



City of Westminster

City  
for  
All

# A Partnership Approach to Open Spaces and Biodiversity in Westminster

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# Foreword

The open and green spaces dotted across Westminster are remarkable. We are fortunate to be custodians of some of the most recognised and valued areas in London and almost one quarter of Westminster’s 8.9 square mile area is open and green space. Westminster’s parks and gardens also offer immense quality, very recently achieving a total of 24 Green Flag awards between them. These spaces provide important opportunity for respite in the centre of one of the world’s most vibrant cities, and they get and keep people active, as well as helping to improve local air quality across the city.

We know residents, workers and visitors alike value these areas immensely. Our green and open spaces provide opportunity for physical activity, leisure and sport and contemplation for us all. The green areas of the city also provide an important home to the rich and diverse wildlife that live or visit the city each year.

Our partners across central London are vital to helping us deliver these benefits. The Royal Parks provide a large proportion of the green open space in Westminster and create a unique draw for tourists and visitors in particular. Various partners enable the use of the Westminster’s numerous private squares and gardens by our near quarter of a million residents, while Business Improvement Districts, major landowners and other groups work with us to deliver exceptional greening initiatives in locations across the city.

The council is determined to protect, enhance and promote our many parks, open spaces and other green infrastructure, as well as acting to conserve the city’s rich and diverse wildlife, so that we can all continue to benefit from them. We are equally committed to encouraging and facilitating new greenery wherever possible across the city – whether in the form of new green spaces, living walls and roofs, or other innovations.

I look forward to working with everyone that values these outstanding assets.

**Cllr Tim Mitchell**  
Cabinet Member for Environment and City Management



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# Introduction: Pressures and Priorities

Westminster has an impressive open space and green infrastructure network – in fact it is a much ‘greener’ place than many people tend to expect. Almost one quarter of Westminster’s 8.9 square mile area is open and green space, and the number and range of other ‘green assets’ such as living walls and roofs, is increasing.

Over half of the city’s open spaces have a heritage designation, with more than 70 London Squares and 21 Historic England registered parks and gardens, including the five Royal Parks. These unique landscapes are assets that can reinforce a sense of place and identity, improve health and wellbeing, boost environmental resilience and make the city a more attractive and prosperous place. Westminster is also home to a thriving and diverse range of plants, animals and micro-organisms. Over 600 different kinds of flora and fauna have been recorded in Westminster and St John’s Wood has formal designation as a Local Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949). In fact, nearly one quarter of Westminster’s total area – more than 500 hectares – is protected because of its wildlife value.

Nonetheless, there are challenges associated with providing green and open space in the very heart of central London. Westminster is a truly ‘24 hour city’ and its population of over 233,000 residents is boosted on a daily basis by a further 674,000 workers and 176,000 visitors, which swell the overall population to an estimated around 1.1 million. With the impending opening of Crossrail and other infrastructure improvements, these figures are only set to rise. Population growth adds additional pressure on existing green space, but conversely it also further intensifies the value of that very infrastructure and of other interventions to help relieve the intensity of the urban built environment.

User surveys and feedback from the public highlight just how highly valued by the local community Westminster’s open spaces are. Open spaces refer to all open spaces of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water which offer opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity. Access to nature is important for individual and collective wellbeing, and our parks, open spaces and green infrastructure provide opportunities for people to be physically active and do things which benefit all aspects of their health. We want to capitalise on this, helping as many people as possible to feel the benefits and increase the accessibility of our open spaces. Meanwhile, as the local authority we have a statutory responsibility to have regard to Westminster’s biodiversity. We need to make clear plans to protect and improve conditions for the species and habitats that make up the city’s abundant wildlife. We can achieve this by working together with key partners, to maximise our impact within available resources.

Given these pressures there will be challenges in ensuring that we reap all the benefits of having high quality, well maintained open spaces and green infrastructure. The city council has therefore developed this strategy for open spaces and biodiversity, to help us meet these challenges head on.



# Policy context

The importance of open and green spaces along with the role of local authorities in protecting, managing and enhancing them, is recognised in a range of policy documents and frameworks.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advises that councils should conduct up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, and opportunities for new provision, while also working towards the protection and enhancement of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure (paragraph 114). Open and green spaces are also protected by some specific legislation – for Westminster this includes the London Squares Preservation Act (1931) which offers statutory protection to a number of squares and enclosed gardens across the city.

The NPPF is supported by Planning Practice Guidance, which advises local authorities to prepare green infrastructure strategies and requires them to take account of biodiversity. This is in line with the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (Section 40).

The Mayor of London's London Plan aims to protect and promote London's open spaces and green infrastructure. Key relevant policies in this plan include the requirement for planning authorities to audit, manage and protect existing green spaces and infrastructure and develop priorities for addressing deficiencies. Also included are dedicated policies relating to play and recreation space, urban greening, sustainable drainage and biodiversity. A new London Plan is currently in draft form and, once adopted, will put a particular focus on 'good growth' and green infrastructure. The Supplementary Planning Guidance document on the All London Green Grid, published in 2012, added extra emphasis in respect of connecting and integrating London's green infrastructure network. Any future iterations of this strategy will also have regard to the Mayor's new London Environment Strategy, which was published in 2018 and integrates all aspects of London's environment in a strategy for the first time.

The Mayor also wants to make London the world's first National Park City, with high quality green spaces, cleaner air and waterways, and greener streets that encourage and provide more space for healthy living. It is hoped that a National Park City will create more opportunities for Londoners to get involved in physical activities as they help make the city greener, such as tree planting and gardening. The Mayor's commitment to valuing green infrastructure alongside 'built' elements is also outlined in the London Infrastructure Plan 2050.

The city council reflects the aims of the Mayor's London Plan in its own planning policy, with a clear strategic objective within Westminster's City Plan to: "protect and enhance Westminster's open spaces, civic spaces and Blue Ribbon Network, and Westminster's biodiversity; including protecting the unique character and openness of the Royal Parks and other open spaces; and to manage these spaces to ensure areas of relative tranquillity in a city with a daytime population increased every day to over one million workers and visitors." Key policies within the current City Plan include:

S35 Open Space; S36 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation; S37 Westminster's Blue Ribbon Network; S38 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure; and S32 Noise; although additional policies on flooding, design, heritage and health are also all relevant. The city council is currently refreshing and its City Plan and a new look is being taken at the aspects which pertain to open spaces and biodiversity as part of this. Careful drafting and application of the relevant planning policies within our City Plan will provide the necessary policy framework to enable us to protect, develop and enhance Westminster's open spaces and wildlife.

Our priorities are further supported and reinforced by the council's Code of Construction Practice, which was published in July 2016. This document helps us to monitor, control and manage construction impacts on sites throughout Westminster. It sets out a range of requirements for developers whose proposals may have implications for the city's green assets or local ecology, to ensure negative impacts are managed and mitigated.

In addition to this statutory planning context, the council's strategic approach to open spaces and biodiversity shares important connections with a wide range of its other policies and strategies. A few key examples are shown opposite.

This strategy looks at how we can work with partners to maximise the benefits of the city's green assets for the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, whilst protecting the environment and biodiversity and supporting the character and prosperity of Westminster as a whole. In doing so, it aligns directly with the council's City for All vision.

## This Strategy in Context: Some Key Links Within Westminster



# The Importance of Open Space and Green Infrastructure

The benefits of open space and green infrastructure to individuals and communities are broad ranging. Providing green spaces and places for nature improves the health and wellbeing of individuals, increases resilience to climate change, improves air quality and enhances biodiversity, while also delivering economic benefits and driving local growth and prosperity. It is also one of the most effective ways to address health inequalities in the community.

Our understanding of the precise impacts is growing all the time and there's always more we can learn about the benefits of protecting and investing in 'green assets'. In 2016 a Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) committee recommended that more work was needed to specify the real value of the contribution of green spaces to wider public agendas. So research and exploration of these issues is ongoing and this ever increasing body of evidence has been brought into consideration in the development of this strategy.

## Health and wellbeing benefits

Our network of green and open space has many benefits for physical and mental health and wellbeing. Among the most recent evidence are findings from a research study by Fields in Trust, which indicate that proximity to, and more frequent use of, local green space produces corresponding increases in health and wellbeing scores across all four of the Office of National Statistics wellbeing indicators (life satisfaction, sense of worth, happiness and anxiety) along with general health.

### Physical health

Insufficient physical activity is among the ten most important risk factors for the health burden in England, costing the NHS over £1 billion a year. In Westminster, over 58% of adults aged 16 and over engage in moderate physical activity only once a week or less and the percentage of children who are overweight is higher than the national and London average.

Access to parks can and should promote more active lifestyles by default, by providing space for physical activity, leisure, sport and play. Public Health England recognise that increased access to green space is directly linked to increased levels of

physical activity, which is then directly connected to maintaining mental and physical health and preventing illness. This is supported by a wealth of scientific evidence which demonstrates a positive impact in terms of reductions in long-term conditions: this includes heart disease, cancer, musculoskeletal problems, cardiovascular morbidity, obesity, type 2 diabetes and overall mortality.

Westminster's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy recognises the value of our network of open and green spaces, not only in encouraging physical activity but also in providing opportunities for relaxation and interaction, which can impact on other concerns such as loneliness and social isolation. For example, dog walking can be a key leisure activity for some people that encourages them to be active and socialise. Of course not every green space is ideally suited for dog walking (often due to the small size of the space), but we will enable the activity wherever possible. Westminster has a strong track record of dealing with issues of dog fouling, which can negatively affect other users of open spaces - we rely on dog owners to act responsibly and help us with this. These connections point to a direct alignment between making the best use of Westminster's green spaces and infrastructure and our strategic health objectives.

## GROUP ACTIVITIES IN OPEN SPACES

Paddington Recreation Ground is somewhat unique in Westminster, as our largest open space area outside of the Royal Parks, with multiple facilities for physical activity, leisure and sport.

The city council works to make the most of this valuable asset, often using it to create opportunities for the community to come together and get physically active. A highly successful mass Tai Chi session was held there in 2017, attracting over 50 participants. Since then this open space has hosted the launch of National Fitness Day, which saw 300 young people receive top quality coaching in tennis, netball, athletics and hockey from stars such as Colin Jackson and Alex Danson. Paddington Recreation Ground was also the venue for the council's 2018 **#MyWestminster Day**, where, alongside finding out more about a huge variety of council and community initiatives, local people could enjoy the 'activity zones', taking part in fun challenges. The event attracted over 3,000 visitors to the park. Through this strategy the council hopes to build on good examples like these, to use our green and open spaces in ways that help people look after their health and wellbeing in ways they really enjoy.



One of the ways in which the city council will maximize the use of our parks and open spaces is for physical activity, leisure and sport, ensuring that this is supported, permitted and enabled by default as well as being supported by our Park Makers scheme. Under the Park Makers scheme local providers and individuals can volunteer to deliver free physical activity, leisure and sport activities in Westminster's parks and open spaces. There are opportunities for them to improve their skills and expertise while opening up access to organised physical activity, leisure and sport opportunities to the whole community. This initiative was recently highlighted as a 'best practice' approach and it marks an important link between promoting open spaces for their positive impact on physical health and our commitment to support volunteering. This is a connection the council would like to explore even further in the future as part of this and the ActiveWestminster strategy.

#### Mental health and wellbeing

Green spaces also offer tranquil spaces in the heart of the city. There is strong evidence that green spaces directly improve our health. Green spaces are associated with a raft of health benefits such as; improved mental health and wellbeing, improved cognitive function and stress reduction, and increased self-esteem and improved sleep quality. Supporting and improving the mental health of Westminster's residents and visitors is a high priority for the council. Our Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy recognises that "poor mental health can affect quality of life, life expectancy and the ability to participate in and contribute to society", while also noting that Westminster has a higher prevalence of self-reported anxiety and depression than neighbouring London boroughs. Studies have shown that people value green spaces as important for their happiness and wellbeing and local data reveals that in Westminster a large proportion of people who use our parks and open spaces do so in order to enjoy the peace and quiet.

Green space is also one of the most effective ways to address health inequalities in the community. Increasing the use of good quality green space for all social groups is likely to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. It can also bring other benefits such as greater community cohesion and reduced social isolation.

#### Communities

In addition to the physical and mental benefits which may be felt by individuals, green spaces and infrastructure can contribute to the collective wellbeing, resilience and cohesion of whole communities. Our green assets can help foster a sense of community – whether through community growing projects like the one in Church Street or simply by providing a focal point where local people can gather together to socialise, learn and volunteer.

#### FOREST SCHOOLS

The Forest Schools programme has been operating out of Paddington Recreation Ground for over three years. It has become extremely popular with local primary and infant schools, which send their pupils to enjoy the custom-built Environmental Area and the newly added bluebell glade extension, as 'outdoor classrooms'. Children learn about wildlife as well as, through planting herbs and vegetables, gaining an understanding of where their food comes from, which can have additional benefits in line with the council's commitment to helping tackle childhood obesity. This year we will engage more children in the programme; our target for 2019-20 is 7,000, which builds upon last year's ambitious rate of participation. Furthermore, we're looking to develop the offer to create more opportunities for other sections of the community to learn about nature. We've already begun working with Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools and the Home Education Network. We're also creating more opportunities for adults and whole families to learn together. Details about how we intend to continue doing this are outlined in the Action Plan attached to this strategy.



#### Environmental benefits

The environmental benefits of open and green space are broad ranging and well documented, and are drawn into particularly sharp focus in intensively developed, highly populated urban areas like the centre of London. They play a vital role in supporting urban wildlife, can help improve resilience to climate change, improve air and water quality, and are an integral part of the historic townscape.

#### Wildlife and biodiversity

Both open spaces and green infrastructure, such as green roofs and walls and trees, can provide habitats for wildlife and support pollinators. There are 32 locations in Westminster that have the designation of Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC). This total has remained unchanged for almost ten years and underlines the major contribution that green spaces and infrastructure within our borough make to supporting biodiversity across London and more widely. The majority of these sites incorporate a number of different habitat types, enabling them each to benefit a range of species. However, most recent audit data shows that of the total land area assessed, only 39% was found to have 'average to rich' or 'rich' species diversity. This is something we would look for opportunities to improve through this strategy.

#### Access to nature

As well as providing for wildlife, green spaces and infrastructure allow people to experience a closer relationship with nature. There is a significant weight of evidence connecting a lack of contact with nature with a range of negative impacts on people's wellbeing, including higher incidences of depression, stress and anxiety, and greater susceptibility to allergies. There is a particular significance for children and young people growing up in predominantly urban environments, with studies indicating that spending time in the natural environment can improve children's cognitive development, mood and self-esteem, and may even reduce the symptoms and need for medication among children with ADHD. This underlines the importance of providing opportunities to interact with nature for those growing up in Westminster.

The London Plan encourages boroughs to ensure people can walk to areas with significant wildlife value (no more than 1km from their homes). The city council aims to respond to this by continuing to maintain high quality green spaces all over the city, and in view of the known benefits in terms of health and wellbeing we will be particularly keen to increase opportunities in places where there is less easy access to nature currently. Our priorities will be guided by audit work which has identified specific areas of potential deficiency indicated in Appendix 3.

### LOCAL PARTNERS DELIVERING NEW GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

There are several examples of private local stakeholders across Westminster working to 'green' our city. Greenery has been added in many locations and in a variety of forms including living walls, green roofs and on-street planters. As well as adding visual interest and environmental benefits in terms of air quality and urban cooling, these assets provide important habitats for local wildlife. The 'Evergreen Embankment' project has recently added a living wall at Embankment tube station – it was delivered through effective partnership working between the local Business Improvement District, Transport for London and other interested parties. Another excellent example of local stakeholders collaborating to deliver green infrastructure is Wild West End. A joint initiative by local landowners, with the support of the London Wildlife Trust and the GLA, which seeks to "encourage birds, bees and bats back into this iconic area of London, and create greater connections with nature for residents, visitors and workers to enjoy." Among their achievements is the creation of 'Pocket Meadows' at the residential development 25 Castlereagh Street, which is in a geographic area of priority for the council in terms of greening and was short-listed for a Civic Trust Award in 2016.



### Climate change and urban cooling

Green spaces and planting have a crucial role to play in helping manage the effects of climate change. They help to cool the city, lowering both surface and air temperatures by providing shade and through evapotranspiration. A well-known effect of urbanisation is the warming of the local climate relative to surrounding rural areas, creating a phenomenon known as the 'urban heat island' (UHI). Planting in urban locations helps to mitigate this. Green roofs and walls can also provide insulation, reducing the need to cool and heat buildings mechanically. This further benefits the environment in terms of energy efficiency, in line with the aims of the city council's Greener City Action Plan.

### Flooding

Green spaces also help to reduce flood risk. Intense rainfall can cause localised flooding as rainwater is unable to soak into the ground or drain away, but vegetation can slow down and reduce the flow of rainwater to the drainage system. Westminster has identified areas that are susceptible to surface water flooding so the city council would look to preserve and where possible enhance planting in these regions as a priority. Small areas can also contribute, such as the John Lewis Rain Garden in Victoria which provides permeable surfaces that help to manage rainwater flow. The key role that green infrastructure like this can play in reducing surface water flooding is recognised in the London Sustainable Drainage Action Plan.

### Air Quality

Westminster has some of the poorest air quality in the country and has been designated an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) since 1999 for nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulates (PM<sub>10</sub>). Air pollution damages human health causing an increased risk of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, an increased risk of cancer, and exacerbating asthma. The number of additional deaths in Westminster attributable to air pollution was estimated at 9,400 in 2010. It is considered virtually certain that this figure has risen since that time.

Vegetation can help improve air quality, by absorbing pollutants such as ozone, nitrogen dioxide and particulates. The London i-tree study found that trees are particularly effective in storing carbon, estimating London's trees store almost 2.5 million tonnes of carbon each year. In recognition of this and other benefits, this strategy supports and will coordinate with the council's Greener City Action Plan commitment to planting 1,000 trees by 2020. Green walls can also play a role and because we want to prioritise improving air quality for Westminster's children and young people. The city council will always push for the incorporation of this type of green infrastructure in all school-based developed, especially on heavily trafficked roads.

Green planting and well maintained open spaces have the additional benefit of making the city more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. This contributes to the aims of the council and numerous partners around increasing carbon neutral travel to reduce air pollution. In 2016 the council successfully established the area around Marylebone as a Low Emission (LEN) Neighbourhood and as part of this has focused on creating attractive streets for walking and cycling.

### Water Quality

Most of Westminster is served by combined sewers designed in the 1860s. These receive both waste water and rainwater, and during rainy periods may overflow into the River Thames. Open space and green infrastructure can reduce the amount and speed of rainwater entering the drainage network, and thereby reduce the polluting overflows from the combined sewers into the river. Poor water quality, as a result of foul drainage from developments into rivers for example, can lead to excessive weed growth, de-oxygenation and the killing of fish species.

### Heritage and townscape

Open spaces are also an integral part of Westminster's historic fabric. They create attractive views and provide the setting for buildings, contributing to the character of the city. The Royal Parks and River Thames provide the setting for iconic landmarks, such as the Palace of Westminster and Buckingham Palace. Open spaces can also be heritage assets in their own right, with 21 registered parks and gardens and 85 London Squares in Westminster. Many parks and gardens also contain listed buildings and structures including statues and fountains.

## Economic benefits

There is growing evidence to support the economic benefits of green infrastructure. As well as the potential savings to health care, social and environmental costs, there are benefits to local businesses and a positive impact on tourism. Green spaces also provide economic benefits by increasing quality of life, attracting and retaining a skilled work force, increasing property values and encouraging new residents and investments - therefore being economically sustainable, increasing productivity and earning potential. Investment in our open spaces and green infrastructure can therefore help to drive our City for All ambitions by helping to encourage the right kind of economic growth in Westminster.

### Investment and Local Economy

A greener environment can attract investors, significantly boosting the local economy. Research shows that office and commercial floor space within close proximity to high quality parks and green areas can command higher rental rates. Businesses of all kinds are coming to recognise the positive impact that easy access to open spaces and natural environments can have on the wellbeing of their staff, and productivity. Increasingly they are looking to occupy premises that offer these benefits. Parks and open spaces can also directly generate and safeguard jobs themselves. The recognised benefits of greening for the business sector and local economy is reflected in actions taken by Westminster's Business Improvement Districts and major landowners, in undertaking green infrastructure audits and prioritising the protection and enhancements of the city's green assets.

### Tourism and events

Westminster's green spaces are a significant draw, for visitors from around the world. Research by Visit Britain has found that of the 31 million people who visit Britain each year, around a third (11.1 million) enjoy a park or garden while they are here, data from the Royal Parks shows that typically well over a third (37%) of people visiting Hyde Park, have come from outside the UK. So by focusing effort and resources on providing high quality green spaces, we can help drive the local tourism economy, support local businesses and contribute to Westminster's continued reputation as top global destination.

A number of our open spaces can also provide unique and attractive venues for a wide range of special events. In recent years Westminster's Royal Parks and

council-managed green spaces have played host to large scale concerts, international sporting events and film premieres, as well as many smaller scale commercial and community events. Of course, while many of these events are enormously popular with the public but they can also generate litter, noise and wear and tear, as well as potentially restricting access to spaces for a limited amount of time. This means that using our parks and open spaces for these purposes can be a sensitive issue. We need to manage the competing demands, carefully considering what might be appropriate in terms of the nature, duration and frequency of events, and recognising that this may well vary depending on the precise open space or locations.

This strategy joins a number of other documents and policy materials, most notably the council's City Plan, in supporting us to balance the conflicting demands for open spaces as 'venues'. The City Plan creates scope for events that will be beneficial to the local area and to Westminster's communities and enterprises, provided that they do not unreasonably compromise or damage the quality, amenity and accessibility of our open spaces or green infrastructure for the public. This means protecting planting, habitats and biodiversity and controlling the potential negative impacts of noise, litter and so on. We will use that policy in conjunction with this strategy, to ensure that the city and its communities benefit from the positive impact of appropriate events, while preserving the other key benefits of our green assets.

### Corporate Social Responsibility

Our green spaces can also provide opportunities for the private sector to get involved in improving and looking after the city, for the benefit of local people. The city council is committed to helping business to invest in their local community. By supporting them to connect up with Westminster's charities and community sector organisations, as well as linking in with the council's volunteering schemes, we can help all sectors work together on a wide range of activities, from day-to-day parks maintenance, to community growing or educational programmes on wildlife and biodiversity. This type of work further increases the social and economic benefits of our green and open spaces, and mobilising all local sectors like this helps us ensure that our green infrastructure network can continue to thrive in these times of constrained resources.





# Our Assets

## Parks and open spaces

Westminster has over 200 identified parks and open spaces across the city, ranging from large, multi-functional areas such as Paddington Recreation Ground to small ornamental gardens, squares and 'pocket parks'. Westminster's 'blue ribbon' waterways are also included – canals and of course the Thames. These assets are supplemented by the five Royal Parks that fall within Westminster – Royal Parks' land accounts for around 80% of our total green space. Both the city council's spaces and the Royal Parks are at times used for special events and a range of organised activities, but their primary purpose is to provide places for local people and visitors to relax, gather, engage in physical activity and connect with nature.

## Green infrastructure

The term 'green infrastructure' refers to a network of multi-functional green space, both urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Westminster has an impressive network of greening in the built environment which includes green walls, landscaped roofs, food growing and wildlife installations such as beekeeping sites. Some of these are owned and managed by the council, although many are privately held assets which the council has helped to encourage, enable and facilitate through in its role as planning authority.

## Further assets

In addition to the open spaces and greening within Westminster, the city council has some further assets which provide opportunities for people to access nature, get active and enjoy the outdoors. The council operates three cemeteries outside of the borough, at East Finchley, Hanwell and Mill Hill. These spaces are valuable open spaces in their own right, reflected by the fact that they have all individually attained Green Flag status. The council also owns and operates the outdoor education and activity centre at Sayers Croft in Surrey. This is an important asset for enabling and encouraging many kinds of physical activity, leisure and sport. It has a particularly big role to play in our outdoor education, work, offering activities such as pond dipping, nature walks and wildlife themed creative workshops, while actively supporting our Forest Schools programme at Paddington Recreation Ground. Westminster is also part of the consortium of Local Authorities which support and help fund the 26 mile long, 10,000 acre Lee Valley Regional Park.

We even recognise the value of spaces like the central reservation down Park Lane – which actually constitutes a very large area of attractive open space – in adding to the green look and feel of our city.

The city council taps into additional green assets in order to increase access to nature and make a positive contribution to the broader greening and biodiversity agenda, both within and beyond the city itself.



# Working in Partnership

Maintaining and improving Westminster's network of green spaces and infrastructure is something the city council does not and cannot do alone.

Our efforts combine with those of an extended team of partners and it is through this collaboration that we are able to achieve our shared aims in respect of the quantity, quality and positive impact of our green assets for both people and local wildlife.

This strategy seeks to recognise the collective efforts of this partnership. With a range of key partners lending their resources and expertise in various specialist areas, the city council aims to articulate the specific commitments and contribution it will make to achieve goals that we all have in common.

In the area of biodiversity in particular there is an opportunity to build upon past good practice to deliver things in partnership. In previous years a collaborative approach has been driven by the former Westminster Biodiversity Partnership, which brought together 33 organisations and groups to ensure a healthy future for wildlife in Westminster. This local arrangement operated within the context (and with the support) of the wider London-wide biodiversity partnership. Unfortunately the London-wide partnership structure folded a few years ago. However, many of the partners that were previously involved continue to be instrumental in supporting and protecting Westminster's rich and diverse wildlife, and the city council continues to recognise the benefit of providing opportunities for agencies to come together and work jointly in this area. It is with this in mind that we propose, through this strategy, to re-establish some form of structured partnership around biodiversity at a borough level. We hope to explore how we can make the most of our collective resources and expertise to establish and deliver some key biodiversity priorities locally. This is discussed in greater detail later in this strategy document, and in the Action Plan which accompanies it.

## Across the biodiversity and broader open spaces and greening agenda, our key local partners include:

- Greater London Authority
- Royal Parks
- Major landowners, including Grosvenor and Crown Estates
- BIDs and the wider business community
- Neighbouring boroughs, including Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
- Canals and Rivers Trust
- Local partnerships, including the Paddington Partnership
- London Wildlife Trust
- Resident Associations, including the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and is in addition to partners in central government and elsewhere, working at a national level (including the Environment Agency, Historic England, RSPB and Defra).

This strategy as a whole has been developed with consideration of the roles various partners play, and it will be delivered in direct collaboration with them. We can succeed in our ambitions for open spaces and biodiversity in Westminster only with their help.



# Evidence Base and Priorities

The Mayor's London Plan states that local authorities should periodically audit the green spaces and wildlife in their area. The city council commissioned such an audit in Westminster to support the development of this strategy.

This detailed audit had the purpose of assessing the level of provision of open and green space within the city, highlighting any changes to provision since the last audits were carried out and identifying opportunities for improvement. As well as establishing a solid basis of information about the geographic area, typology and physical features of open spaces and green infrastructure, strong emphasis was also placed on understanding our local biodiversity, looking in detail at the specific habitats and species that those spaces are home to.

Alongside this audit a community consultation and engagement exercise was undertaken, to gather views about our green spaces from those that use them. User surveys were carried out at 14 of the city's parks and open spaces, as well as online, to ascertain usage patterns, levels of satisfaction and priorities for improvement. The results can only provide a snapshot of course, but a mix of spaces (some large areas such as Paddington Recreation Ground as well as several smaller gardens) were included in the study, and over 800 respondents were spoken to, with the aim of gathering a useful and representative range of insights.

Mapping for 'Areas of Deficiency' in access to public open space and access to nature – which will inform the City Plan and subsequently future planning decisions to drive greening where it is needed most – are attached as appendices to this strategy. The other key findings from the audit of green spaces and community engagement research can be summarised as follows.

## Green spaces audit – key findings

A total number of 203 'parcels' of open space in the City of Westminster were audited.

Westminster offers 2.17 hectares of space per 1,000 resident population. This overall level of provision has not changed significantly since the last full audit, a decade ago.

However only a little over half (57%) of the audited spaces are openly accessible to the public.

That said, on account of their smaller average size, the private spaces account for only 24% of total green space.

Contrary to some perceptions, the central area of Westminster is actually the best off area for green space, thanks in no small part to the Royal Parks. There are geographical variations within this though, with some central neighbourhoods being identified as deficient in open space.

Areas of lower provision include Abbey Road and Warwick wards, as well as some very central areas like the West End.

Areas with particular deficiencies in terms of access to nature include Warwick ward and Bryanston and Dorset Square.

Marylebone is an area of comparative deficiency in respect of both open space and wildlife. These findings, alongside the area's Low Emissions Neighbourhood (LEN) status suggest it should perhaps be a priority area for greening.

Green infrastructure (GI) was also audited – 30 living walls / roofs were included in the study. There is a mix of new build and retro-fitted infrastructure and the majority has a lengthy life span of 25 years or more.

## Community engagement – key findings

Satisfaction with Westminster's green spaces is high – 87% of people rate open spaces as "excellent" or "very good".

The majority of people reach open spaces on foot and stay for less than an hour each time. Most visit regularly (at least weekly) and year round.

The majority of respondents also visit Royal Parks in the borough. Compared to open spaces generally, respondents tend to visit Royal Parks less frequently, but tend to spend longer when they are there.

Open spaces are highly valued assets, and those engaged in this research particularly appreciate their ease of access and convenience.

Main reasons for visiting are to get fresh air, to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city and to spend time in a natural environment.

Planting arrangements, a high standard of maintenance, cleanliness and seating were all of great importance to those questioned.

Quiet, informal recreation was by far the most popular purpose for which people use open space in Westminster. Walking was the most popular active pursuit.

## What the evidence tells us: key emerging priorities

From these findings it has been possible to identify some specific emerging priorities. The action plan accompanying this strategy will therefore look to focus the efforts of the council and its partners in the following areas:

- 1. Green infrastructure** – There are some excellent examples of living walls, roofs and other green infrastructure across the city, but we want to drive the delivery of more, with a particular emphasis on public access and visibility wherever this is achievable. We will support this through our planning policies, set out in the Westminster City Plan. We're particularly keen to encourage green infrastructure in areas where there is not so much greenery currently and where people have fewer opportunities to have contact with nature, for example in social housing. We're looking to learn from and build upon successful work with and by partners to achieve this. Initiatives such as Wild West End demonstrate the instrumental role local land owners can play and we're keen to also work with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and community groups.
- 2. Space for play** – We are conscious of an overall lack of play provision in Westminster, with a particular shortage of facilities geared towards older children. There are some areas of the city which have both deficiencies in play space and higher concentrations of resident children, such as Church Street, Pimlico, Little Venice, East Marylebone and Soho (see map at appendix 4). We will be especially keen to take opportunities to add play space in these areas. Recognising the challenges such as pressures on available land, we will ensure targeted policies are built into our refreshed City Plan, which will create scope for different types of play opportunities to be pursued. This will help enable us to take full advantage of any opportunities to offer additional play space, whenever and however they arise.

We will also be exploring other options, for example through our ActiveStreets initiative. Based on legislation passed in 1983, local authorities may restrict or prohibit vehicular access to specific streets at designated times, to create a 'Play Street' which offers a safe opportunity for children to play. Westminster was, in fact, one of the first boroughs in London to create permanent Play Streets in the 1950s. With concerns about air quality as well we're keen to focus on the idea once again – as detailed in the new ActiveWestminster strategy, 'Activating Your City, Lives and Neighbourhoods'. The city council is proposing a new pilot scheme of permanently designated Play Streets. As part of our ActiveStreets initiative, the city council is proposing a new pilot scheme of permanently designated Play Streets, in addition temporary road closures for Street Play and School Streets). These streets would have restricted traffic and be available for play on weekday afternoons and for most of the day at weekends. The initiative would be supported by structured local activities delivered through our ActiveStreets programme, and a team of volunteer 'StreetMakers' who will help people to get involved to facilitate a sense of community ownership.

**3. Walking in and around open spaces** – Most people (63%) using our green spaces get to them on foot and 30% said they were using the space specifically for walking or as a through route. We want to focus on walking routes through and around parks, recognising how things like raising awareness of available green space locally and effective signage can help with this.

We also want to make our green spaces more publicly accessible for the elderly and inclusive for wheelchair users and people with physical disabilities. These aims align directly with the council's Walking Strategy, which outlines a number of specific actions including working in partnership with The Royal Parks to improve access and the pedestrian experience and reduce any conflict between pedestrians and cyclists. We will also continue to drive the greening of Westminster's streets to provide a pleasant walking environment and offer people contact with nature, introducing pockets parks and plazas where possible to offer additional opportunities and incentives for people to experience open spaces on foot. The council's strategies for open spaces and biodiversity and for walking are therefore complementary and will be used in tandem to facilitate the continued enjoyment of our open spaces by people on foot.

**4. Biodiversity** – As outlined previously, the momentum of some biodiversity partnerships and initiatives has decreased in recent years. However, the city council continues to appreciate the importance of protecting and enhancing biodiversity and there are some recent examples of these issues being brought more to the fore at a wider level. In June 2017 the Greenspace Information for Greater London partnership (GiGL) wrote to all London Local Authorities, citing a recent GLA research publication and highlighting the finding that "approximately 18% of planning applications have the potential to impact adversely on nature in the capital". Earlier in the same year the London Assembly drew attention to "a risk that London will see its biodiversity being squeezed or reduced" and highlighted the importance of balancing pressures to deliver housing with impacts on nature in the way that residential developments are delivered.

In the meantime, though, and in the absence of a London-wide framework at present, the city council is interested in drawing together key partners at a local (borough) level to explore how some work on priority outcomes in this area could be driven forward. With all partners, including the council, operating with limited resources, we're keen to look at how we can make the greatest impact. Drawing a borough-level group together on the back of this strategy is the way that we intend to do this. The group would have the specific task of developing a two year action plan (to coincide with the time when Defra's existing Biodiversity 2020 approach comes to a close and these issues may be subject to further review at a national level).

Supporting pollinators is one of many areas we would like to explore in detail as part of developing our biodiversity plans. There are already a number of bee keeping sites in Westminster. Based on expert advice from partners such as the London Beekeeping Association, we are keen to look at what we could do not necessarily to encourage more bee keeping, but to ensure we support the bees that London already has. This is about driving the right kind of planting in both public and private spaces.

Alongside these proposals it is worth noting some existing work that the council does, which can provide an excellent basis on which to further develop our biodiversity approach. Wildlife education is a big part of this. The city council is continually building on the success of our Forest Schools scheme, with an ambitious target for the number of children participating in the 2018–19 financial year. With the ongoing support of our Sayers Croft facility, work is being done to offer additional drop-in learning opportunities in the school holidays which allow whole families to get involved, and we're looking at potentially offering sessions for adults and 'Continuing Professional Development' learning opportunities for teachers. With the completion of works to expand the 'bluebell glade' area at Paddington Recreation Ground, too, it will soon be possible for more people than ever to take part in outdoor activities and learning about Westminster's wildlife.

In the meantime the city council continues to recognise the importance of Westminster's open spaces and green infrastructure as habitats for a number of priority species, as referenced in existing Biodiversity Action Plans.

# Action Plan

Recognising the depth and breadth of impact that our green spaces and infrastructure have, not only on the environment but also on the health, wellbeing and enjoyment of all those who live, work or visit in Westminster, we have developed this strategy to help us – with our partners – to get the very best we can out of these assets.

The following plan outlines the priorities that have been identified on the basis of our audit and consultation work, and the specific actions that the council will undertake to deliver them over the course of the next two years. Many of these commitments will be delivered in collaboration with our partners in any case, but as part of this action plan we also want to recognise some examples of additional work being done by other agencies which supports our common aims.

This action plan structures our priorities and proposed action in a way that reflects our intention to secure and increase the:

- 1. QUANTITY** of green assets across the city
- 2. QUALITY** of our open spaces and green infrastructure
- 3. IMPACT** of our green assets, delivering a range of benefits to individuals, communities and the environment.

## QUANTITY

Our priorities	Our commitments	The council will:	Wider Context – examples of partners' work
<b>Protecting existing green assets</b>	We will robustly protect and preserve existing green space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure planning decisions strictly align with our policies, with particular reference to the City Plan.</li> <li>As part of the ongoing revisions to the draft City Plan 2019–2040, incorporate specific policies to protect and preserve open and green space, and the ecological value of it. Include specific provisions to support protection private garden space and waterways.</li> <li>Encourage greater use of green spaces by ensuring planning decisions are promoting accessibility for all to our spaces, as well as providing facilities within them - such as playgrounds, toilets and walking trails. The quality and accessibility of a green space is as important as the size of it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historic England are consulted on development proposals affecting grade I or II registered parks and gardens. Gardens Trust are consulted on all proposals. We also consult relevant amenity societies and 'Friends Of' groups on applications affecting open spaces.</li> <li>London Parks and Gardens Trust maintain the inventory of London's green spaces of local historic interest, while Historic England maintain the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.</li> <li>The Royal Parks, GLA and others all work in various capacities to protect the existing green assets across the city.</li> </ul>
<b>Prioritising city greening by creating new green infrastructure</b>	We will drive and support developers to deliver new green infrastructure and commit to no net loss of green space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt robust planning policies to encourage the provision of living roofs / green infrastructure as part of Westminster's City Plan. Such green infrastructure must be accessible to all and extend to social housing: it should not be solely for the purpose of developing private roof gardens, for example. Include specific target that major development should aim to provide an area equivalent to 100% of the building's footprint in, ambitious target for areas that should be used for living roofs, living walls and ecologically sensitive landscaping as a percentage in relation to total building floorspace.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BIDS and land owners' initiatives, e.g. Wild West End.</li> <li>Private developers who introduce innovative green infrastructure within developments and in the public realm.</li> </ul>

Our priorities	Our commitments	The council will:	Wider Context – examples of partners' work
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance the usability and multi-functionality of open space</li> <li>Always pursue the delivery of green infrastructure as part of development projects involving schools.</li> <li>Continue to support BIDs and major land owners to deliver greening that should be publicly accessible.</li> <li>Provide advice, information and guidance on ways to incorporate greening in development proposals (potentially using council website and /or signposting to additional information or third parties who can help).</li> <li>Provide opportunities for developers to see good practice examples of greening, and continue to develop our own learning about innovations in this area.</li> <li>Maximise opportunities to fund greening, including actively pursuing the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions for this purpose.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other major development / infrastructure projects – developers work with the council to ensure impact on open spaces and biodiversity is considered and steps are taken to appropriately manage.</li> </ul>
	We will directly contribute to the expansion of Westminster's green network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take forward 'green spine' proposals as part of the Church Street regeneration project, with a view to maximising the delivery of green assets in this area.</li> <li>Deliver our ongoing programme of tree planting, in green spaces and on streets. We will continue to strive for a mix of species and sizes, as committed to in our Greener City Action Plan. 75 new trees have just been built in Paddington Recreation Ground, with an aim to build an additional 35 in 2019-20.</li> <li>Use ringfenced council capital funding and where possible lever in external funding to implement open space and green infrastructure projects. Indicatively, commitment within the capital fund for FY 2017/18 was £200k.</li> <li>Encourage developers to consider the provision of pocket parks, allowing access to small open spaces for workers, particularly during their lunch breaks, and school children. Tranquil spaces can help people to feel relaxed in the city and are crucial to improve health and wellbeing. For example, Christchurch Gardens provide a quiet green space off the buzz of Victoria Street where workers, residents and visitors can rest and socialise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work between with the council and CityWest Homes to facilitate greening on housing estates that is publicly accessible.</li> <li>The Greater London National Park City Initiative – there is a campaign to have London recognised as a National Park City.</li> </ul>
	We will focus our efforts where they are needed most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use planning policies (including latest/ongoing revisions to the City Plan) to drive delivery of green infrastructure, prioritising identified 'deficiency areas'.</li> <li>Alongside larger scale projects, also support and facilitate innovative greening solutions including pocket parks and private 'greening' activities by residents and businesses.</li> <li>Add much needed play space, with targeted policies in the refreshed City Plan to ensure we can pursue all different types of play opportunities wherever they exist.</li> <li>Complement existing play space by pursuing our ActiveStreets initiative, aiming for the establishment of at least one Play Street in a priority area (based on current deficiencies and location of the Marylebone Low Emissions Neighbourhood). Support this with the Street Makers scheme which will involve local people and drive participation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Royal Parks will deliver their objectives of the 'Play Strategy: 2015–2020'.</li> <li>A wide range of partners will be working with the council to implement our refreshed ActiveWestminster Strategy, which includes the ActiveStreets proposals and a wide range of other commitments which relate to open and green spaces. This strategy, too, aims to focus efforts on places and people where the impact will be greatest.</li> </ul>

QUALITY			
Our priorities	Our commitments	The council will:	Wider Context – examples of partners' work
<b>Biodiversity and wildlife</b>	We will work to protect important habitats and species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With local partners, look to develop specific, borough level priorities for supporting Westminster's biodiversity, for the next two years to 2020.</li> <li>• Build in specific biodiversity requirements and training when procuring key services . Bring this into line as part of our Responsible Procurement approach.</li> <li>• Raise residents' awareness of the need for bee-friendly planting in gardens, window boxes etc, to support Westminster's existing population of pollinators. Use various communications channels to do this.</li> <li>• Protect the following target species in the city, which are important in the region and require conservation: bats, Buttoned Snout Moths, hedgehogs, House Sparrows and Tawny Owls. The City Plan policies will ensure that these species' habitats are protected to minimise the detrimental impact of developments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement by various partners (particularly via Royal Parks wildlife group) in the borough level local biodiversity task force.</li> <li>• Volunteering opportunities orchestrated by various providers, focusing on parks and environment education (e.g. One Westminster, London Wildlife Trust and many others).</li> <li>• Private developers can incorporate wildlife-friendly element in their designs, e.g. planting creepers, creating vertical habitats or introducing 'bird bricks' or spaces for bats within new or converted buildings.</li> </ul>
	We will enable people to access and learn about nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to provide and update information on the council website about how people can get involved in enjoying and supporting Westminster's biodiversity.</li> <li>• Continue to deliver our successful Forest Schools scheme and, using the newly refurbished and extended outdoor learning facility at Paddington Recreation Ground, pursue opportunities to extend the scheme e.g. with SEN schools and a home school.</li> <li>• Alongside this, look to offer more learning opportunities for adults and whole families, proactively fundraising to enable this.</li> <li>• Extend the range/programme of outdoor learning activities at Paddington Recreation Ground and Sayers Croft.</li> <li>• Provide details and links to wide range of activities and opportunities via the council and ActiveWestminster websites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Royal Parks continue to offer wildlife talks at the wildlife garden in Regent's park.</li> <li>• ZSL continue to deliver range of nature and conservation learning opportunities to schools and individuals at London Zoo.</li> <li>• Thames Explorer Trust offer opportunities to bring people closer to the nature living in the Thames foreshore.</li> <li>• BIDs help local people and workers to access and get the most out of the open and green spaces in their areas, e.g. Northbank BID's gardening club at Temple Gardens.</li> </ul>

Our priorities	Our commitments	The council will:	Wider Context – examples of partners' work
<b>High standards</b>	We will deliver and maintain clean, safe and award winning green spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective management of the re-commissioned Grounds Maintenance contract, with explicit requirements around biodiversity built in.</li> <li>• Maintain our success in Green Flag awards (currently 24). Explore additional opportunities in relation to Heritage Green Flag Site Accreditation.</li> <li>• Continue and build upon Westminster's past successes in the London in Bloom awards.</li> <li>• Continue to monitor the net gain or loss of open space (by square metre) via our annual Authority Monitoring Reports. This will enable us to maintain high standards in terms of quality and quantity of our open space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contracted grounds maintenance provider will work with the council to maintain consistently excellent standards and high levels of customer satisfaction among users of open spaces. This is monitored through contract performance targets and the council's annual City Survey ; in 2018, 97% of respondents said that they are satisfied with Westminster parks and open spaces.</li> <li>• Contractor is also committed to helping us achieve awards and maintain Green Flags – this is explicitly included in their contract.</li> <li>• All those who use and enjoy Westminster's open spaces play their part in keeping standards high. Disposing of litter properly and taking care not to damage plants and infrastructure all helps enormously.</li> </ul>
<b>Managing and balancing demands</b>	We will work to ensure Westminster's green assets can be used for a range of purposes, without jeopardising people's enjoyment of them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a specific approach to facilitating events in appropriate locations in open and green spaces, while avoiding undue harm to biodiversity and heritage assets. We want to ensure successful events can be hosted for the benefit of the local area, but that enjoyment of these spaces by others is not unduly compromised.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event organisers and private businesses will collaborate with the council to operate in a way that minimises negative impacts for open spaces and local wildlife.</li> </ul>

IMPACT			
Our priorities	Our commitments	The council will:	Wider Context – examples of partners' work
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	We will ensure that our parks and open spaces enable and support all aspects of physical and mental wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of the Westminster City Council Walking Strategy. Actions particularly relevant to open and green spaces include improvement of parks and street scene with planting, signage and wayfinding to attract people into open spaces to experience the full physical and mental benefits.</li> <li>• Deliver our Park Makers scheme, recruiting, training and deploying local providers and individuals to deliver physical activity, leisure and sport opportunities in our parks and open spaces that benefit both body and mind.</li> <li>• Ensure physical activity is built in by default at our open spaces, supporting people to be physically active where, when and how they choose.</li> <li>• Remove restrictive signage and byelaws such as 'No Ball Games' and 'No Cycling' to create a more permissive and supportive environment for physical activity, leisure and sport, wherever possible and where appropriate.</li> <li>• Explore how we can build the benefits of access to open and green spaces into targeted provision for older people, for example via park benches in tranquil spaces. This commitment also includes the aim to design out anti-social behaviour in open spaces and the perception of crime by improving the quality of our open spaces.</li> <li>• Alongside this, look at the potential to strengthen the connections with our existing Exercise Referral Scheme.</li> <li>• Through robust application of our City Plan policies, protect our open and green spaces as spaces of relative tranquillity, offering opportunities for rest, calm and reflection. This involves maximising the calming and soothing qualities associated with green spaces, particularly trees and other planting on our streets where possible.</li> <li>• Work with Public Health partners to explore the connection with smoke free public spaces, in line with the council's objectives around air quality and its impact on health. Smoke free public spaces would reduce exposure to second hand smoke to people who are more vulnerable to its effects - including children and pregnant women - and to denormalise smoking behaviour, contributing to achieving a 'smoke free generation'. An initiative of this type is currently being scoped in one of Westminster's open spaces.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our ActiveWestminster partners will work with us to deliver the new Active Westminster strategy: 'Activating Your City, Lives and Neighbourhoods'. This large multi-agency partnership connections and momentum it offers to promote open spaces to drive participation in physical activity, leisure and sport.</li> <li>• There are various plans and strategies to encourage and enable physical activity, leisure and sport at Royal Parks.</li> <li>• Various partners including CCGs and local Voluntary and Community Sector partners will continue to offer structured physical activities in Westminster's parks/open spaces, e.g. weekly walking groups.</li> <li>• The GLA's Healthy Schools scheme supports many of our objectives around supporting health and wellbeing among young people. Use of open space and encouraging physical activity are important parts of this.</li> </ul>
	We will use our green assets to help support people to eat healthily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain the success of Westminster's numerous community food growing sites around the city, enabling local people to get involved in growing fruit, vegetables and herbs, and learn about healthy food.</li> <li>• Use structured evaluation of the existing food growing programme to explore how to embed food growing in a sustainable way for the future, maximising impact on outcomes including obesity, tackling social isolation and supporting mental wellbeing.</li> <li>• In line with the council's approach to tackling Childhood Obesity, continue to focus food growing sites on housing estates and schools in areas where the need is greatest.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other food growing schemes, like the Capital Growth initiative spearheaded by the GLA, complement Westminster City Council's own work increasing the profile and levels of engagement in these types of activities in London.</li> <li>• Royal Parks include sessions dedicated healthy eating in their annual programme of Wellbeing Events, in Hyde Park.</li> </ul>

Our priorities	Our commitments	The council will:	Wider Context – examples of partners' work
<b>Social Value</b>	Our green assets will bring people together and enable them to contribute to their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate appropriate community events in parks, using the rigorous events planning and applications process to manage impact of events.</li> <li>• Encourage volunteering in work areas that support and help us make the most of our green assets. This includes our Park Makers and Street Makers to facilitate physical activity, leisure and sport.</li> <li>• Explore and take advantage of connections with Time Credits and other ways of rewarding volunteers.</li> <li>• Create an options menu of suitable trees for residents to use and maintain as memorial trees, in addition to our memorial bench scheme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Westminster's volunteering schemes are delivered by and through partners (One Westminster and other Voluntary and Community Sector organisations). Groundwork offers volunteering opportunities to transform local parks in Westminster e.g. volunteers recreated St John's Wood Church Garden for children and families and cleared a walkway to improve accessibility to the park.</li> <li>• Some partners (Open Age and others) specialise in facilitating intergenerational activities, which can have particular social value benefits.</li> <li>• Westminster City Council's Grounds Maintenance contractor to contribute to the council's civic responsibility priorities, e.g. by facilitating apprenticeships, volunteering and community involvement.</li> </ul>
<b>Information and access</b>	We will promote our green spaces and raise awareness of their benefits to increase access, as part of the City for All priority: a healthier and greener city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the Mypark website, encouraging use by residents, workers and visitors, to make information about green assets accessible and appealing.</li> <li>• Actively promote Westminster's array of open and green spaces and all the uses and benefits they can have, through the council's regular communications channels including the website, social media, and resident newsletter and magazine. This also involves supporting national initiatives such as Keep Britain Tidy's Love Parks week.</li> <li>• Support this by promoting the 'Roads to Wellbeing' online directory and mapping tool provided on communitymaps.org. These tools, originally designed to support our drug alcohol services, are hugely useful for anyone wanting to find out where they can find open spaces and facilities to support their wellbeing, and what they offer.</li> <li>• Connect with relevant public health campaigns (obesity, stress etc) delivering coordinated communications and coherent messages.</li> <li>• Signpost to the Greenspace information available on the GiGL website to encourage people, especially children, to record the wildlife they see in Westminster.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Royal Parks carry out ongoing promotion and engagement encouraging the use and enjoyment of their facilities.</li> <li>• Ongoing promotion and information provision to general public, by London Parks and Gardens Trust and many other organisations.</li> <li>• Research, lobbying and other work is done by health partners, including Public Health England and academic institutions, to highlight benefits of open spaces and contact with nature for mental and physical wellbeing.</li> <li>• Parklife London offers interactive online mapping tool, provided by City Bridge Trust/City of London. This engages additional audiences and fuels further interest in parks and open spaces.</li> </ul>
	We will share and use data to raise awareness and increase understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with GLA to ensure our data access agreement with GiGL is maintained after the current arrangements formally expire.</li> <li>• Make the connection with the Mayor's new London Environment Strategy, actively feeding into the detail as it is finalised and goes into implementation.</li> <li>• ActiveWestminster are taking more granular approach to data and business intelligence which will enable a better understanding of who is engaged in the offer and where we should be prioritising resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The GiGL information resource, hosted by the GLA, helps to open up / maximise access to information on Westminster's habitats and biodiversity.</li> </ul>

# Appendices

## APPENDICES 1 – 4: Mapping

1. Map of Open and Green Spaces
2. Map of Open Space Deficiency Areas
3. Map of Access to Nature Deficiency Areas
4. Map of Current Play Space Provision and Local Child Population Data

## APPENDIX 4: Additional Information

### Useful links

Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) [gigl.org.uk](http://gigl.org.uk)

Greater London Authority [gla.gov.uk](http://gla.gov.uk)

Royal Parks [royalparks.org.uk](http://royalparks.org.uk)

Wild West End [wildwestend.london](http://wildwestend.london)

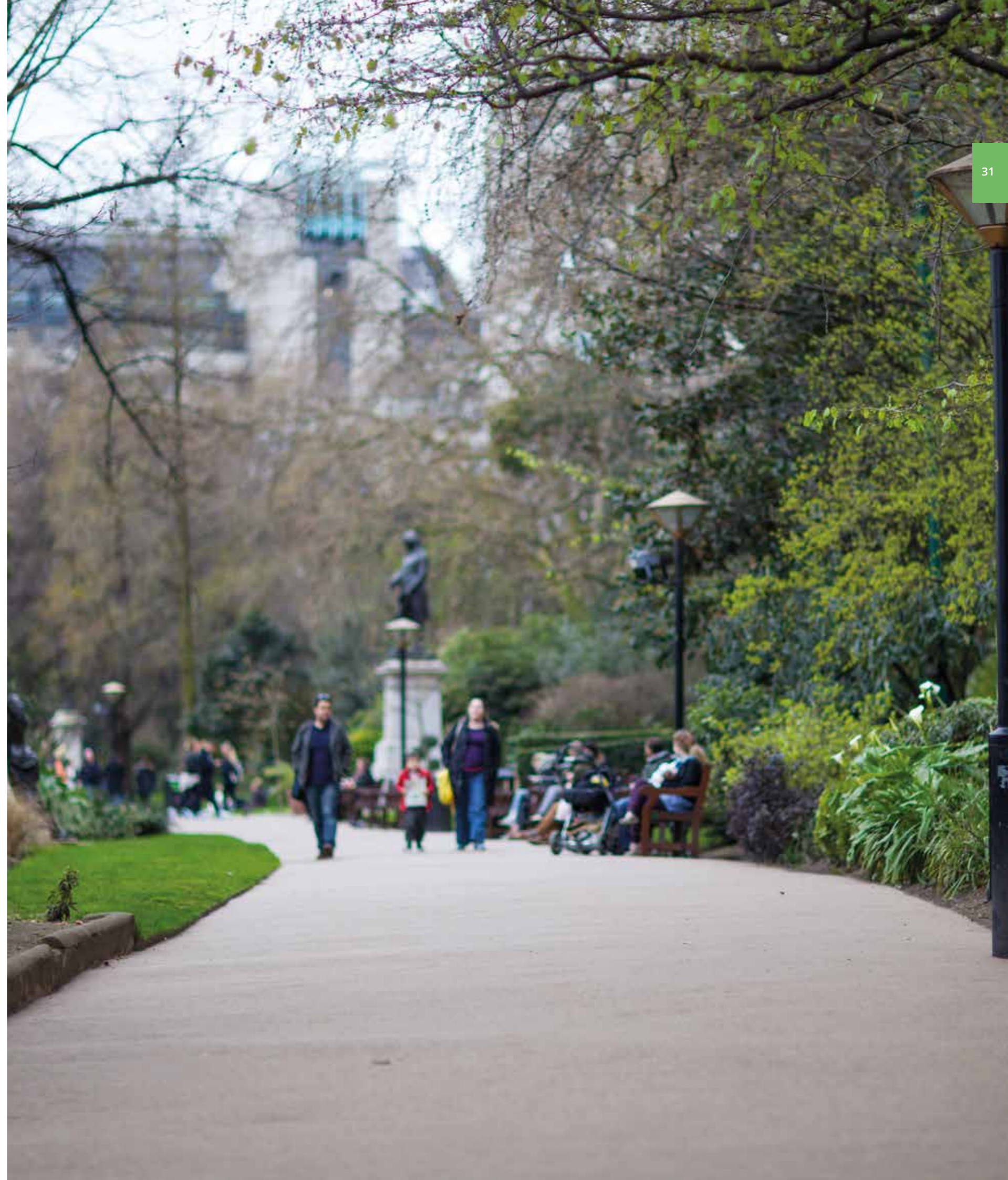
Zoological Society of London [zsl.org](http://zsl.org)

Canal and Rivers Trust [canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk)

Westminster City Plan [westminster.gov.uk/westminsters-city-plan-strategic-policies](http://westminster.gov.uk/westminsters-city-plan-strategic-policies)

### Selection of Further Reading

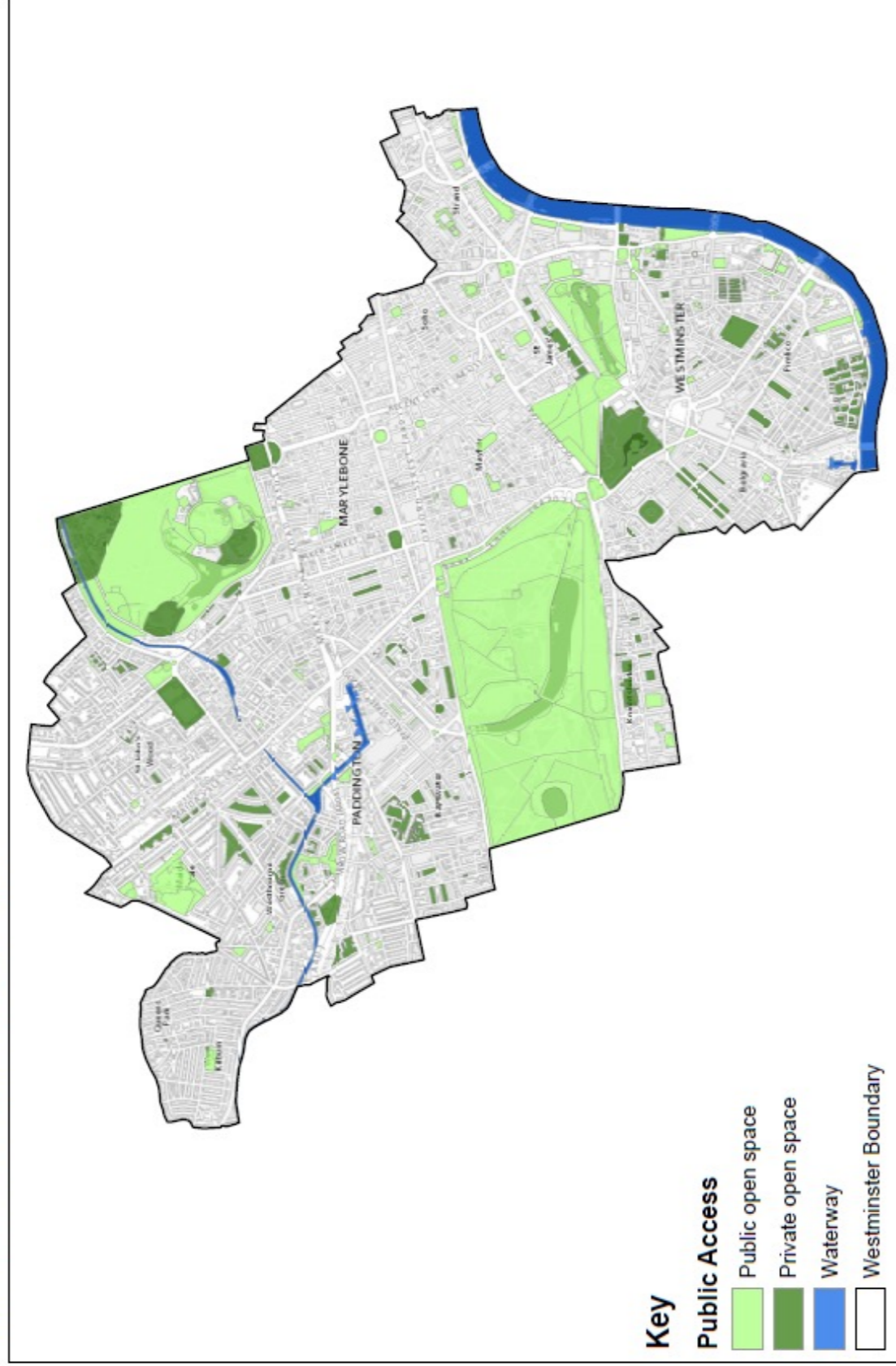
- London Environment Strategy (2018) Greater London Authority
- London Plan (currently draft) Greater London Authority
- London Infrastructure Plan 2050 (2014) Greater London Authority
- Park Life: Ensuring green spaces remain a hit with Londoners (2015) Greater London Authority
- Biodiversity 2020 (2011) Defra
- Tri-borough Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Physical Activity (2014)
- Improving Access to Green Spaces (2014) Public Health England
- Natural Capital (2015) and Green Capital (2016) – both Greater London Authority
- Gardens and Health (2016) The Kings Fund
- The Value of our Green Spaces (2016) The Land Trust
- The National Pollinator Strategy (2014) Defra
- Air temperature regulation by urban trees and green infrastructure (2013) Forestry Commission
- Valuing London's Urban Forest (2015) Treeconomics / Forestry Commission



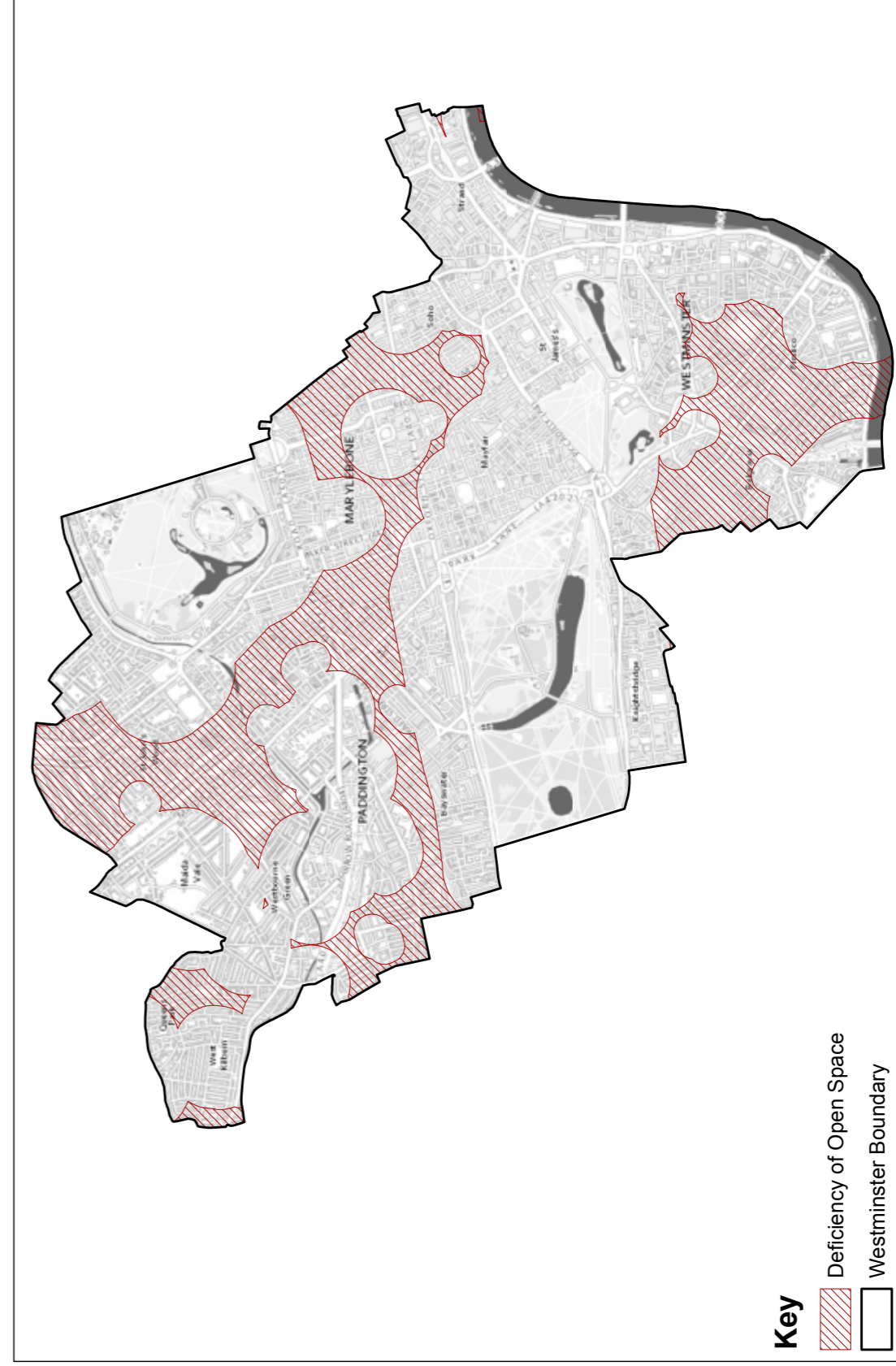


# Appendices

GROUNDWORK OPEN SPACE MAPPING



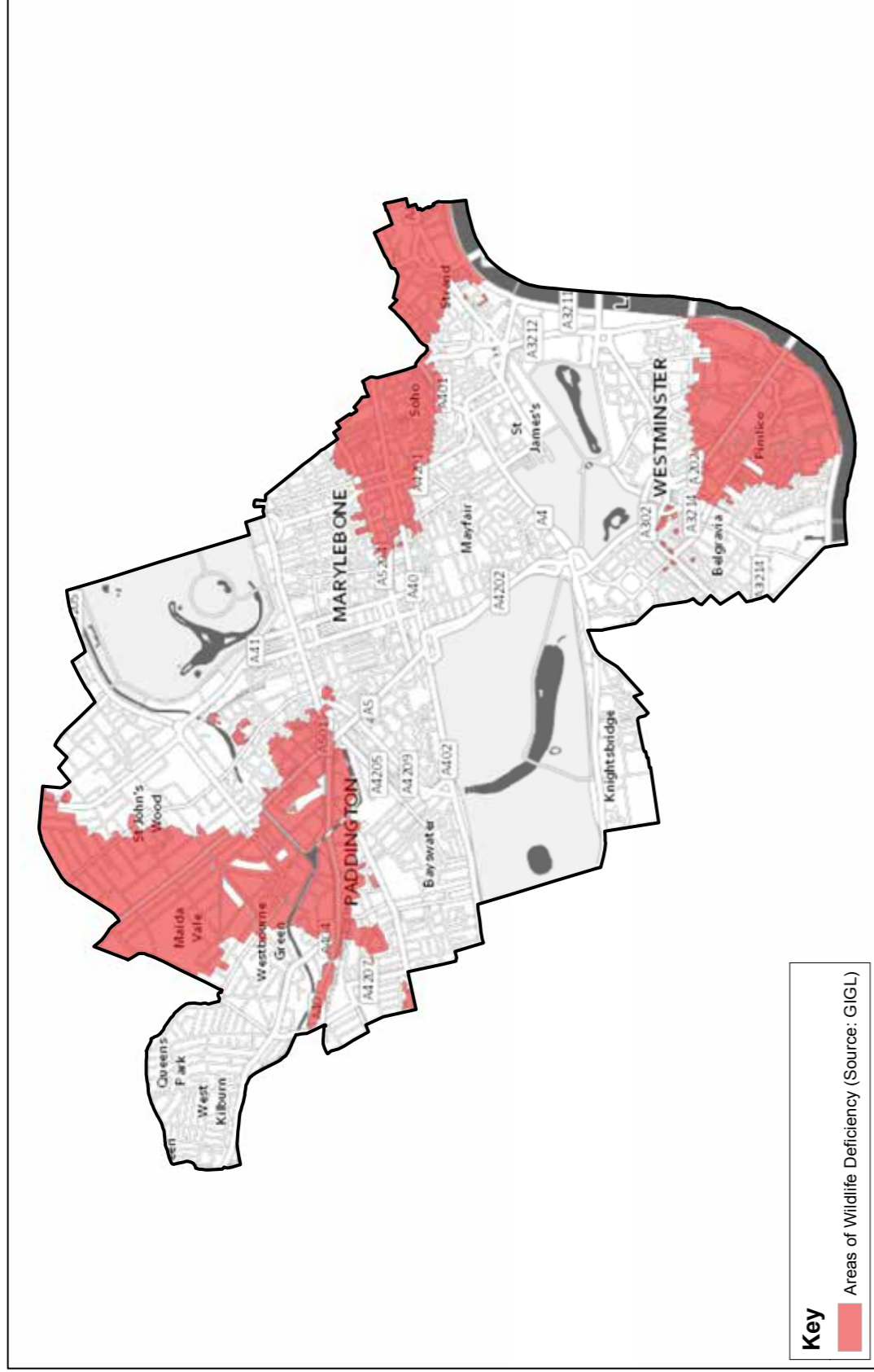
GROUNDWORK OPEN SPACE MAPPING



# Appendices

APPENDIX 3 – MAP OF ACCESS TO NATURE DEFICIENCY AREAS

## Deficiency in Access to Wildlife Map



APPENDIX 4 – MAP OF CURRENT PLAY SPACE PROVISION AND LOCAL CHILD POPULATION DATA

## GROUNDWORK OPEN SPACE MAPPING

