

Tooting Gardens Management Plan 2007 – 2012

Index
Timetable
Site description
Wandsworth Open Spaces Study
Current management
Future management
Action plan

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in April 2007

The progress against the action plan to be monitored annually via the Parks
Service AQPR.

Site Description :

Site Name : Tooting Gardens.

Location : Tooting Gardens is bounded to the north-east by Tooting Leisure Centre; to the south-east by a narrow walkway between the park and St George's Hospital; to the south-west by residential properties on Cranmer Terrace and to the north-west by residential properties along Fountain Road.

Map showing locations is available on request.
Map showing the internal layout of Tooting Gardens is available on request.

Grid reference : The grid reference of the bottom south west corner of the site is TQ 269 714

Council Ward : Tooting Ward. Elected members are :
Cllr Dr Nick Bowes (Labour)
Cllr Alex Jacob (Conservative)
Cllr Mrs Susan John-Richards (Conservative)

Site Area : The area of the site totals 0.7ha (1.7acres).

Tenure : The site is owned by Wandsworth Borough Council and managed by the Council's Parks Service (part of the Department of Leisure and Amenity Services).

Management : The site is managed and maintained by Wandsworth Borough Council, with responsibility for the site taken by the Parks Service, with the exception of the playground, which is managed and maintained by Play Services.

Designations : The Council has adopted planning policies, which aim to protect and enhance the quality of life and improve economic and social opportunities. They are the basis for promoting and controlling development in the borough. The current statutory development plan for the borough comprises the Wandsworth Unitary Development Plan (UDP), adopted August 2003. Under this plan this site is designated as "Other Larger Protected Open Space Sites".

History:

Tooting Gardens lies adjacent to St George's Hospital, which replaced the Grove Hospital and the Fountain Road Fever Hospital, built in 1893 and situated at that time on the edge of the still distinct 'village' of Tooting. Summerstown, the next hamlet, was across fields in the 1890s but by the First World War the streets in between had been developed.

Tooting Gardens was laid out in 1912 on the abandoned site of the 'old Tooting slop shoot'. This local point for rubbish collection was probably replaced by the Borough 'dust destructor' at the other end of Fountain Road in about 1898. The site had had an indeterminate use for several years. Amongst the other uses were parts that were let to the Vacant Land Cultivation Society to re-let as allotments, part used as a stores depot, a part remained a Council depot for refuse trucks, and a glass works.

Requests for it to become a park were put to the Council by the Wandsworth Trades and Labour Council and the Balham and Tooting Traders Association from 1908. Two years earlier, Garratt Park had been created about a mile distance along Garratt Lane. The appeal for a local park claimed that this was too far for small children to walk.

Tooting Gardens was 'thrown open to the public' on 1 June 1912.

The Metropolitan Asylum Board gave up its prospective right of way from the Grove Hospital to Garratt Lane once a road was laid out along what we know as Cranmer Terrace and Greaves Place.

In 1911 a drinking water fountain was removed from Tooting Broadway to make way for the memorial statue of King Edward VII and installed in Tooting Gardens.

Play equipment was installed or replaced in 1953.

In 1977 the new Tooting Swimming Pool and Lola Jones Hall were opened in Greaves Place. Large plate glass windows gave out onto the Gardens. This swimming pool replaces the slipper baths at Tooting Broadway, which was closed in 1976.

Site features:

Tooting Gardens is fenced on three sides and a brick wall provides the boundary with the walkway by St Georges Hospital. Two entrances are directly connected by a footpath, and there is another path circling around the northwest of the gardens. A children's play area includes a large mounded grass area. Large mature shrubs form a boundary on three sides of the site. To the far end there is a lawn area. Seating and bins are positioned throughout the gardens. The site is regularly patrolled by Parks Police and is locked at night.

Safe and secure:

As the gardens open out to their full width there is a grassed area on the left of the path which is banked and mounded. At the junction of the two paths here there is a holly tree, the bottom branches of which completely block the view of anyone approaching from beyond the mounds. When the Parks Police attend to reports of anti social behaviour at this park it is this hidden section of footpath where youths hide.

The footpath on the northwest of the gardens is totally hidden from the view of the main body of the gardens by a grass banked area, trees, shrubs and the play areas. This entire area is used by groups of youths engaged in anti-social and illegal behaviour. Removal of benches in this location has had little effect, as the knee rail which edges the shrub border is used as seating instead.

The wooden post and rail fencing surrounding the playgrounds are constantly vandalised leaving nails exposed which pose a safety risk for users of the play areas. The removed wooden slats are also used as "tools" to cause further damage or as weapons.

The wall to the south east of the gardens is a target for graffiti, particularly since the shrubs in this area have been thinned.

The fence between the gardens and Tooting Leisure Centre has a gate, which is meant to form the fire escape from the rear of the leisure centre. The gate is latched on the leisure centre side to allow opening from that side only. However it appears that on several occasions the gate has been left unlatched to form an "illegal" entry point to the rear of the building at night. There is also the possibility that if the gate is used for its intended purpose (as an emergency exit) after the park has been locked, then possibly hundreds of people will be directed into an enclosed locked area.

Welcome:

Access to the park is through traffic gates located in Cranmer Terrace and pedestrian gates adjacent to Tooting Leisure Centre. There is also a narrow pathway before the gardens open out to their full width. This is not intimidating but could possibly be made more welcoming through the addition of measures to brighten it up.

The mounded grass area and footpath to the south-east of the site have been enclosed as part of the playground. This limits users access to this area, particularly dog walkers, as the area is included in the no dogs designation of the playground.

There is a sign board at the traffic gates, however the key piece of information shows bye-laws; there is no general welcome sign nor is there a sign at the pedestrian entrance. There are additional signs at the playground gates.

Clean and well maintained:

In general, this park is well maintained and free from litter. The grass is mown regularly to maintain a short dense sward across the park. There is a regular litter collection programme for both general litter and dog waste. The trees are inspected on a regular rotation to identify any works which may be required to maintain a healthy tree stock. The play areas have daily visual safety inspections carried out by the Wandsworth Parks Police, weekly recorded inspections by Council staff and quarterly safety inspections made by technical staff. There is, in addition, an annual inspection of all Council owned playgrounds carried out by an independent inspector.

The gardens appear to be well used by smokers from the hospital. Although there are litter bins these do not appear to be used for cigarette ends, which are strewn on the ground, particularly around benches.

The planting beds which surround the playground have recently been replanted to allow views into and out of the play area whilst maintaining large shrubs and small trees which give shade.

The beds and borders elsewhere are very mature and in places require replacement planting to fill in gaps. The plants that do exist however are well maintained and kept to shape.

Health and well being:

There is both a toddler and a junior play area that provide for play and exercise for children. This open space is strategically placed to aid the health and well being of visitors to the next-door St George's Hospital both aesthetically, and by being able to get a "breath of fresh air" somewhere relatively quiet.

Community involvement::

There is no known community involvement currently. The toddler and junior play areas are extremely well used by local families. There is the opportunity for picnicking on the amenity grass areas.

Service delivery:

Landscape maintenance is carried out by a contractor and monitored by the Parks Operational team based at Wandsworth Common. Structural maintenance of buildings and paths is the responsibility of the Premises Section of the Leisure and Amenity Department. Playground maintenance is

the responsibility of the Play Services section of the Leisure and Amenities Department.

Staff skills and knowledge:

Skills required to manage this site currently include basic horticultural maintenance such as knowledge of mowing & strimming machinery, and shrub & herbaceous planting maintenance. There is also a need for arboricultural skills to inspect the trees on site. Staff with knowledge of the maintenance of play equipment are also required.

Sustainable approach:

Sustainability issues here will depend upon type of machinery used to maintain the area and what happens to any arisings (grass cuttings and branches from any tree work) once they are removed from the site.

Finance:

Maintenance costs are met from Parks budgets covering all small parks. There is no separate budget for this site within the Parks Service. Playground maintenance is carried out through the Play Services budgets.

Wandsworth Open Spaces Study

In 2006, the Wandsworth Planning Office carried out an Open Space Study. As part of that study, a quality assessment of all of the facilities in the Borough was carried out. The range and condition of facilities within each open space were assessed using a scoring criterion derived from the Civic Trust Green Flag standard assessment, which is also consistent with the GLA guidance.

The criteria included the assessment of the quality of natural and landscape features, conservation of buildings and structures, provision of interpretation facilities, standards of arboricultural management, whether the space was welcoming, its accessibility and safety, signage, levels of personal security, dog-fouling, cleanliness, standards of horticultural maintenance and the overall appropriateness and quality of provision of facilities for the site

All aspects were scored between 0 and 10, with below being poor, 5-6 fair, 7 good, 8 very good, 9 excellent and 10 exceptional.

In this assessment, Tooting Gardens had an overall quality average score of 8.2, which puts it just over the “very good” rating. Suggested improvements included lighting and noted there was potential for a low feeling of security.

Current Management :

Horticultural management:

All horticultural maintenance and litter clearance is as specified in the Parks Service Horticultural Maintenance contract, which includes all routine grass cutting, litter collection, weed clearance, shrub pruning and other routine horticultural tasks. All work that does not fall under this contract e.g. the maintenance of park furniture is carried out under additional works programme by order with the main contractor or outside contractors depending on the scope of the work entailed.

Play equipment:

The Council's Playgrounds Officer manages the facility and the associated fencing and gates.

Gates:

There are two gates to the gardens. These are currently locked and unlocked daily by Parks Police.

Future Management :

Safe and secure:

As the gardens open out to their full width, there is a grassed area on the left of the path, which is banked and mounded. At the junction of the two paths here there is a holly tree, the bottom branches of which completely block the view of anyone approaching from beyond the mounds. To aid vision through to the area described and to aid detection of people engaged in anti social behaviour, the lower branches of the holly tree should be lifted. In the longer term, it may be advantageous to consider regrading the landscape to lessen the height of the banking/mounds.

The footpath on the northwest of the gardens is totally hidden from the view of the main body of the gardens by a grass banked area, trees, shrubs and the play areas. To allow sight lines through from the main areas of the gardens, trees and shrubs should be thinned and/or crown lifted. Consideration should be given to removal of the knee rail. Trees along the boundary should be kept to the same height as the fence to allow sight lines and light from neighbouring properties. In the longer term, it may be advantageous to consider re-routing the footpath to eliminate this danger spot completely.

The post and rail fencing surrounding the playgrounds are constantly vandalised. Slats should be bolted to rail to prevent their removal. The gateway giving access direct from the playground into the shrub area should be removed, to limit access into this area. Consideration should be given to the replacement of the fencing with that of a different style.

The wall to the south east of the gardens attracts graffiti – to limit/prevent this, climbing plants could be encouraged up the wall to block the surface.

To address the issue of safe emergency egress from Tooting Leisure Centre an alternative route needs to be identified or consideration should be given in the long term to leaving the park unlocked at night.

Welcome:

To give a greater sense of place and a better welcome, signs should be placed at both entrances detailing the features within the park and relevant contacts.

Consideration should be given to measures to brighten up the areas at either side of the narrow pathway into the gardens from Cranmer Terrace.

Clean and well maintained:

To reduce the problem of cigarette ends being dumped around benches, bins specifically to extinguish cigarette and retain ends should be installed. It may also be advantageous to begin a dialogue with the hospital staff to encourage more responsible use of this open space.

A watching brief should be kept on the planting beds surrounding the playground to ensure that it establishes successfully but that it does not block views into and out of the playground.

Health and well being:

The Gardens clearly provide a welcome environment for users and staff at St George's Hospital. This should be built upon to enable a dialogue between users and the Parks in order to better cater for the health and well being of users.

Community involvement:

There is no known community involvement with this space, however given the proximity to the hospital and the leisure centre there may be the opportunity to improve this. There are also opportunities to link to local families through the play facilities at this site.

Tooting Gardens Management Plan 2007

ACTION PLAN

Code	Aim	Objective	Action / task	Target date	Who
TG101	To make Tooting Gardens a place where people feel safe and secure	Improve visibility to the west of the gardens	Lift the lower branches of the Holly tree	2007	Parks Service Arboriculture Service
TG102			Investigate the possibility of relandscaping the mounded areas to reduce their height	2010	Parks Service
TG103		Reduce inappropriate use of hidden area	Remove knee rail		Parks Service and Premises Management Service
TG104			Replace knee rail, if necessary, with alternative way of demarcating the edge of the planted border		Parks Service
TG105		Improve visibility of the footpath to the north-west of the gardens	Thin out and crown lift trees and shrubs which block views		Parks Service and Arboriculture Service
TG106			Dependant upon the outcome of TG102, consider the option of rerouting the footpath away from "hidden" area.		Parks Service
TG107		Lessen the opportunities for vandalism in the playground area	Initially , repairs should be carried out using bolts not screws/nails to provide a stronger solution		Parks Service and Playground Officer

Tooting Gardens Management Plan 2007

Code	Aim	Objective	Action / task	Target date	Who
TG108			Limit the access to the surrounding shrub beds by removing the gate that gives direct access and replacing it with a continuation of the fence line		Playground Officer
TG109			In the long term replace fencing with a better type which is less easy to damage		Playground Officer
TG110		Prevent graffiti on garden walls	Plant climbers up the wall		Parks Service
TG111		To enable safe emergency egress from Tooting Leisure Centre	Begin dialogue with sports services to identify a solution to this issue		Parks Service and Sports Services
TG201	To make Tooting Gardens welcoming and define a sense of place	To provide information on facilities within the gardens, at entrances	Replace or provide new signs at each entrance to the gardens	As part of wider signage review of parks and green spaces	Parks Service and Graphics
TG202		To provide more welcoming environment at the Cranmer Terrace entrance	Investigate opportunities for planting up this area		Parks Service

Tooting Gardens Management Plan 2007

Code	Aim	Objective	Action / task	Target date	Who
			Identify funding sources if planting is feasible		Parks Service
			Plant up		Parks Service
			If planting is not feasible, investigate alternative options		Parks Service
TG301	To provide a clean and well maintained Park	To eliminate the problem of cigarette ends being dropped on the ground	Install bins specifically for cigarette ends in areas close to benches		Parks Service
TG302			Create links to hospital staff and visitors to promote responsible use of the gardens		Parks Service and Local NHS Staff
TG303		To maintain the planting throughout the gardens	Monitor new planting around playground to ensure establishment	2006 and ongoing	Parks Service
TG304			Replace any failed planting as necessary	2007	Parks Service
TG305			Fill any gaps in planting elsewhere as necessary		Parks Service
TG401	To provide a park which contributes to the health and well being of all who use it	Establish links to the staff and visitors to St George's Hospital	Build on links formed under TG302 to encourage a two-way dialogue to identify the needs of these specific users		Parks Service
TG402		To increase cycle facilities to and within parks.	Investigate the potential for cycle parking		Parks Service Technical Services Dept

Tooting Gardens Management Plan 2007

TG501	To effectively engage with and involve the community in decisions made relating to Tooting Gardens	To carry out consultation with different user groups as outlined above to influence the enhancement of this park	Ongoing	Parks Service
		To build on these links created during consultation to ensure an ongoing dialogues with park users and the local community		