



Accessibility Audit

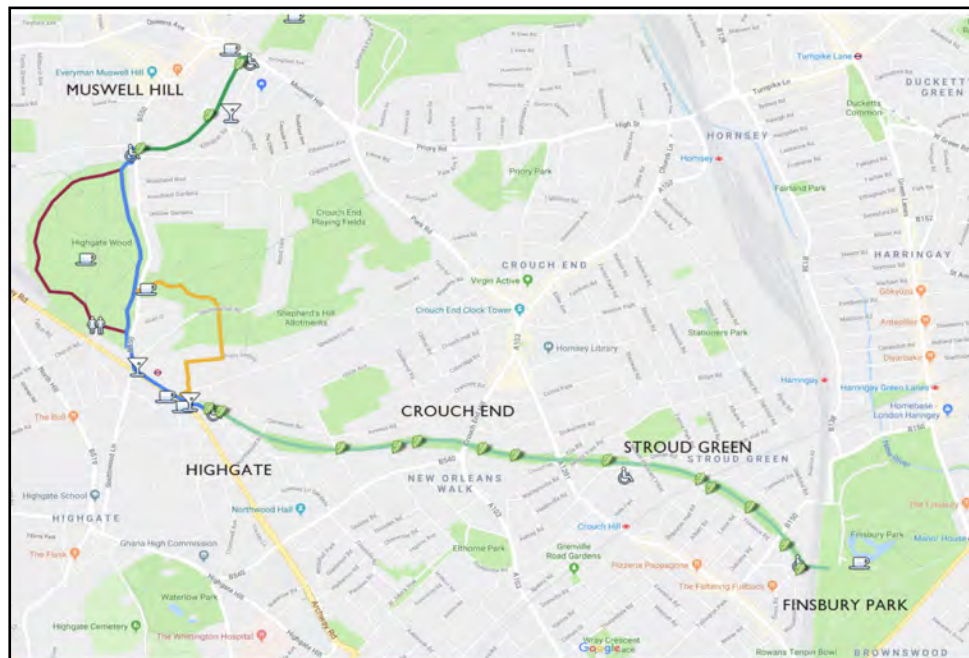
Venue: The Parkland Walk

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Introduction

The Parkland Walk is a county walk through a nature reserve in the heart of London. The walk, which is London's longest nature reserve, runs along the route of a former railway line and forms part of the Capital Ring. Popular with walkers and cyclists as well as with wheelchair users and families with pushchairs, it offers an area of countryside in the heart of London.

The Walk is divided into two parts:

- Parkland Walk North which is 770m long and which runs between Highgate (Muswell Hill Road and Cranley Gardens)
- Parkland Walk South, which comprises the majority of the walk. This section is approximately 2.8km long and runs between Fiinsbury Park (Oxford Road) and Highgate (Holmesdale Road).

The Walk passes through different Local Authority areas, these being Haringey, which manages the majority of the Walk, and Islington which manages a small section between Blythwood Road vehicle entrance and Vicarage Path footbridge. There are 12 bridges along the Walk and 20 entrances.

As well as being a Local Nature Reserve, the route is also part of a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and is designated as Metropolitan Open Land.



Client brief and scope of audit

This audit has been commissioned by David Theakston, Principal Parks Development Officer for Haringey Council.

The purpose of the audit is to identify the current level of accessibility at The Parkland Walk for visitors with additional access requirements. Whilst the majority of the Walk is managed by Haringey Council, the small section between the Blythwood Road vehicle entrance and Vicarage Path footbridge is managed by Islington Council and is therefore technically outside the scope of this audit. There are 20 entrances to the site along the route in total. Similarly, of the 12 bridges which form part of the Walk, two belong to Islington Council and are therefore excluded from this commission (Crouch Hill and Mount View Road).

At either end of the Walk are Alexandra Palace and Finsbury Park, both of which have great amenities which attract visitors to the area, and to the Walk, but which are outside the specific scope of this audit. Similarly, Highgate Wood, which is situated between Parkland Walk North and Parkland Walk South is also outside the scope of this audit.

Planning consent has been approved to replace the bridge at Stanhope Road and to provide a set of steps on one side which will be a lesser gradient than the existing steps. On the other side of the bridge, the proposal is to create a wheelchair accessible ramp.

A key focus of the audit is a consideration of the extent to which it would be reasonable to make each or any of the entrances to Parkland Walk fully accessible under the Equality Act or to any other standard, balanced against the need to maintain and preserve the Walk's natural 'capital' as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and Metropolitan Open Land.



Approach:

Our access audit and the following report have been prepared with a view to current accessibility and inclusion Best Practice including but not restricted to:

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Public Sector Equality Duty
- The Principle of Least Restrictive Access
- Countryside For All Standards
- By All Reasonable Means (BARM) and the Access Chain (Sensory Trust guidelines)
- The Centre for Accessible Environments Design Guidance, incorporating BS8300 and the U.K. Building Regulations including Part M and Approved document M, where applicable.

At each stage of the 'visitor journey' (website, arrival and parking, visitor experience and departure) we have audited the information, facilities and services (known as the 'three pillars' of accessibility) for disabled people, including people who are:

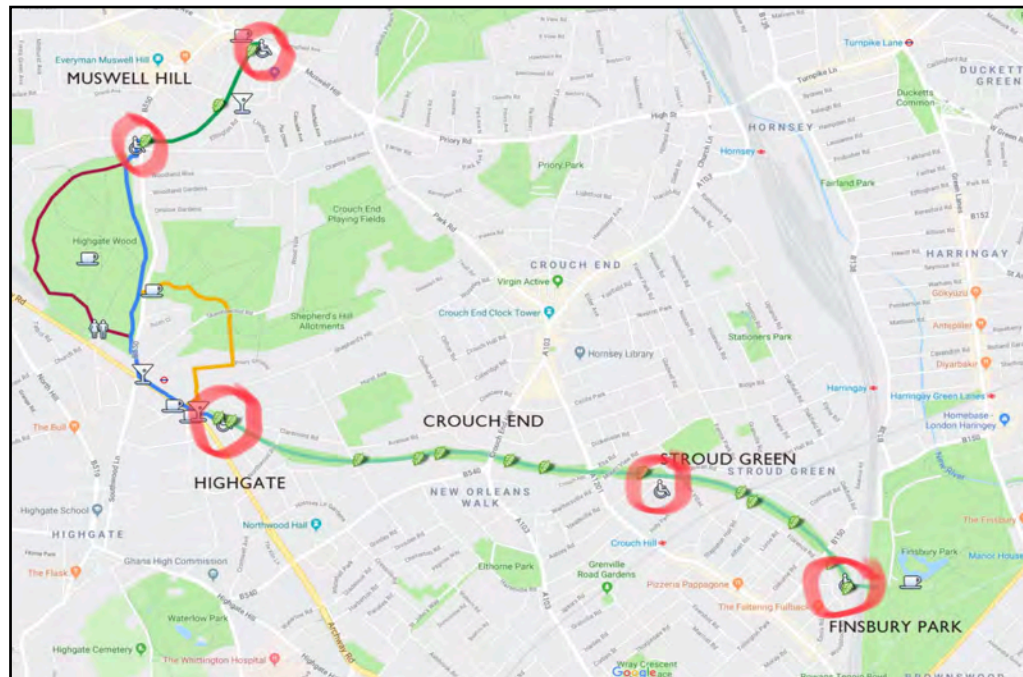
- Deaf or have hearing loss
- Blind or have sight loss
- Mobility impairment or are a wheelchair user
- Autistic
- Living with dementia

Whilst some small sections of the Walk were technically 'out of scope' for our access audit brief e.g. the section through Highgate Wood, we have nevertheless considered the whole of the route in our report in order to reflect the 'end to end' visitor journey and visitor experience, which is not constrained by administrative boundaries.

Executive Summary

The topography of the Parkland Walk is complex and, as a result, so is its accessibility. Whilst the Walk itself comprises of a wide route on a largely firm, solid surface with very few barriers, it is access onto and from the route which is challenging.

Originally created as a railway line, and therefore with an imperative to create a level route through an undulating landscape, the majority of the route's 20 access points have stepped access over steep gradients. For this reason, only five of the twenty entry points currently offer level access and egress. These are at the start and end of the Parkland Walks North and South and at Blythwood Road which is part way along the latter.



In addition to a challenging topography surrounding the Walk, further challenges are created by the need to preserve the natural heritage and rich biodiversity of the area.

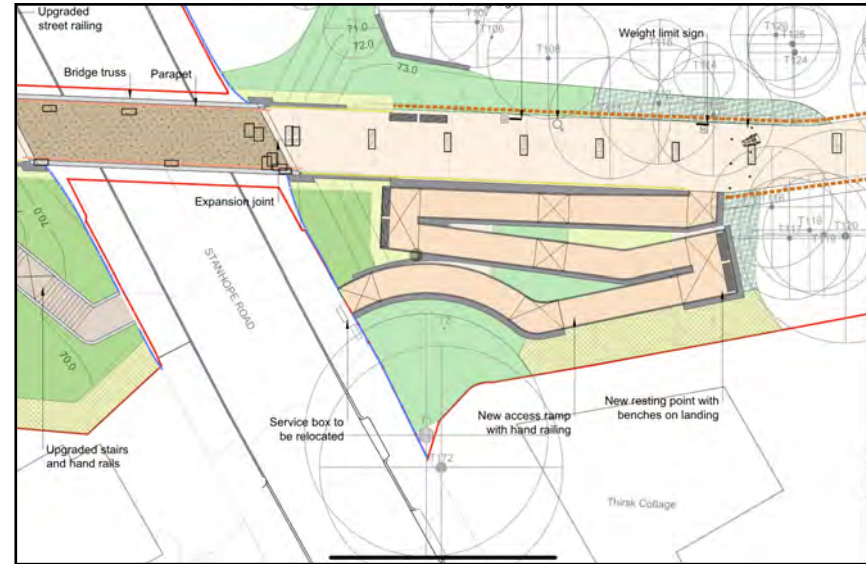
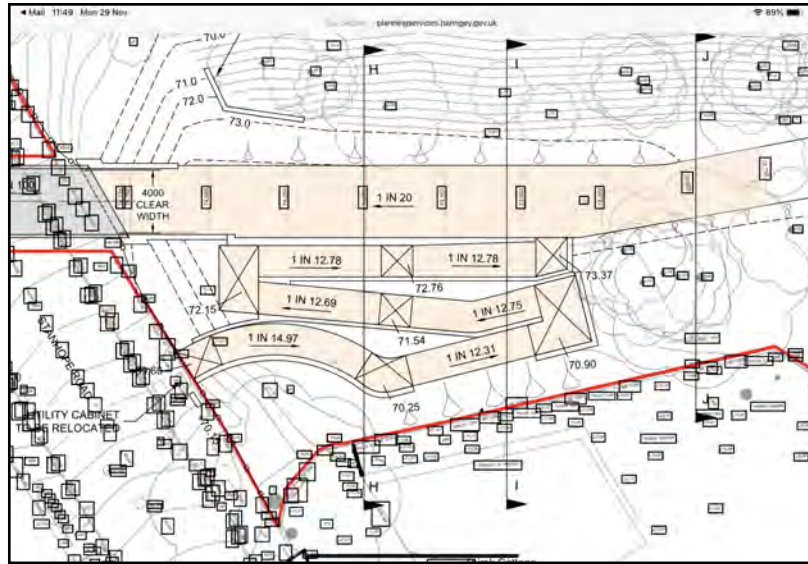
One of the key elements of our audit was to identify the extent to which it would be 'reasonable' to make each or any of the entrances to Parkland Walk fully accessible. 'Reasonable adjustment' is a requirement of the Equality Act 2010. It is important to note, however that the Equality Act is not a compliance-based Act. What is considered reasonable for one organisation may not be reasonable for another. This may be due to a variety of factors including organisation size, location, resources and finances available and the extent to which planned changes would be effective, for example. Ultimately, what is 'reasonable' is a matter of opinion. Our audit also forms part of the Council's commitment to fulfilling its commitments under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Our conclusion, having audited the site, is that it is not practicable to make all the entrances along the Walk 'fully accessible'. Fully accessible would mean providing level access at each point which would be difficult in most cases and virtually impossible in others, due to the complex topography.

The planned new access ramp at Stanhope Road will be located on land to the south east between the new bridge structure and Thirsk Cottage, replacing the existing steps. It will comprise six flights of 1:12 gradient and lengths of between 7.7m and 9.7m, with landings at rises of no more than 650mm between landings, in line with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB).

The ramps will be 2m wide, and landings 2m long will be provided between these rises. The surfaces will be finished with self-binding gravel to match the raised sections of the Walk leading to the bridge surface. 1.1m high handrails will be provided for the entire length of the ramp. A separate stepped access is proposed on land to the south west of the new bridge, to the north of Parkgate Mews. The stair comprises three flights of steps of 12 risers per flight. The stairs are 2m wide with intermediate landings 2m long. As with the proposed ramp, the surfaces for the new stepped access will be finished with self-binding gravel to match the raised sections of the walk leading to the bridge surface. 1.1m high handrails will also be provided.

It is noted that the ramps are on the steeper side of the guidance, therefore additional landings and resting points have been provided. A full and independent assessment has been carried out against the proposed development and are contained in the Access Statement. In summary, the assessment concludes that providing a new step-free access to Parkland Walk from Stanhope Road will future proof the local nature reserve enabling equal access and enjoyment to all. A new step-free access point is also considered necessary to help the Council meet its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This requires public bodies to offer services that support equality, and to meet local, regional and national access and inclusive design policies. It also concludes that the proposed improvements to the access to Parkland Walk on Stanhope Road are the most balanced design option between the usability of the ramp by users of all ages and abilities while retaining the existing biodiversity as much as possible.



In addition to the above proposal, we feel that there is a further opportunity to create an accessible route onto the Parkland Walk South at Stapleton Hall Road. Here, a second pathway leading under the footbridge, has a far more gentle gradient for much of its length, lending itself to the creation of a wheelchair accessible pathway onto the Walk. Whilst the gradient of the pathway is steeper at the top, there is space here to create a more gentle gradient leading onto the trail. The surrounding landscape is more level at this access point and there is supporting infrastructure in the form of a garage, shops and cafes.





A further accessible entry point could be created at Oxford Road, where the change in level between the Parkland Walk and the surrounding landscape is less than at many other points along the route. Even here, however, the creation of an access ramp would necessitate the removal of a trees and vegetation. In addition, the level access entry point at Finsbury Park is just a few yards away from the Oxford Road entrance. This being so, the impact on increasing the number of disabled users on the trail may not be as significant as at Stapleton Hall Road, which is some distance from other accessible entry points, creating a greater geographical 'spread' of accessible entry points and improving the opportunity to potentially attract a greater number of disabled users and other with additional access requirements.

Further accessibility improvements could be made by enhancing the existing level access entry points at Holmesdale Road and Blythewood Road and the supporting infrastructure. The creation of additional accessible parking bays at these entry points, along with corresponding kerb drops would be extremely beneficial, for example, as would improving the surrounding pavement conditions by repairing surface cracks and reducing cambers. Reducing the existing gradients leading onto the trail at the existing level access entry points would also be very helpful.

Improvements to the Parkland Walk branding, enhanced online information about the Walk, better informational and directional signage and more varied interpretation in a variety of formats would also help to ensure that the Parkland Walk is made accessible to a wider range of people, as outlined in the summary below and in the report which follows.



- Create more easily identifiable and accessible branding for the Parkland Walk. The current 'logo' / 'identifier' which is in the form of a silver, metallic circle, has poor visual contrast with its surroundings. In addition, there is no visual contrast on the discs themselves making them difficult for users with sight loss to discern. In addition, the logo is missing altogether from some of the entry points, as described in this report. In addition, the Parkland Walk logos which are located on the floor are easily covered in dirt and debris and at least one has become a trip hazard due to the deterioration of the surrounding ground.
- Use any new branding developed on all marketing materials, websites, informational and directional signage and information leaflets to ensure consistency.
- Provide more pre-visit information online for disabled visitors and other with additional access requirements. This could include videos and a 360 degree tour of the Walk.
- Create a stronger visual and tactile identity at the start point of each part of the Walk, incorporating any new branding developed above. This will assist visitor orientation.

- Ensure consistency of names for entry and exit points. The information, maps, websites and signage along the route and about the route appear to have grown on an 'ad-hoc' basis over time and are not entirely consistent with one another, creating confusion for users.
- Install improved directional signage along the entire route of the Parkland Walk, including within Finsbury Park and Alexandra Palace and incorporating the route between the Parkland Walk North and Parkland Walk South in order to assist users, highlighting the most level access route within the latter and indicating the distance to the nearest level access entry / exit point.
- Install improved and more consistent informational signage which is currently absent from many of the exit points on the trail itself e.g. when walking along the route, it is not always clear at which point a user is exiting. This makes wayfinding difficult. In addition, some signage at entry points has a 'you are here' symbol, consisting of a walking figure on the route, whilst other signs do not. This needs to be consistent on all signage both on the trail and at the access points to the trail. QR codes could be included in informational signage to provide links to further information on the route, its wildlife or its railway heritage.
- Ensure that any new informational signage is set at a height which is accessible for all.
- Provide improved interpretation along the route which is in a variety of formats e.g. tactile maps and audio information which is accessed via QR codes.
- Offer BSL signed, guided walks along the trail for users who are Deaf or having hearing loss.
- Offer audio-described, guided walks along the trail for users who are Blind or have sight loss.
- Offer guided walks for wheelchair users to encourage use of the existing, and any new, wheelchair accessible entry points and routes.
- Offer autism and dementia friendly guided walks along the trail.
- Provide tactile maps at the start and end points of each section of the trail and at key points along the route. These will create interest for all users and will be particularly helpful for users who are blind or have sight loss. Tactile maps, which are produced

by the RNIB, may include information on routes, surroundings or key features and may include information in Braille. They typically include a 'key' and a north point to assist visitors orientation.

- Create some tactile elements along the route. These may be in the form of wooden sculptures or carvings of some of the flora and fauna to be found along the Walk.
- Install additional seating along the route, in accordance with our Seating Best Practice guidance. Ideally, a variety of seating should be provided, included seating with backrests and seating with and without arms.
- Review, refresh or replace the numbered trails along the Walk. There are a variety of marker posts with numbers and reference details on them, but no explanation as to what these refer on site. Create new trails which can be accessed by a wider range of users. For example, these could include a simple, numbered route or a route between numbered seats. Instead of numbers, wildlife symbols could be used to create a trail. Ensure that any new trails created are promoted on the websites which provide information on the Parkland Walk.
- Create better accessible parking provision at the existing level access entry points, as described in this report. This would include providing a number of marked, accessible parking bays and corresponding dropped kerbs adjacent to each one. The provision of information on wheelchair accessible taxi companies on the websites which feature the Parkland Walk would also be helpful.
- Investigate the possibility of providing tramper hire at Finsbury Park. This could be offered via the cafe and would enable disabled people who may never have considered using the trail to access it.
- Create a more gentle gradient to access the route at the Holmesdale Road entrance, where there is currently a relatively steep gradient from the entry point onto the trail.
- Provide handrails to both sides of steps to assist users with mobility impairment. Some users may have one side which is stronger than the other, or may be able to use only one side. Providing a handrail to both sides is therefore important. Providing an additional handrail at a lower height to assist users of shorter stature is also good practice.
- Replace steps which are uneven in their 'rise' and 'going' with ones which are consistent in height and tread.
- Improve the drainage and surface conditions in the areas highlighted in this report in order to minimise boggy ground.

- Remove any trip hazards along the route as identified in this report, including exposed tree roots and tree stumps along the main pathway, raised ironworks, bricks and other hazards.
- Replace the steep, wooden flight of steps with open treads at Crouch End Hill with steps of a more sturdy construction with closed treads.
- Maximise the pavement width at entry points such as Blythwood Road by clearing away overgrown ivy and other foliage. The pavement at this entry point is also cracked and requires repair.
- Consider creating a new, wheelchair accessible entry point at Stapleton Hall Road. A second, unmarked entry route which leading under the bridge already exists here and would be relatively easy to create.
- Consider creating a new, wheelchair accessible entry point at Oxford Road.
- Establish closer inter-borough partnership working to facilitate a consistency of approach across the entirety of the route.

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by reference to a view of current best practice that is subject to change. As the Equality Act 2010 is not compliance based, adherence to the advice contained in this report cannot ensure compliance with the Equality Act or immunity from the award of damages under the act. For information regarding any issues arising from the interpretation of the Equality Act, it is strongly recommended that you seek appropriate legal advice.