

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Health and Well-being Board	6 th November 2013
Subject: Green Spaces: The Benefits for London	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Information
<u>Summary</u>	
<p>A report entitled 'Green Spaces: The Benefits for London' was published by the City of London Economic Development Office and Public Relations Office. The report, a review of the literature in the field, found compelling evidence that a range of benefits were delivered by green spaces. The Open Spaces department is undertaking a range of activities to maximise the benefits to Londoners of the green spaces.</p>	
Recommendation	
That this report is received for information.	

Main Report

Background

1. The Economic Development Office commissioned BOP Consulting to carry out a literature review of the research relating to the benefits to residents, workers, businesses and visitor of green spaces.
2. There has been increased interest in measuring the value of green spaces, with the concept of green infrastructure gaining popularity.
3. The report, published on the 8th July 2013, and available in full as an appendix, found compelling evidence for the benefits of green spaces. The benefits were classified as environmental, wellbeing, social and economic.

Current Position

4. The literature review found compelling evidence of the environmental benefits of urban green space. Key to health was the role played in urban microclimates, with green spaces cooling air through shade, and ground cover creating less heat retention. Research also showed improved air quality caused by urban green spaces as trees and plants absorbed pollutants.

5. Access to green spaces was shown to be related to lower obesity and better cardio-vascular and respiratory health, because of the space for exercise. Research also demonstrated the role of green spaces in reducing stress, mental fatigue and attention deficit.
6. Research into social benefits found particular benefits to children and young people. The presence of urban green spaces is linked to enhanced cognitive and motor skills and better socialisation among children because of the increased space and opportunity for outdoor play.
7. Urban green space is also found to promote social interaction and community cohesion.
8. The report identifies a number of pieces of research which have sought to enumerate the value of urban green space in terms of reduced expenditure on health.

Activities within the Open Spaces department

9. A number of activities have been developed within the department which seek to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits of the green spaces for Londoners.
10. Surveys of visitors have been carried out at each site to increase understanding of who accesses the sites and for what purpose. From this work communities who do not access the sites have been identified and initiatives designed to encourage access. An example of a specific programme is a partnership programme with the Zoological Society of London to provide conservation training to a group of Chagos Islanders. Recently the department has launched a social media strategy, promoting sites using social networking, including twitter accounts. This has aimed to reach groups of Londoners such as younger people and transient populations who do not visit open spaces as much as other groupings.
11. Work has been carried out to ensure that sites are accessible to all visitors. For example at Epping Forest access paths at High Beach, Jubilee Pond, Knighton Wood and Connaught Water have been designed so that they are accessible for wheelchairs and buggies. Work to improve access at other sites continues.
12. Extensive education, sport, volunteering and play programmes are in place at sites. Health walks are available at all sites. The walks are led by trained Health Walk Leaders (in some cases volunteers) and provide a way for members of the public to lose weight and increase their fitness in the Open Spaces. These walks provide a first step for members of the public who wish to use the Open Spaces for fitness purposes.

Conclusion

13. The report provides a useful summary of the benefits of green spaces to urban areas. Many of the identified benefits are to the health and wellbeing of residents living near to green spaces. The report emphasises the importance of access to green space for urban populations.

14. The Open Spaces Department, through the promotion of the sites, improvement of access to sites and development of education, play and volunteering programmes is seeking to maximise the benefits to Londoners of the green spaces in its stewardship.

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