What and why?

Parks for Health is a major two-year programme running from May 2019 to May 2021 to transform the parks and green spaces in Camden and Islington for now and future generations. The programme aims to transform the management of parks and green spaces to ensure they address health challenges. Green spaces will change from being passive health enablers to take an active and central role in delivering improvements to health and wellbeing across both boroughs.

The project was developed to address local health priorities including high levels of mental ill-health, physical inactivity and health inequalities, and to increase social cohesion and respond to social isolation.

The most affluent residents in Islington and Camden can expect to live healthily for more than a decade longer than the most deprived residents. Taking full advantage of the potential of parks will bring benefits for all and is vital in helping to tackle this disparity.

Helping more people to use the available green spaces will increase physical activity levels (particularly those living in our less affluent areas and at risk of poorer health), improve physical and mental wellbeing, mitigate long-term health conditions and reduce social isolation and loneliness.

Location: Camden and Islington, London

Partners: Parks for Health is led by Camden and Islington Councils, and Camden and Islington Public Health.

Stakeholders: The Future Parks Accelerator is a collaborative venture between The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the National Trust, with financial support from local authorities, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Greater London Authority.
Project Aims:
- Develop a new infrastructure to deliver health-focused green space provision.
- Develop closer links between parks and the NHS, health providers and doctors.
- Build a strong understanding of the community infrastructure to enable engagement with, and pathways into, social networks.
- Produce a baseline assessment of the current health opportunities of the area’s green spaces.
- Identify and test innovative opportunities in the active use of green space for wellbeing.

Outcomes (to date):
- Secured senior level and political buy in. The project board includes senior councillors and officers from both councils. Supported by a project steering group, it includes heads of greenspace for the two councils.
- A green social prescribing pilot has been set up at the initiative and with the support of Defra. The six-month project has created two action plans to introduce social prescribing in two specific parks and across the two boroughs. They have been created with the input of the local health sector and social prescribing referral organisations.
- The Parks Challenge took place in late 2019. Officers from the National Trust visited over 40 parks across the two boroughs and talked to many Friends of Parks groups and parks staff, to look at how parks are run and could be improved. Their recommendations about the visitor experience, communications, staff and volunteering feed into our work.
- The project will also be complemented by a valuation of the social and economic value of the local green infrastructure.
- A toolkit has been drafted that examines the health assets of the individual parks in the two boroughs.

The project aims to ensure parks are inclusive, attractive and accessible for all, reaching those with greatest needs and building partnerships with the wider health and voluntary sectors to ensure parks and green spaces are seen as central to a happy and healthy Camden and Islington.

Cross discipline engagement of health and environment systems is the biggest achievement to date.

Community engagement will be key to the project.

Dual approach of physical changes and social promotion activities. This project is less about physical changes and more about the creation of new activities within the parks to make the most of the available spaces and the promotion of these and existing activities that address the local health priorities, transformation of the workforce to support this work, and engagement with the health and voluntary sectors so that our parks are central to good health in Camden and Islington.