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1. Introduction

This toolkit aims to give inspiration and essential information/tools to those who are thinking about the future of parks in Ealing and how they can get involved.

Parks are a place of possibility, some of the last remaining 'common' space, free to access and use by all. They can be important neutral places where communities can come together, provide a place for sports activities for all ages, and provide crucial tranquil spaces and contact with nature than can support wellbeing and improved mental health.

By 2020, local councils will have lost almost 60% of their central government funding¹ when compared with 2010 and as parks are not a statutory service, they are at risk. Ealing Council, like many others, is determined to find new ways of working and delivering in order to maintain these precious public green spaces. The aim is to be more collaborative and bring together different objectives as well as people and organisations. We hope this toolkit lays the ground for the growth of some of these new collaborative initiatives or even enterprises. Please get in touch if you have an idea you would like to discuss. You will also find the accompanying toolkit '**Projects in Parks - Making it Happen**' useful.

1.1. Future Ealing

Ealing Council is changing. In 2017 the council's cabinet agreed a fresh direction for the council with a renewed focus on improving the lives of local people at a time of reduced funding. We are working together to transform the way that the council pays for and delivers local services so we can secure their future sustainability and make Ealing a better place to live. [Future Ealing Borough Plan 2018-22](#)

1.1.1. Active Citizens

At the heart of Future Ealing is the principle of active citizenship - at a time of shrinking resources, residents will have an important part to play in helping themselves and each other. That isn't simply a response to reduced resources, however: we genuinely believe that real and lasting change is often best delivered from the community upwards.

2. How to use this toolkit

This toolkit can be read from start to finish, but each section also stands alone so you can just pick whatever is relevant or useful to you.

It gives examples of existing projects, organised under headings representing goals or objectives that can be met through parks projects. If you have objectives you want to meet but are not sure how to do it, you can start here.

The accompanying toolkit '**Projects in Parks - Making it Happen**' gives practical advice relevant when you are ready to start your initiative or develop your organisation. Find it on the '[Do Something Good Website](#)'. You can find more general information on volunteering at [Ealing CVS](#)

¹ [Financial times, February 2019](#)

3. Getting started

Whether you are an existing organisation which wants to start an initiative, or an individual or group starting something new, these steps will be useful to move your ideas forward.

The first thing to think about is WHY.

Be as clear as possible on your purpose / why you're wanting to take action.

Understand your motivations and those of your fellow group members; find your shared vision.

Everyone doesn't need to agree on every detail - but you need enough common ground.

You could even try to write a vision or mission statement.

Next be clear about WHAT are you doing

Are you project planning, defining outcomes, working out what you don't know, or defining aspirations?

Be clear about what stage you're at.

This double diamond process from the design council may help you to define this.

Now consider WHO you are

Are you an individual or organisation? How much capacity, and what skills/expertise do you have? Are you incorporated and can therefore enter into contracts or take ownership without personal liability of those involved? You may or may not want to take this step but should understand the implications. Also, how much local stakeholder support to you have?

Finally, HOW are you going to do your project

Is it a one off volunteer project? are you trying to set up a social enterprise? do you want to be making a surplus to support other things?

Considerations

- Have you got a shared vision?
- Have you got support from your community, local council or other stakeholders?
- Doing a small event or a trial is a good way to get started
- Find out who owns the land and consider how you can help them with their own objectives.
- If you enter into contracts, own assets, employ people, or take on risks you should incorporate to *limit liability* of individuals involved.

4. Parks as a place of possibility

*"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said **faster horses**."*

– Henry Ford (Innovator and founder of the Ford Motor Company)

Parks and green spaces are places of possibility; they are a community resource which can be activated to provide multiple benefits for local people and organisations.

If there are projects here you find particularly inspiring, why not contact parks@ealing.gov.uk to ask for advice?

4.1. Improving Green Space and community cohesion (events and culture)

Green spaces that are neglected or abandoned can easily attract anti-social behaviour or littering, and become trapped in a vicious cycle. It takes a bit of organisation and effort to turn this around, but

as the inspirational examples in the following pages show it's more than worth it – and can create additional benefits for communities.

While we have given 2 case studies here, in fact, all of the case studies in this toolkit have improved their local green spaces, and brought the community together through volunteering days or organised events.

For more on setting up a Friends group and different types of communities taking over under managed, neglected or derelict spaces, see [this guide](#) (written for community orchards and gardens but information can be used for a range of different green space projects) and also [here](#).

For a simple guide on organising a community clean up and kit please see [here](#).

Some considerations

- Engage your community early on, find out their aspirations and what they want.
- Find your key local champions and value them, but be aware that different people will be able to give different amounts of time, and different skills.
- Think about long term maintenance implications when designing the space.
- Find reasons to celebrate as you go on your journey together, mark each milestone

Case studies

4.1.1. [Katherine Buchan Meadows](#)

A group of residents came together to improve a local neglected green space near a primary school. They cleared overgrown weeds, broken seats and timber, and installed a new seat and renewed planting through crowd funding and a grant from the council. It is now maintained by 10 volunteers who carry out action days, and arrange events for the community in the park. They won a Green Flag community award in 2018, as well as Level 5 outstanding at London in Bloom in Sept 2018.

4.1.2. [LAGER Can \(litter picking group\)](#)

A Hanwell resident set up a Facebook page called LAGER Can (Litter Action Group for Ealing Residents) asking local residents to take positive actions to address the behaviours and activities that cause littering and sharing their stories to inspire others to do the same. They work with the council providing support and kit for individual pickers, organise regular group events and run campaigns to tackle littering.

Find more information on running your own clean up event and kit join LAGER Can on Facebook or if you don't use Facebook, contact parks@ealing.gov.uk who will put you in touch with your local group.

4.2. Food Growing in Parks

Food growing won't be suitable for every site; it will depend on the size, topography, and local enthusiasm! It could be raised beds, or you could take an '[incredible edible](#)' or [food forest](#) approach;

planting perennial herbs or fruit bushes. These don't need to interrupt the open space, can be low maintenance and look good too. For more information about food growing in parks see [here](#).

Some considerations

- Consider the physical nature of the site and how plants will be maintained.
- There is lots of expertise available to help you plan your planting and seasonal activities. For example the council, Wildlife Trusts, Groundwork or TCV.
- Think outside the box when it comes to engaging volunteers, there may be chances for additional benefits for the community, i.e engage schools or SEND residents.
- Make contact with the landowner early on to see their appetite for food growing activities on site. You will need permission for many approaches, as it may be a substantial change to the site.

Case studies

4.2.1. [Friars Garden](#) (Ealing)

They fundraised through crowdfunding and a council grant to improve a run-down green space, installing an adventure play trail, planters and fruiting trees. Residents can use the planters themselves, the flower beds and trees are cared for by the Friends of Friars Garden volunteers, who also organise events, and keep an eye on the space to encourage community-spirited behaviour.

4.2.2. [Piggeries Orchard](#) (Ealing)

Started by the Hanwell and Norwood Green Orchard Trail who have planted over 100 fruit trees in publicly accessible orchards in the area since 2015. They will transform a derelict site into a wildflower meadow and community orchard, offering education and training opportunities as well as a nice green space for community use, and free fruit for local residents. The site will be managed by volunteers, including pruning, planting, watering, litter picking and weeding.

4.2.3. [Community Orchards](#) (Ealing)

Ealing Transition have worked in partnerships with Residents Associations, schools and [The Orchard Project](#) to restore as well as create a number of new orchards and growing spaces across the borough. This has included converting overgrown tennis courts, fundraising for raised beds, and mapping new fruit trees on [an online map](#) to promote harvesting. Sites are managed through ongoing volunteer days.

4.3. Buildings in parks

Parks often contain buildings - pavilions, cafes, toilets, which are, or have the potential to be places for the community to come together. Increasingly, we are seeing local groups taking control of these assets, and creating community businesses. These businesses provide a community resource, but also providing employment, training or volunteering opportunities.

See more about developing community hubs [here](#), and more on community cafes [here](#).

Some considerations

- A financial model is important, with all costs/income streams, including a 'repairs' fund.
- Being really clear about your purpose, and the finances involved, will help you negotiate for the kind of legal relationship with the building that will work for you. It might mean freehold ownership is important, but a lease or even a licence to occupy might be sufficient.
- Always be clear about the responsibilities you're taking on - who is responsible for repairs, who pays insurance etc... should be negotiated in a heads of terms document and written into a formal agreement. You need independent legal advice before signing a formal agreement.
- It's important that any community organisation buying or renting a building is incorporated, to ensure *limited liability* for those involved

Case studies

4.3.1. [Blondin Consortium](#) (Ealing)

They are raising funds to create a community pavilion in the park. They will also take charge of organising events and activities in the park, with all proceeds from the cafe and event fees kept to support consortium activities and ongoing maintenance of the park.

4.3.2. [Arnos Vale Cemetery](#) (Bristol)

The site was compulsory purchased by Bristol City Council in 2003, and the Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust set up and given a licence to manage the site. It was restored through grant funding, including converting buildings into a café and conference space. It's now self-sustaining with income from educational events, selling logs/charcoal, and renting the space. Some maintenance is carried out by volunteers, forestry contractors are engaged where necessary.

4.3.3. [Lordship Hub Coop](#) (Tottenham)

They got lottery funding and issued community shares to construct a new building, which includes a cafe and rooms for hire. They raise money through membership, donations and activities in the park and have a business plan to ensure the building generates enough money to pay staff . Any interested individual or group can become a member and attend general meetings.

4.4. Mental health and wellbeing

Physical activity and being in nature have long been known to be beneficial for mental health and wellbeing. Recently the NHS published a long term plan, which [set targets around social prescribing between now and 2023](#), opportunities may emerge from this. See more information about gardening and health [here](#), and guides [for community groups setting health projects](#), or [health professionals making referrals](#) to green space projects created by Hammersmith Community Gardens Association [here](#).

Some considerations

- Be aware of health and safety, and make sure activity leaders have appropriate training. Insurance or a licence may be needed, i.e. for sports activities.
- Think about the skills, capacity, and [safeguarding practices](#) you will need within your organisation if dealing with people with different levels of need. (See [this checklist](#) on safeguarding from Social Farms and Gardens)
- Building the case for your service can be supported by researching local strategies, area statistics, and wider research supporting ecotherapy or greencare. Make sure you talk to the community as well and evidence it.
- Partnerships with relevant organisations may be essential for example; to receive referrals or access expertise to enable better delivery/support provision.

Case studies

4.4.1. [Thrive](#) (Wandsworth)

They offer gardening programmes in four therapeutic gardens, based throughout Battersea Park. Participants have the opportunity to gain a City and Guilds vocational qualification Level 1. The spaces are designed specifically for the delivery of programs for those who need a supportive and safe environment. They started transforming one derelict space in 2002, more recent spaces have been delivered through sponsorship from Jo Malone Ltd, and a partnership with Idverde (the park maintenance contractor for LB Wandsworth), in addition to fundraising activities.

4.4.2. [Good Gym](#) (UK wide)

Good Gym encourages people to be active, outdoors and connected to others. Participants exercise and help their community at the same time. For example, one activity is ['plogging'](#), where runners jog and pick up litter. Sessions can be for people of all ages and abilities, and there are a range of activities in Ealing.

4.4.3. [Walking for health](#)

Walking is a great low impact exercise, beneficial for people of all ages including those with existing health conditions. Walking for England provide training for volunteers to set up walks in their local area. See [here](#) to access an existing walking group, or for information on how to set one up.

4.5. Training and education

Most of the projects discussed within this toolkit offer some sort of informal training through volunteering activities, however some have formalised training into qualifications or creating structured pathways to work or recovery. For example, to link to a local school you may need curriculum linked sessions with clear learning outcomes. There are existing teaching materials; see [here](#) for teaching materials from the Royal Horticultural Society.

Some considerations

- Which audiences do you want to aim your offering at? (i.e. adults with learning disabilities) How will you make the offering accessible and inclusive?
- Do you have the right expertise within your group, or do you need to hire it in?
- What kind of learning pathway are you creating? What opportunities do they have to progress within your organisation or outside it? Can you find an appropriate registered partner to offer a formal qualification?

Case studies

4.5.1. [Hammersmith Community Gardens Association](#)

HCGA association are a charity who have been operating in the area for 30 years, they have a number of growing projects, including; weekly volunteer sessions for carers, Edible Askew Road (which is sponsored by local businesses), weekly gardening sessions in two parks, and a school farm located next to and linked to a high school in White City. They also focus on training workers from other sectors, such as delivering training for primary school staff to grow food with children, and delivering training for health practitioners on prescribing gardening.

4.5.2. [The Calthorpe Project](#) (Kings Cross)

The ½ hectare site is owned by Camden Council, and in 1983 was developed into gardens, play space and activities for under fives after successful campaigning by residents. The Calthorpe project is a charity and a company limited by guarantee, their provision includes: horticultural training and volunteering for people with learning disabilities or mental health issues, community classes and activities, sport development, and a community café. Volunteers can earn AQA accredited qualifications, for example in greenhouse management or vegetable growing, which can help them access further training. Community classes are funded and open to everyone but targeted at disadvantaged groups. The project has a turnover of more than £300k per year, including income from grants.

4.6. Social Enterprise

The maintenance of a local green space can be a source of employment for local young people and others. Enterprising activities can also be beneficial for charities, reducing reliance on grants. In fact, many projects showcased in this toolkit could be considered social enterprises, however some are volunteer-led and smaller scale. The below examples tend to be led by paid staff, and have multiple income streams or portfolios of projects, and some are larger.

See more on starting a community business from Power to Change [here](#).

Some Considerations

- Where are your main sources of income going to come from? What are your values? And what are you going to do with your surplus? These questions and others may inform [what is the best structure](#) or legal format to adopt

- How are you accountable to your local community? How do you enable them to have input into or engage with what you do?
- What is the purpose of the initiative; what skills/resources do you have to deliver it?
- It may help you to use some traditional business planning tools such as a SWOT analysis or the Social Business Model Canvas (see more tools [here](#)). But a good start is a simple 'back of an envelope' calculation to check the numbers will add up .

Are you considering a:

Project	Social Enterprise
Time-bound	Open ended
Often entirely grant-funded	Aims to at least in part self-fund through income generation
Often carries out one or a fixed set of activities	Likely multiple income generating activities, activities may change
May be volunteer-led	Often aims to pay some staff

Case studies

4.6.1. [Horsenden Honey and Grape Farm](#) (Ealing)

Horsenden Allotment and Garden Association are transforming a disused plot of land into a sustainable farm, producing organic honey and grapes. This will be converted to healthy fizzy drinks and products that can be marketed to local schools and hospitals as a healthy and sustainable alternative to junk food. They will also create an educational facility for use by the community, local schools and scout groups. It is a long term project for it to have a sustainable income, but it appears enough social and organisational infrastructure exists around it to carry it to that point.

4.6.2. [Heeley Millennium Park](#) (Sheffield)

Heeley Development Trust was formed in 1996, and took a 125-year lease from the city council of 3.5 hectares of derelict land in 1997, after raising funding. They now run a myriad of community initiatives, including: a bike enterprise supporting disadvantaged young people to gain training, confidence and jobs, a grade II listed building turned into a managed work space with 46 creative tenants, and a local magazine. It employs 32 staff across all its initiatives. The Millenium Park is still maintained as a community resource, and people are encouraged to become members of the park for £10 a year to further support its management. This [subscription scheme](#) makes around £8000 per year, accounting for 15% per year of the park's total operating costs. One critical success factor for them has been the 'portfolio approach' of having both the land and an asset based enterprise.

4.6.3. [Pottersfield Parks Trust](#) (Southwark)

They manage the park on lease from Southwark Council, putting on events and activities for their local community in the park, maintaining wildlife, and gaining additional funds for maintenance through concessions and renting sections of the park for corporate events, filming and public activities. They are now taking on the management of another park

4.7. Other models

Of course there are other innovative models, particularly looking at partnerships with large organisations or businesses. Have you considered whether your local Business Improvement District might work with you? Or is there a local business that might provide sponsorship? These partnerships can be time consuming to build up, and need champions on both sides to bring them into reality, however they can be a great source of long-term stability.

There are just a few examples listed here, for further reading see [Rethinking Parks](#) from Nesta.

- 4.7.1. [Beam Parklands](#) (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham)
Owned by the Land Trust (a large national charity which manages land) who have an endowment to run it, and run with local partners, it provides education and training for local people, especially about wildlife.

- 1.1.1. [Bryant Park](#) (New York City)
The Bryant Park Corporation is a not-for-profit, private management company founded in 1980 to renovate and operate Bryant Park. It shares its management team with the 34th Street Partnership (similar to a Business Improvement District). To carry out park maintenance and improvements, as well as put on activities, the corporation has been very successful in partnering with leading brands and corporations to get sponsorship and hiring the space for events or filming.

If you are inspired by this toolkit and want to take the next step, check out our '**Projects in Parks - Making it Happen**' toolkit.