

Following reports in the media over the weekend which suggest Wandsworth is set to introduce bylaws in our parks restricting people's use, I wanted to write to you and put the record straight.

Unfortunately the stories that appeared were completely wrong and I want to reassure you that any claims that we want to use these bylaws to prevent children from climbing trees, flying kites, sailing model boats and playing games such as cricket and football, simply are not true.

The purpose of the new bylaws being proposed are to protect our parks from criminal damage, anti-social behaviour and vandalism, so everyone can continue to enjoy them. Wandsworth is no different to any other London borough in this regard.

As you may know a lot of existing Wandsworth bylaws that relate to our parks date back many decades and simply aren't fit for purpose in helping to look after, maintain and preserve our wonderful park resources.

Later this week a report is due to be discussed which aims to adopt Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Model bylaws to replace the existing Wandsworth bylaws in Coronation Gardens, Furzedown Recreation Ground, Garratt Park, King George's Park, Leaders Gardens, Swaby Gardens and Tooting Gardens.

These new bylaws will also cover a further 35 parks and open spaces, including old burial grounds and sports grounds, that currently have no bylaws.

These DCLG bylaws are already adopted by 14 other local authorities in London: Brent, Bromley, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Hammersmith & Fulham, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Redbridge, Southwark, Sutton, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest.

The changes proposed won't apply to Battersea Park, Garratt Green, Tooting Common, Wandsworth Common and Wandsworth Park, which are already covered by Greater London Council bylaws.

All we are doing is bringing the bylaws for our remaining parks and open spaces into the 21st century and making them fit for purpose so we can best manage them.

The new bylaws went out to public consultation, with Friends of parks groups affected by the changes contacted. The consultation had 87% approval and received unanimous cross-party support when they went before council.

This is all about applying the bylaws in a sensible and common sense way. Stopping a child from flying a kite, climbing a tree or sailing a model boat, as suggested by the media, certainly will not be how we want to see the bylaws used and it's important to us that families and children feel they can use our parks for leisure activities and play freely. We want as many people as possible to enjoy our parks.

As explained, the bylaws for many of our larger parks aren't even changing but those that are will hopefully help us ensure that our parks are not damaged, or misused in any way. But I want to stress that play and games certainly doesn't fall into that category.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Jonathan Cook

Cabinet member, community services