



Walkies: dog-walking company boss Rowena Fisher relies on green space to walk her furry charges in north London

‘It’s so important to me to have a job that’s outdoors’

ROWENA FISHER set up dog walking company **Woofs and Walks** in Camberwell and walks between six and 12 miles a day. ‘It’s so important to me to have a job that involves being outdoors,’ she says. ‘I’d just get restless sitting behind a desk.’ She lives close to **Brunswick Park** in Barnet. There are tennis courts, a new playground and a recently crowd-funded art gallery and café.



£499,950 to £1,999,950: homes with one to four bedrooms at **Woodside Square** near **Cherry Tree Woods** park in N10



Capital’s green lung: London has 3,000 parks and countless pockets of green space, even tucked among City tower blocks

A green city is a healthy city

This spring, London becomes the world’s first National Park City. We must value our green space, fund our parks and nurture wellbeing, says **Anna White**

LONDON will this year become the world’s first National Park City. Its new status, launched on May 1, will be celebrated by a series of crowd-funded events in parks across the capital to encourage turning even more of London green, through green roofs, “living” walls and rain gardens that absorb water run-off. The ultimate aim is for at least half the city to be declared suitable habitat for wildlife.

London National Park City is a charity run by the Greater London Authority with blue-chip sponsors, such as Arup and the Canary Wharf Group, and inspired by the National Parks scheme. London has for many years been considered among the world’s greenest cities, thanks to its 3,000 parks and 300 urban farms. Much-loved and historic common land, such as Hampstead Heath, Hyde Park and Richmond Park pull in tourists, while Kew Gardens has global scientific importance.

But the capital also has hundreds of “secret” pockets of green that are often overlooked or underused. One example is the “green corridor” towpath running alongside the Thames from St Margarets suburb in Richmond borough to Richmond Bridge. Local children play in its undergrowth and it is dotted with benches in memory of late residents who loved to sit in what is a peaceful spot from which to watch the river sliding by.

“London is extraordinarily green with more tree coverage than any other region in England. But a lot of these spaces are relatively unused,” says Ben Rogers, director at the Centre for London think tank, which promotes ideas to brighten the future of the capital.

APP ONE WITH NATURE

Even in the City of London, dominated by glass, steel and brick, Londoners are never more than five minutes’ walk from green open space, according to LOOP, a new smartphone app.

An example is the Tower 42 estate between Old Broad Street and Bishopsgate. Tucked away behind the City’s original Tower 42 skyscraper is a small square garden where office workers seek respite from the frantic trading day.

Created by architects at Foster + Partners, LOOP highlights these urban clearings, and tailors walks depending on where you are and how much time you have. “Access to nature is an important determinant of mental health and wellbeing,” says the app’s creator, Simon Hicks.

This is especially relevant at this time of year when dark mornings and

evenings mean many employees may not see the light of day during the working week.

GREEN INITIATIVES

The release of the LOOP app is the first of London’s National Park City events. In a separate initiative the Royal Horticultural Society is offering 40 neighbourhoods £500 and manual help to reinvigorate local outdoor spaces. Last year, as part of its Greening Grey Britain project, the RHS roped in police cadets in Stratford to help care home residents tend their communal grounds and build bird and bee boxes. Interested parties can now apply via the rhs.org.uk/ggbwithcommunities website.

SHRINKING GARDENS AND PARK FUNDING CUTS

In a bid to pack more new homes on to scarce development land, London’s average garden size has been getting smaller.

“Green garden space has been shrinking in recent decades,” says Sue Riddleston, chief executive of Bioregional, the developer behind the Sutton eco-village BedZED. “There is a mass of evidence that gardens and green space in and near cities makes an important contribution to people’s wellbeing and mental health, helping to reduce stress and anxiety.”

“Family homes need something bigger than a postage stamp garden, and flats in high-density locations need a terrace or balcony,” she says.

Centre for London’s Ben Rogers agrees: “The public health crisis is rooted in inactive lifestyles. But we need quality green space, not just quantity.” He cites badly designed Sixties housing estates where unwelcoming parks were created, fostering antisocial behaviour and crime.

A decade of austerity has hit the quality of London’s parks, too. “The cuts get worse year on year,” says Tony Leach, chief executive of Parks for London.

This affects planting, maintenance and policing of parks. It’s not just about health, he explains — investing in our parks is good economics. A well-kept common boosts the value of surrounding homes. “Parks have an economic impact. Neglect parks and they will not deliver their communities any value,” Leach adds.

HOMES NEAR HIDDEN POCKETS OF GREEN

Homes overlooking green space can be expensive. Some attract a premium of 45 per cent, according to Savills. The average price of a property within 100 metres of one of central London’s top parks or gardens



RIGHT PATH FITNESS



‘Open-air workouts make you happier and less stressed’

FOUNDER of personal training company **Right Path Fitness**, **Keith McNiven** trains clients in **Shoreditch Park** before and after their day’s work. “People who access green spaces are happier and have less mental stress,” he says. **Hamptons International** is selling a two-bedroom apartment overlooking **Shoreditch Park** for £845,000. Call 020 3369 4378. Getting fresh air can also be incorporated into the working day, says wellbeing coach **Matthew Carlton**, who runs **Shine Workplace Wellbeing**. “Walking meetings are growing in popularity. But even just a catch-up with a colleague on a bench outside at lunchtime is good. The different environment may inspire new ideas and more creative thinking.”

The park as a gym: personal trainer **Keith McNiven** puts clients through their paces in **Shoreditch Park**, above and left

is £1.3 million. Homes near the smaller, lesser-known parks are often much better value for money.

Woodside Square This new development in **Muswell Hill N10** is a short walk from historic **Cherry Tree Woods** park, a wildlife haven with a café, tennis courts and play areas. The Zone 3 site will comprise 159 homes with one to four bedrooms, with prices starting from £499,950. Call KFH (020 8012 2773).

Moormead Park The terrace homes that line the streets around **Moormead Park** in **St Margarets TW1** are significantly cheaper than those which border nearby **Marble Hill Park** or **Richmond Park**. With a children’s play park and football field it’s a five-minute walk from the high street and surrounded by mature trees. **John D Wood** is selling a first-floor split-level maisonette in nearby **Kenley Road** for £595,000. Call 020 8618 4560.

Gillespie Park The entrance to **Gillespie Park** in **Highbury N5** is hidden behind a brick wall — yet it’s **Islington’s** largest nature reserve at

seven acres and has an ecology centre. With ponds, woodland and meadows, it is home to 244 species of plants, 94 species of birds and 24 types of butterflies. **Hamptons International** has a renovated four-bedroom terrace house nearby for £1.35 million. Call 020 3369 4378.

LONDON’S NEWEST PARKS

Developers can play an important part in creating more green space to compensate for shrinking gardens, says **Parks for London’s Tony Leach**. “Clever green parkland can also help combat flooding as it absorbs excess water,” he adds. “We should be doing more of it.”

Kidbrooke Village This new project in **Greenwich SE3** will deliver 5,000 new homes when completed. Developer **Berkeley** has also taken a neglected wasteland and is transforming it into one of London’s new parks. “The whole scheme is being designed around this 20-acre green space,” explains landscape architect **James Lord**, partner and

head of landscape design at **HTA**. “We are creating extra-wide streets lined with trees, that feel safe and pleasant and lead you through the park,” he says. There will be a huge play area with equipment made from reclaimed and upcycled material. “It’s going to be a patchwork of habitat types: a small dry chalk stream, next to acid grassland next to woodland is a fantastic combination for nature, flora and fauna. We are creating wilderness in a city,” says **Lord**. Prices start from £355,000 and there will be an on-site train station. Call 020 8108 3065.

Elephant & Castle The UK’s first climate-positive scheme, run entirely off renewable energy, is being built in the heart of **Elephant & Castle SE17** along with a new two-acre park by **L&Q**. New shared-ownership flats are part of the wider £2.3 billion **Southwark regeneration** masterplan. Prices start from £118,750 for 25 per cent of a one-bedroom flat and £156,250 for a 25 per cent share of a two-bedroom flat (lpricedin.co.uk).



From £567,500: two- and three-bedroom flats at **Birch House** by **Berkeley Homes** in **Kidbrooke Village, Greenwich SE3**. Three-bedroom duplexes with balcony and terrace are £1,045,000

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