles.

- Enhance the biodiversity value of the Fields through new trees planted for greater shade; pollinator flower planting; softening boundary areas to enable wider diversity of flora and fauna to build a wildlife corridor with neighbouring Streatham Cemetery.
- Increase accessibility for wheel chair and buggy users through path around perimeter.
- Promote outdoor learning with Nature Classrooms, Forest schools, field and exploration studies
- Make the Fields a stage in the **Tooting Green Way**, the proposed walking and cycling trail linking three of Tooting's green spaces: Fishponds Playing Fields, Streatham Cemetery and Springfield Park. Involves opening gates between Fishponds Fields and Streatham Cemetery and joining up or creating new paths.



Facilities

A complete redesign of the site and its facilities is needed, informed by continuing consultation and involvement of local people. The latter is vital in getting the best result. Significant future investment will be needed but much can be done quickly to improve the site without excessive cost.

Relevant aspects are:

- Entrance area: make welcoming, with clear visibility to the Fields
- Biodiversity: perimeter planting, bring in meadow or 'no mow' areas and enhance plant and insect life
- Indoor space: community pavilion and gathering room to enable all weather, all year activities
- Sustainable practice for building – rain harvesting, solar panels, zero waste
- Improving extreme heat protection: trees for greater shade
- Improving the everyday experience : a café, more and modernised toilets, more benches, perimeter paths, adult and children cycle racks at the Fields
- More equipment for play and informal sports such as outdoor fitness and new play equipment

Voice: ensuring local people have a clear and meaningful voice in decisions on the Fields, now and into the future

The enthusiasm and advocacy of local people have been critical in securing the opening of the Fields and their recent development. Future developments must respond to their needs and views. Involving them in decisions about the Fields through a range of channels – fundamental to implementing the evolving vision successfully.



Forever

As a life-enhancing green habitat for all, in the heart of urban Tooting, it is important the Fields remain protected in perpetuity for future generations to enjoy. Ways of doing this can be explored together.

We ask for the following immediate actions:

- To support and take further the progress made since July 2021 towards the goals and targets above, and ensure that changes and improvements being made in the short term reflect them
- To commend and reinforce partnership working between Forever Fishponds and Enable
- To clarify the Council's timetable for making decisions on the long term management of the Fields
- To invite Forever Fishponds to collaborate on developing the specification for the appointment of the long term managing body for the Fields
- To continue regular discussions between Forever Fishponds and the lead councillors concerned

“I really like having different classes every day. I go to several. They’ve helped me get my fitness back after having a baby.”

Local resident



About Forever Fishponds

Forever Fishponds is a group of local people committed to developing Fishponds Playing Fields as a flourishing asset for the whole community. It works with many partners, local and national. It is constituted as a CIC.

After prolonged campaigning by residents to open the Fields to all, led since early 2020 by Forever Fishponds, the Council appointed Enable LC in July 2021 to manage the Fields for a pilot period pending decisions in late 2022 on the long-term management of the Fields. This decision followed many years of minimal public access and under use.

There has been consultation and engagement between Enable and Forever Fishponds in a spirit of partnership. These have been positive developments, which need consolidating.

We express gratitude for work done to secure a future-facing vision for the Fields for the benefit of the whole community. We look forward to continuing close cooperation with all stakeholders on this evolving vision. We will be pleased to provide further information on any aspect of the above. We welcome opportunities to inform Wandsworth councillors of our work - and enjoy a meet up on the Fields.

Forever Fishponds team

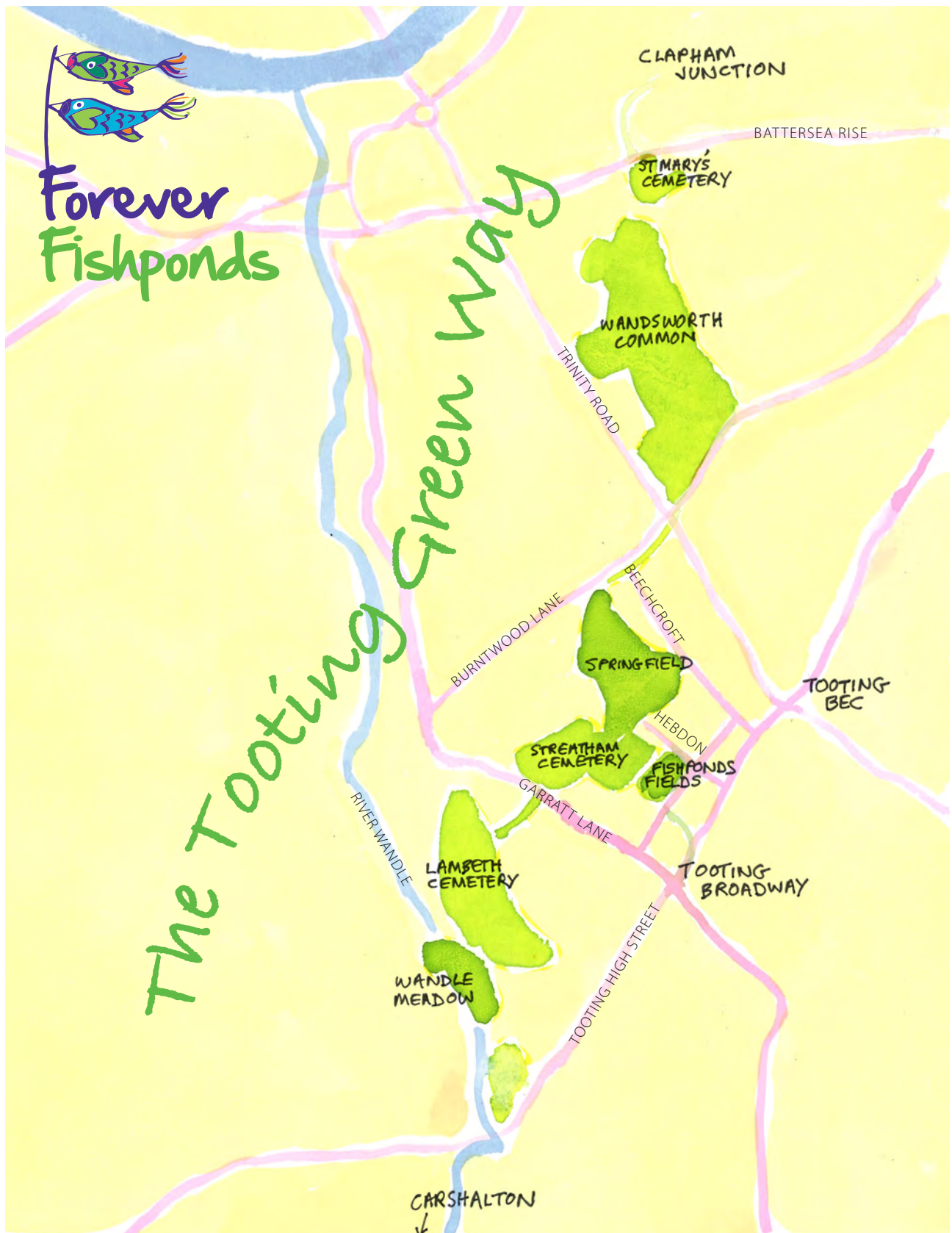
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"Fishponds Fields is an ideal place for this class. I love the fresh air and open skies."

Over 50s active well-being class participant





🐦 @FFishponds

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