

# Green local economic development: The case of Richmond Park

A walk around Richmond Park

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## Introduction

This self-guided walk is designed to help you explore the complexities of eco-tourism as a strategy for sustainable local economic development. By undertaking the walk, you will observe examples of green space in London that are utilized to generate economic value. By the end of the walk, you will have developed a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of eco-tourism.

The [United Nations Environment Program](#) and [UN World Tourism Organization](#) define sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” In recent years, London has tried to boost its valuable tourism industry on a sustainable basis, aiming to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on its natural environment, while maximizing the positive effects that tourism can have for the city. Sustainable eco-tourism takes this commitment further, asking the tourist industry to place the preservation and enhancement of the natural environment at the heart of any strategy, as well as bringing education to the fore.

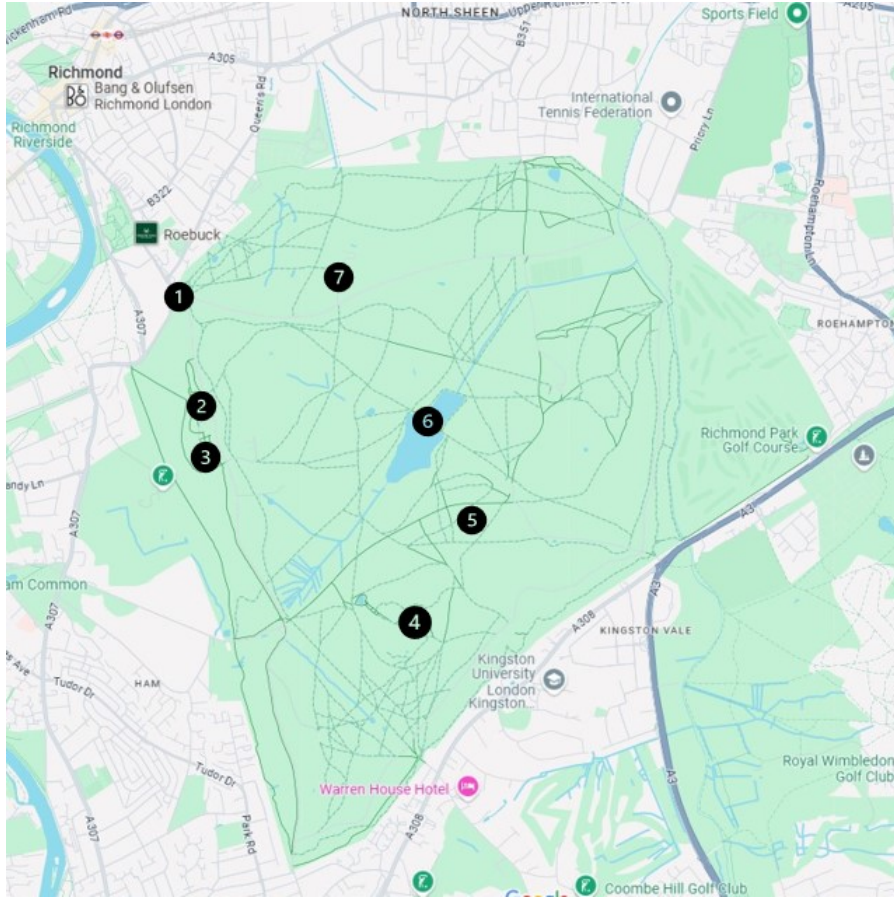
The walk explores seven themes that fit within the broad subject of eco-tourism:

- 1) **Green space enclosures and ownership structures**
- 2) **Planning policy**
- 3) **Heritage**
- 4) **Legacies of colonialism and imperialism**
- 5) **Green space design and infrastructure**
- 6) **Urban biodiversity**
- 7) **Labour**

During your walk you will cover much of Richmond Park, stopping at several of its well-known attractions. You will enter through Richmond Gate, then walk up to King Henry’s Mound to see and critically reflect on its view of Central London. Next, you will stop by Pembroke Lodge (a popular event establishment) before exploring Isabella Plantation. On your way from there to Pen Ponds, you will likely observe the deer the park is famous for and reflect on urban re-wilding. Your final stop is the Holly Lodge (Visitor Centre) where staff and volunteers educate London students on wildlife and ecology, before exiting the park through Richmond Gate. If you want, you can travel to the London Wetland Centre in nearby Barnes for an additional stop. **Throughout, you are given site-specific reflection questions that will aid your critical analysis of how Richmond Park is employed as a green resource for local economic development within the framework of eco-tourism.**

## The Route:

➔ Travel to Richmond Park using public transport. Make your way to Richmond Gate and enter the park. Below, you will find a map of your route.



### Legend

- 1) Richmond Gate
- 2) King Henry's Mound
- 3) Pembroke Lodge
- 4) Isabella Plantation
- 5) Deer
- 6) Pen Ponds
- 7) Holly Lodge (Visitor Centre)



## STARTING POINT

◎ **Stop One:** Richmond Gate functions as the entry-point to the park. To enter, you walk through a metal gate designed by the Architect John Saone, and constructed in 1798. Today, the park is open to the public, but its gates close at sundown to prohibit cars from entering at night and disturbing the wildlife. From where you stand, you can see that Richmond Park is enclosed by a wall. This enclosure dates to 1673 when King Charles I sought to make the park his Royal hunting ground and excluded other uses of the lands. The enclosure spurred resistance from locals as they depended on the land for resources like firewood (Friends of Richmond Park, 2024). Enclosing land this way was not uncommon in the UK at the time. This era of Britain-wide land-change

is called the “enclosure of the commons” and refers to public land being partitioned, closed off, and made (more or less) inaccessible to people without land property ownership. Today, the Royal Parks Agency owns the land comprising Richmond Park and, thus, controls access. Richmond Gate is a manifestation of that property ownership, and its associated right to restrict access. While at the gate, take a moment to reflect.

### Reflections:

*Reflect on why there is a gate here. What purpose does the gate serve? Why does The Royal Parks Agency close it to protect local wildlife? Who controls the opening and closing of the gate? Who can pass easily through, and who cannot?*

*Reflect on your own sensation when passing through the gate. What does it feel like to leave the busy road and enter the park? What do you think gives you this impression?*

*Observe the city area you just travelled through to get to this gate. What kinds of businesses do you see? How might their business models be shaped by the clientele and foot traffic on their way to visit the park?*

➔ Leave the gate area and walk to Kind Henry’s Mound.

◎ **Stop Two:**

King Henry's Mound is located on a hill, and its height has made it an excellent spot for the telescope you find there. Look through it and you'll see St. Paul's Cathedral (if the weather allows). This view is no coincidence but a protected "sightline" under London Planning law (see City of London, 2012



and 2015:116). In practice, this legal protection means that nothing can be built that obstructs, or impedes, the view. On an experiential level, the view connects Richmond to central London, and bridges two central tourist destinations. In 2016, the protected sightline was hotly debated, as a tower was proposed in Stratford. The proposed tower would not obstruct the view of St. Paul's, but appear behind it (see summary in The Guardian, 2016). The debate demonstrates the clashing priorities planners for local economic development handle daily: how are the benefits of a protected view to be weighed against the development of tall buildings with residential and commercial space?

**Reflections:**

*Look through the telescope and reflect on what you see. What is it like to see Central London from this location in Richmond Park?*

*What value does the protected sightline produce? Think about experiential, environmental, and economic value.*

*Reflect on the sightline through the prism of **eco-tourism** and **regenerative tourism**, presented in GY247 lectures. Is nature simply consumed or actively engaged with here? Does the sightline produce positive ecological outcomes (like leaving land undeveloped), or is the sightline simply an eco-tourism feature that results in ecological costs elsewhere (like air travel to London)?*

*The view connects two different locations of London tourism: one that is cultural (St Paul's Cathedral) and one that is ecological (Richmond Park). How are these two locations interconnected through the sightline? What does this imply for sustainable local economic development through tourism across London?*

➔ Now, make your way down the Mound and walk to Pembroke Lodge.

◎ **Stop Three:** Pembroke Lodge today consists of multiple buildings and is an important source of revenue for the park. It is unclear exactly when the first houses on this lot were built, but by 1754 one cottage was present and served as the home of the park's molecatcher (moles were a menace to hunters). With time, the cottage was rebuilt into a lodge (called Hill Lodge) that hosted multiple members of the court over the years. Through a series of property transfers and sequential remodelling and investment, the lodge had been upgraded to a multi-room Georgian Mansion. During World War II, the Mansion was bombed and used as billets for soldiers, which deteriorated the building. After the war, Daniel Hearsom (whose family still runs the Pembroke Lodge business) restored the building into the popular wedding/event venue, and coffee/tea stop for park visitors that it is today (Pembroke Lodge, 2024a&b). On Pembroke Lodge's website it is argued that the lodge has been "Lovingly restored", and the business owners donate 10p of every 1 GBP spent to maintenance and upkeep of the park (Pembroke Lodge, 2024a). Importantly, the Hearsom family does not own the land or building but leases it from the Royal Parks Agency. Hence, The Pembroke Lodge business is a tenant that must adhere to specific rules when operating their business. For example, they must keep guest lists of event attendees and undertake their operations in ways that does not harm the natural environment (UK Parliament, 1999). Pembroke Lodge's history reflects an evolution of the building's purpose in response to global political events, ownership status, and the personal commitments/preferences of owners/leaseholders. Look at Pembroke Lodge and its surroundings and reflect on the following questions.

**Reflections:**

*Reflect on Pembroke Lodge's economic activities and business model. How is the park used for local economic development? With what effects? What are potential positive and negative environmental impacts of its economic activities?*

*Consider the emphasis The Hearsom Family places on that they "lovingly restored" the lodge. This is an expression of heritage conservation, deeply connected with eco-tourism. How is value and local economic development created through heritage construction in Pembroke Lodge? Why? With what effects?*

*Think critically about what aspects of heritage are emphasized. Is it the molecatcher, World War II building use or the visits from members of the court that is emphasized? Why, and with what effects? Consider how the heritage construction is steered by Pembroke Lodge's economic model. Consider what other uses and economic activities Pembroke Lodge could perform by emphasising other aspects of its heritage.*

*Reflect on the fact that the Pembroke Lodge business leases the land and building from The Royal Parks Agency. Do you think a lease agreement, whereby the Royal Parks Agency can set requirements for Pembroke Lodge is positive, negative, or a bit of both? Why? What could potential effects be on the business model?*

➔ Continue your walk through the park by heading to Isabella Plantation.



© **Stop Four:** Isabella Plantation was established in 1830 and opened to the public in 1953. Today, it is a crucial part of making Richmond Park a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). When you walk through Isabella Plantation you will see both native and introduced plant species, several of which originate in the former colonies of the British Empire. The Plantation has been designed to promote biodiversity: multiple plant species have been introduced, and habitats created through building ponds, leaving fallen logs or wood branches on the ground, and designing both streams and open ditches that are habitat for plants, animals, insects, fungi and microbes (The Royal Parks Agency, 2024a).

### **Reflections:**

*As you walk around the plantation take note of your experience. What do you see? What do you hear? Which one of your senses is most active (sound, hearing, smell, touch or taste)?*

*Observe the design of walking paths. In the lecture, you learned about how eco-tourism can create 'boutique' experiences of nature. In the 'boutique', nature is often meticulously curated for observation rather than for active subsistence practices (like farming or hunting-gathering). How does the design of the walking paths structure your movement behavior and interactions with wildlife? How are tourists and visitors encouraged to move? What patterns can you detect, and what effects do they have? Do you think the Isabella Plantation is designed as a 'boutique' experience? Why, or why not? What are the potential positive or negative effects?*

*Today, Isabella Plantation is a major eco-tourism attraction in Richmond Park. Its biodiversity is an economic asset. The colonial and imperial legacy of Isabella Plantation is clear to anyone with knowledge of the origins of, for example, rhododendrons and azaleas. Reflect on the global exchange relations that made Isabella Plantation as an asset possible. Are these apparent to visitors? Do they still matter? Why?*

➔ Now, walk towards Pen Ponds **BUT** along the way you are encouraged to keep your eye out for Richmond Park's deer, and reflect critically on their presence in the park. REMEMBER to keep safe distance, do not attempt to approach or feed the deer if you see any. **Stop at a comfortable location of your choosing** along this walk.



⊙ **Stop Five:** The deer that roam Richmond Park are a central park attraction today. Along your walk, you may see a few. Indeed, Richmond Park was founded as a hunting ground near central London, and deer have been introduced throughout its history as a result. There are, at current, about 600 deer in Richmond Park, and they are no longer hunted. Today, most park visitors simply look at the deer as a prized nature experience close to London. However, the deer are not domesticated. There have been instances of harmful collisions between deer and humans during the deer's mating seasons when they are particularly unpredictable. To abate harm, The Royal Parks Agency limits human access to the park during this time of the year (The Royal Parks Agency, 2024b). The Royal Parks Agency has also created a safety protocol, cautioning visitors to stay at least 50m from the deer and reminding visitors that it is illegal to feed the deer (The Royal Parks Agency, 2024c). Look at the landscape around you (and any potential deer) and take a moment to reflect.

#### **Reflections:**

*Reflect on the different roles the deer have played throughout the park's history. Deer have been used for hunting and are now seen as a component of biodiversity. What societal changes have sparked this change?*

*Consider the role deer play in creating local economic development through eco-tourism. How are the deer used to create economic value today? With what effects?*

*Remember the critiques of eco-tourism, and the subsequent push for regenerative tourism. Regenerative tourism emphasises active participation in natural landscapes for restoration of biodiversity, for example. Are the deer in Richmond Park an example of regenerative tourism in your opinion? Why, why not?*

*Consider the ethics of having wild deer and humans in the same park. The safety precautions necessary reflect tensions of "rewilding" cities globally. What do you think of the Royal Park Agency restricting access to the park when the deer are particularly unpredictable? Is this the most ethical practice? Why? Why not? Should other safety precautions be put in place? Why, why not? Should deer or humans have their movement restricted to avoid incidents?*

➔ Continue walking towards Pen Ponds.

◎ **Stop Six:** Pen Ponds is located at the center of the park. Today, it is one of the few locations in West London where park visitors are permitted to fish and is often frequented by bird watchers. Fishing is both allowed and encouraged, except for when the pond undergoes maintenance that can cause stress on the fish



population (the Royal Parks Agency, 2024d). If you walk around the pond, you should see that very little infrastructure has been installed (specifically in comparison with Isabella Plantation and Pembroke Lodge). Take the landscape in and critically reflect on the below questions.

### **Reflections:**

*Reflect on what infrastructural features have been installed near the Ponds (consider benches, roads, fences, potential tables, garbage bins). What purpose do they serve? What materials are used? Who uses them, and for what purpose? Remember the lecture on eco-tourism, do you think these materials have been imported from elsewhere, or extracted from Richmond Park? What are the potential ecological impacts of the materials used?*

*Remember the critique of eco-tourism that argues that it creates “boutique” experiences of nature. Do you think fishing, birdwatching or walking around the lake constitutes a “boutique” experience? Why? Why not? How does Pen Ponds compare to Isabella Plantation? Reflect on the implications of your answer to these questions.*

*Birdwatching could be considered a “low impact” activity as part of an eco-tourism offering (it requires little beyond a set of binoculars). Observing Pen Ponds, do you agree with that statement? Why, or why not?*

➔ Now, make your way to Holly Lodge (Visitor Centre).



◎ **Stop Seven:** Holly Lodge is an educational centre in Richmond Park. With access to animals and natural environments, the centre educates primarily groups of school children about wildlife and history (The Holly Lodge Centre, 2024a). It also serves the central purpose of attracting people to Richmond Park and supporting the local economy by increasing footfall. The Centre opened in 1994 and educates about 8,500 visitors each year (The Holly Lodge Centre, 2024b). Education is run by 5 employees and about 80 volunteers (ibid). Importantly, the centre runs on income from the educational sessions and donations. To increase the inclusivity of their educational offerings, the centers offer bursaries for transportation and have sessions tailored to students with disabilities (The Holly Lodge Centre, 2024c). Walk around the centre and reflect using the below prompts.

**Reflection:**

*Consider the central role that education often plays in eco-tourism. How is local economic development fostered through eco-tourism education in Holly Lodge? What potential ecological, political, social, and economic effects can this education have?*

*Currently, Holly Lodge's economic model means that it runs on income from the educational sessions, donations, and relies on volunteer (i.e. unpaid) work. Indeed, volunteering and eco-tourism are widely connected through networks like WOOF and other regenerative practices tourists undertake when abroad. What does the use of/dependence on unpaid work mean for local economic development through eco-tourism? Who can volunteer? Who will volunteer? How does this matter?*

*Think critically about the thesis that environmental education fosters "environmental subjects" that are committed to abating climate change and supporting environmental restoration. Do you agree with this thesis? Why? Why not? Do you think fostering "environmental subjects" is a productive environmental strategy, and possible to achieve through eco-tourism? What are potential critiques of fostering sustainability through educating the young?*

➔ Head back to Richmond Gate where your walk started.

◎ **Stop Eight:** You are now at the end of the tour. As you leave the park through the gate, reflect on the two final questions:

**Reflection:**

*Reflect on Richmond Park as a whole: Does it succeed as a model of sustainable and eco-tourism, or does it need to evolve toward regenerative tourism?*

*How have your perspectives changed after spending time in Richmond Park? What does this say about how eco-tourism might impact those that undertake it?*

➔ Exit the park.

**Well done for completing this self-guided walk! You are now experienced in critical analysis of local economic development through eco-tourism. You have become well acquainted with the themes stipulated below, as well as reflecting on both benefits and shortcomings of using eco-tourism for local economic development.**

## **Voluntary visit to the Barnes Wetland and London Wetland Centre**

If you would like, you can now travel to Barnes Wetland and enter London Wetland Centre. LSE will subsidize your cost of travel and entry to the Centre (but you MUST save your receipt!).

⊙ **Stop Nine:** London Wetland Centre is an educational centre connected to Barnes Wetland. It has both similarities and differences to what you have seen in Richmond Park. When you are at the wetlands, reflect on the following:

### **Reflection:**

*How have planners/policy makers/businesses utilized ecological resources available to foster local economic growth in Barnes Wetlands? How do practices compare to Richmond Park?*

*In your walk in Richmond Park you engaged with multiple analytical concepts that matter for analyses of local economic development through environmental resources.*

*Pick 2 of these analytical lenses and reflect on the London Wetland Centre.*

- 1) **Green space enclosures and ownership**
- 2) **Planning policy**
- 3) **Heritage**
- 4) **Legacies of colonialism and imperialism**
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- 7) **Labour**

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